

LIMESTONE COUNTRY PROJECT

The internationally important limestone country of the YDNP is concentrated in the uplands around Ingleborough, Malham and Wharfedale. These areas, recognised for their outstanding geology, unique habitats and exceptional plant and wildlife, have been combined into the Ingleborough and Craven complexes, designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The project area is the nation's most important limestone landscape.

The mosaic of habitats includes the most extensive areas of upland semi-natural dry grassland and limestone pavement in the UK, as well as flushes and springs, woodland and scrub, rock outcrops and scree, calcareous grassland and lime-rich natural lakes. Limestone Pavement is a declining resource of international conservation importance. Some plants, like the nationally scarce bird's eye primrose and rigid buckler fern, are unique to limestone country.

Livestock grazing has been the main influence on these upland habitats for centuries. A move away from mixed livestock farming and a sharp increase in sheep stock since the 1950s, have reduced numbers and diversity of herbaceous plants characteristic to the area. Sheep are highly selective grazers and choose the most palatable species, while the loss of cattle, less selective grazers, has left rank vegetation ungrazed. Farming intensification has added pressure. Some limestone pastures have been fertilised to support more grazing and larger, modern cattle breeds.

The project seeks to restore limestone country through better land management and conservation. Providing grants to farmers will support a return to mixed farming, using hardy upland cattle breeds. Invasive plant species such as thistles and bracken, along with rabbit grazing will be controlled by environmentally sensitive means.

The Limestone Country Project is a multiple agency partnership with landowners and the local farming community working together, funded by the European Commission LIFE Fund.

THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP)

The CAP forms part of the Treaty of Rome signed in 1962. It takes up a massive proportion of the EU budget, supporting farmers and seeking to encourage employment in rural areas. Supporters say the CAP has made Europe virtually self sufficient in food. Critics claim the cost through taxes and high prices outweigh the benefits.

Conservation of the landscape and wildlife have been financially supported through the European Union's Agenda 2000 proposals. These see farmers as custodians of the countryside. The National Farmers Union urges farmers to play their part in caring for the environment, arguing that conservation makes good business sense as green consumers and retailers press for the safest food of the highest quality.

In October 2000, the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) was launched to conclude the Agenda 2000 proposals. The CAP Rural Development Regulation has allowed a re-directing of support, to enable agriculture and forestry to adapt to systems which protect and improve the countryside and support enterprise in the rural economy. Once an ERDP review is completed, it will be relaunched in 2007.

All subsidies have now been rolled into a 'single payment', linked to compliance with environmental and other standards, termed 'cross compliance'. This has freed farmers to produce what consumers want, rather than what subsidies dictate, so reducing the environmental impact of farming by removing the incentive to intensify production. Within the 'Single Payment Scheme', the flat rate subsidy applies to each eligible hectare: 3 regions each attract a different rate (Upland Severely Disadvantage Area (SDA), Moorland within the SDA, all land outside the SDA). The 'single payment' is being introduced in 2005, to eventually replace headage based subsidies (the area based element will gradually increase to 100% in 2012).



'Grazing biodiversity into the landscape.' Highland Cow, Ing Scar / Ewe moor. Robert Goodison. 2004.

HILL FARMING TERMS

Ewe	adult female sheep
Tup, or ram	adult male sheep, used for breeding
Hogg	a spring born lamb, until first shearing from 8 to 14 months
Meadow	grassland, cut for hay or silage
Pasture	grazing land
Hay	cut grass, dried and stored for animal feed
Silage	cut grass, mixed with additives and stored moist for animal feed

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Education File

Information for students and group leaders

Hill Farming

changing times

THE PATTERN OF FARMING

Farming has given the Yorkshire Dales landscape much of its character. The dry-stone walls, field barns and traditional farming settlements so typical of Dales scenery, are born of a farming lifestyle which has developed over recent centuries.

The 90% native deciduous woodland cover of 8,000 years ago has been progressively cleared, now covering only 1% of the National Park (3.4% total woodland cover). Signs of early farming include outlines of enclosures formed by Iron Age people over 2,000 years ago. Also to be seen are the terraced arable fields or strip lynchets, used since the 7th century by Anglian and then early Medieval farmers.

Between the 12th and 16th centuries, the power and wealth of the monasteries had a huge influence on Dales farming. Monasteries established outlying farms or granges, from which their vast flocks were managed. Even when land fell into the hands of private individuals owning large holdings, following the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536, wool remained the most valuable crop.

At the end of the 18th century a great revolution took place in farming. The growing urban population, fuelled by the Industrial Revolution, drove the need to increase agricultural output. Walls were built, barns constructed and field systems developed high up on the hillsides. The old lime kilns present throughout the Dales, stand as witness to 19th century land improvement.

