



PRACTICE ABSTRACT NR. 27

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Working together for agri-environmental benefits - The Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund in England

The Countryside Stewardship (CS) Facilitation Fund is an instrument that provides funding for facilitators to develop cooperation amongst a new or existing group of land managers (e.g. farmers, foresters) and agree the agri-environmental management priorities that they plan to take forward across their holdings (www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship). The aim is to deliver the priorities from the CS scheme at the landscape scale. To qualify for funding, the group has to undertake activities that are new to them as a result of cooperating, including the alignment of management across holdings. Facilitators also have an advisory role in that they help group members to interpret CS requirements so that members submit individual but complementary applications, and they provide farmers with skills and expertise required to deliver the management activities and secure additional resources. Facilitators are expected to maintain links with local partnerships, initiatives, and government authorities to ensure the group's work complements other actions. Facilitators come from National Park Authorities, river trusts, wildlife trusts, conservation organisations and private consultancies. A group has to include at least four farmers who manage a minimum area of 2000 ha between them, with holdings (largely) adjoining. Funding is provided for 3-5 years and covers the facilitator's costs associated with organising meetings, training and expert speakers. The fund does not cover one-to-one advice but delivers on a one-to-many basis, i.e. group cooperation. In 2018, there is a total of 98 groups (>2400 members), selected for funding through 4 competitive rounds since 2015 (<https://bit.ly/1G50YAH>).

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Although facilitators come from a variety of organisations, they have in common a longstanding relationship with farmers, either through advisory work or involvement in projects. In cases where groups have been newly formed, the main activity has been to organise meetings for farmers to get to know each other and have an expert speaker who contributes information on a locally relevant issue. In more established groups, activities included pond restoration, ditch management to create better habitat for water voles, experimenting with farmland seed mixes to enhance the available food source, or tree planting especially along water courses. Trade-offs are increasingly recognised: the funding structure encourages large groups (up to 80 members). Although a larger group could cover a larger geographical area, much more effort needs to be invested to maintain social cohesion. Monitoring cannot be funded under the Facilitation Fund; this restricts the ability to showcase groups' achievements, and to get more farmers excited about the environmental benefits or their management activities. The current funding for many facilitators ends in 2020. Without the impetus of the facilitator, groups are unlikely to continue. However, some groups may decide to fund their facilitator through member contributions, thus aligning more with the farmer cluster concept.



ABOUT AGRILINK

Agrilink is a multi-actor project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. It brings together 16 partners from 13 countries, including universities, applied research institutes, advisors and consultants from public organisations, private SMEs, a farmer-based organisation and specialists in communication and distance learning.

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All the Practice Abstracts prepared by the Agrilink project in the EIP-AGRI common format can be found here:
<https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/agrilink-agricultural-knowledge-linking-farmers>