Though small areas of land have been enclosed by walls over the centuries, the main enclosures came towards the end of the 18th century. Enclosure Acts were passed by Parliament, leading to the sub-division of meadow, pasture and much of the rough common grazings. Many small farmers and cottagers lost their common grazing rights as they couldn't meet the statutory conditions imposed by enclosure commissioners.

The field barn is one of the most characteristic features of the Dales. Most were built in the 18th and 19th centuries to serve a carefully devised farming system. Field barns provided winter housing for cattle. They were built next to, or in a meadow, to store hay produced for winter fodder.

Improvements in communication, roads, canals and later the railways, removed the need for communities to grow subsistence arable crops in unfavourable Dales conditions. Grass became the main crop.

Today around 40% of the Park is enclosed farmland while 52% is open moorland (rough grassland and heather moor). Livestock rearing, mostly sheep, with some beef cattle and dairy cows in some of the lower dales, is the mainstay of the Dales farming economy. Valley side land is grazed throughout the year, while many of the valley bottom meadows grow hay and silage for winter livestock feed. Some sheep are farmed on the high moors, while large areas of heather moorland are managed for grouse.

Maintaining the landscape, wildlife and heritage value of the Dales, while managing productivity within the current economic climate, presents some complex challenges. Farming, the Dales way of life and the landscape character so highly valued, are under intense pressure to change.



YORKSHIRE DALES
National Park Authority

DALES HILL FARM PROFILES

Land	Valley floor, steep slopes and moor tops.
Soils	Glacial valley floor, limestone pastures and peat over gritstone tops.
Rainfall	1450 mm pa.
Grazing	Valley meadows, rough upland pasture and heather moorland tops.
Management	Semi-intensive, fertiliser on silage meadows, grazing all year.

A KINGSDALE FARM

Area	550 hectares split between an upper and a lower dale site.
Altitude	290m to 540m.
Livestock	85 suckler beef cattle and followers. 800 breeding ewes and 200 replacement hogs.
Labour	2 brothers.

A WENSLEYDALE FARM

Area	112 ha (60 ha dairy)
Altitude	230m to 545m.
Livestock	60 dairy cattle (Friesian) and 40 followers. 450 lambing ewes and 90 replacement hogs.
Labour	Farmer, 2 sons.



Wharfedales classic Dales farmscape - for how long? YDNPA.1987.

PRESSURES ON FARMING

Whilst it's true to say that 'it's farmers that do the farming', many of the pressures on farming - and so on the future Dales landscape - are beyond their control. Farming responds to a complex of economic, environmental, social and cultural factors, operating within a political framework.

- The agenda for future Dales farming is increasingly set by national and EU policy and agreements with the World Trade Organisation.
- The EU Common Agricultural Policy has helped farmers in marginal areas like the Dales through subsidies, compensation and grants, but has failed to maintain income levels.
- Numbers of tourists using the land are increasing.
- Implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW Act 2000), has established a massive 60% of the National Park as access land in 2005.
- 30% of the Park is designated as being of national or international wildlife importance;
- The national outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001 caused massive damage to Dales farming.
- The costs of feed, animal welfare and machinery continue to rise.
- Sale prices for stock have continued to fall, influenced by increases in cheaper imports, livestock disease issues and consumer moves away from meat products.
- People are increasingly concerned about the food they eat, worries are growing about use of pesticides, fertilisers, antibiotics, animal welfare and feeding practices.
- The growth of agri-business, with greater financial and technical resources has forced out some family farmers.

THE EFFECTS OF CHANGE

- Farming in the Dales has intensified, wetter marginal land on the higher ground has been drained or 'gripped' making it more productive.
- Maintaining dry stone walls is increasingly costly, more farmers use cheaper alternatives.

- More work is now done by machinery, some field boundaries have been removed to help.
- Traditional field barns are used less and less and many have fallen into disrepair, more are being put to alternative uses.
- Modern farm buildings have replaced traditional Dales buildings in some places.
- To increase yields from meadow land, the use of chemicals has increased. Threats to wildlife and the risk of pollution are growing.
- The number of larger farms, over 100 hectares, has almost trebled since 1990.
- The number of smaller farms, less than 5ha, has more than trebled since 1990.
- There has been little change in the amount of cropland and grassland within the Dales in the last decade, even though dairy stocks have fallen markedly in response to national changes in milk marketing. Sheep and fowl numbers have grown.
- Whilst the number of people employed in farming has changed little in recent years, the move to part-time and seasonal work is very marked.
- As it becomes more difficult to make a living from farming, young adults are moving away to find employment. They are often replaced by older people, whose search for retirement property pushes up the cost of local housing.



Sheep at auction: the heart of Dales farming. YDNPA. 2003.

A DALES FARMING YEAR

April	Lambing time. Hoggs return from winter pasture.
May	Ewes and lambs are moved to higher pasture. Cattle begin calving and are turned out to grazing. Meadows are muck spread or fertilised.
June	Silage is cut and baled for winter feed. Hoggs are sheared.
July	Ewes are sheared and dipped to kill parasites. Wild flower meadows are at their best. Hay time.
August	Second silage cut is taken where possible. Walling repairs begin. Lambs separated from ewes and bulls put with cows. Traditional agricultural shows take place eg Kilnsey .
Sept/Oct	Ewes are dipped for sale at autumn markets eg Hawes. Breeding and fatstock lambs and suckler calves are sold. Autumn calving takes place. Walling continues.
Nov	Tupping time. Hoggs are sent away for winter. Cattle are housed for the winter. Winter muck spreading.
Dec	Indoor maintenance and repairs. Cattle vaccinations (pneumonia).
Jan/Feb	Sheep are brought down to lower fields during snow. Sheep are scanned and those with twins are kept housed.
March	Increase in care needed for spring calving cattle and ewes in lamb. Preparation for lambing. Fertiliser dressing for meadows.

RESPONDING TO CHANGE

Farming can only be viable if it is profitable. Some farmers can only make profit by developing other forms of income. Others have chosen environmentally sensitive methods to improve the wildlife value of their land, while trying to maintain income through conservation grant schemes. Growing brands like 'Dales Lamb,' are creating demand for Dales meat while organisations like the Wensleydale Creamery have boosted security for many local dairy farmers. Despite this, current pressures are making it increasingly difficult for farmers to make ends meet and sadly, for some, leaving farming altogether is the only option.

• Farm diversification

Many farmers in the Dales are already providing services for some of the 8.3 million visitor days spent in the Dales each year, through farmhouse catering or marketing country crafts for example. Some working farms open their doors to the public to promote their business and help educate visitors into the ways of the countryside.

Converting existing buildings to other uses is increasing. Barns adapted for use by local craft industries are appearing in more areas while some are refurbished as visitor accommodation.

Some land not suitable for domestic livestock may be made profitable by other means, such as small scale forestry for example. Whilst coniferous plantations do produce quicker returns, with financial help farmers are also conserving and planting deciduous woodland. Some farmers may seek permission to accommodate touring caravans or offer camp site facilities.

• Conservation

Nine out of ten visitors to the YDNP put scenery and landscape at the top of their list (1994 Visitor Survey). The work of farmers is critical in maintaining the special qualities of this highly distinctive Dales landscape. Special conservation features include: hay meadows, limestone grassland, semi-natural broadleaf woodland, heather moorland, dry stone walls, field barns, traditional farm buildings.

The NPA seeks to work with farmers, land owners, agricultural organisations and all other interests, to conserve the special qualities of the area, for the benefit of everyone, now and in the

FARM AND CONSERVATION GRANT SCHEMES

- **Environmental Stewardship.** Launched in England in 2005, ES will eventually replace the Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Countryside Stewardship Schemes and the stock subsidy schemes. ES aims to secure environmental benefits above those of good farming practice. The scheme operates on 3 levels. Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) is open to all and encourages farmers to deliver simple, effective environmental management, combating damage to the historic environment, biodiversity and landscape character. It's hoped that most Dales farms will enter Higher Level - and in some case Organic - Stewardship, which deliver added environmental benefits.
- **Wildlife Enhancement Scheme.** The WES applies to farmland on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). English Nature encourages farming practices, which help maintain the environmental value of land with SSSI status.
- **Woodland Conservation Schemes.** The Dales Woodland Service (YDNPA) provides advice on best conservation practice and grant schemes and some funding for new woodland. Funding for new planting and woodland maintenance is primarily available through the Forestry Commission (England Woodland Grant Scheme, 2005) and Environmental Stewardship (2005). Other grant sources include the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust and English Nature.

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Grant schemes have become more important in guaranteeing an income to farmers while funding countryside conservation. Environmental Stewardship (ES) and other supporting schemes target conservation of key special qualities of the area, which may be threatened by farming practice.

• Farms and Livestock

The number of farms in the Dales has increased over the last decade (around 1,000 in 1995, to around 1,200 in 2003). Interestingly, farms of less than 5ha and farms greater than 100 ha have both more than tripled in number. Farms of between 5 ha and 50 ha have halved in number. Despite the huge impact of a national outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in 2001, livestock numbers have shown only slight fall over the last decade - cattle, from around 55,000 to 50,000, sheep 740,000 to 640,000 (in 2003).



Upland hay meadow: hay today, where tomorrow? YDNPA. 1994.