

Environmental Stewardship

Case study: Best practice farm walk – Row Farm

NATURAL
ENGLAND

Name:	Simon Bamforth
Region/County:	Pennines/West Yorkshire
Farm Size/Type:	186 acres /Severely Disadvantaged Area Upland grassland
Stocking:	80 Aberdeen Angus cross suckler cows and a flock of 120 Texel x ewes.
Key objectives:	Protection of a range of historic and environmental features



Is your farm in the Entry Level Scheme? Do you want to know more about the best way to manage your options? If so, why not attend a FREE Best Practice Farm Walk on a farm near you?

We attended a Best Practice Farm Walk at Row Farm near Slaithwaite in Calderdale on a blustery June day to hear more about how to manage Upland Entry Level Scheme (UELS) options....

The event at Row Farm is one of a series of best practice farm walks aimed at helping farmers to maximise the environmental value of the ELS options on their farm. The options within ELS and UELS are designed to benefit a variety of wildlife including farmland birds, mammals such as brown hares, bats and water voles and flowering plants typical of semi natural habitats.

Row Farm near Slaithwaite was selected as an excellent example of a farm in Upland ELS. Nestling into a Pennine hillside, the farm is all grass and supports 80 head of cattle as well as a flock of Texel and Texel cross sheep. Simon Bamforth sells some of his lambs through his farm shop and the rest are sold through Selby market. He has chosen a variety of ELS options to fit in with his farming system.

Andrew Critchlow led the farm walk around Row Farm, taking in all of the different options in place on the farm so that farmers could hear about different habitats and situations. As well as providing environmental advice on behalf of Natural England, Andrew also farms near Edale in the Peak District and his farm is in the UELS so he is aware of the issues and challenges facing farmers.

“It’s your responsibility to make sure that you’ve chosen eligible options and that you can carry out the prescriptions in full. If you’ve given yourself a margin on your points target, that’s always better as it gives you a bit of leeway if you’ve measured something wrong,” Andrew explained at the start of the event.

“You’re allowed one amendment during the five year lifetime of your scheme. But if you choose to have a best practice visit and the adviser recommends a modification to your agreement which includes more high priority options, he can request an extra amendment for you.”

The first stop was to look at traditional farm buildings, a popular option in the uplands where old barns are a valuable landscape feature and are often used by wildlife such as barn owls, swallows and swifts. Andrew explained the importance of keeping good records and photographs.

“Buildings should be maintained in the condition that they were in at the start of the agreement. So it doesn't matter if there is a gutter missing on the building when your agreement starts, or if it's got a tin roof, but you need to take photos so that you can prove that. And do keep a record of any maintenance works that you do – dates and photos - so that you can show them to an inspector.”

Farmers attending the walk were keen to discuss the revised prescriptions for the permanent grassland with low inputs and very low inputs (EL2 and EL3).

“As most of you will have had to re-start your agreements in 2010 when you entered UELS, you will have to follow the new prescription for low input and very low input grassland which requires a range of different sward heights. If you're grazing these areas hard in summer, this could be difficult to achieve so consider reducing your stocking rates on fields in these options.”

The haymaking option, UL20, is worth 60 points per hectare on land in the SDA that is below the moorland line and several farmers in the audience had chosen this option.

“You can make wrapped haylage with this option as long as you don't cut before 5th July and have shut up your fields by 30th May. The aim of this option is to increase the floral diversity in the meadow because the late cutting date will allow many annual flowering plants such as yellow rattle to set seed but it will also help species such as the brown hare to raise young successfully”.



A number of the farmers had chosen the cattle grazing on upland grassland and moorland option (UL18) and were nervous about what records they were expected to produce if they were subject to an inspection. Andrew was able to provide reassurance to the audience.

“You need to show that cattle numbers have been maintained at a minimum of 30% of livestock units on those fields that you have put down for this option. Because 1 cow plus calf is equivalent to 10 draft ewes and over 12 hill ewes, you don't need many cows to ensure that you've exceeded the required ratio”.

“Make sure you record how many of each stock type and age group are in each field parcel entered for this option and keep a note of the dates that they move on and off. There's also more guidance and an example grazing calendar that you might want to use on the Natural England website”.

Management of rush pastures (EL4) was another popular option with farmers in the audience but there was some confusion with the cutting prescription which Andrew clarified.

“You can cut the rushes, but only a maximum of a third of the area each year and not between 1st April and 31st July so that ground nesting birds aren't disturbed. This will create the structural diversity needed by ground nesting birds such as curlew and lapwing if they are to breed and feed their young successfully.”

A view point on the edge of some rush pasture gave the farmers an opportunity to share experiences about the best method of cutting rushes and optimum timing to keep the rushes under control.

Several farmers attending had chosen to include lengths of wall in the stone wall restoration option (UB17) which awards 30 points per metre of wall restored. Andrew reminded them of the key points to note.

“Make sure you've got before and after photographs of the sections of walls that you plan to restore. Also, it's ok to do more than the metres you've written on your form in any one year – but not less - as long as you don't exceed the total for the whole agreement because then you won't be paid for this extra length. And at the end of your agreement, you must have a complete wall in good condition.”



Row Farm contains a number of newly planted woodlands. Several of the farmers on the walk had also undertaken tree planting or had existing woodlands. A popular option within UELS is sheep fencing around small woodlands (UC5) which funds new sheep wire fencing that meets a precise specification.

“Be careful that you’re not using this option to replace old fencing which was put up to protect new plantations that received grant funding through the Woodland Grant Scheme. Otherwise you could find yourself in a double funding situation and in breach of scheme rules if the conditions of your woodland grant required you to exclude livestock.”

The upland grassland and arable requirements (UX2) are a fundamental strand of UELS and Andrew reminded farmers of what they had to do to comply.

“Most of the requirements are simply good practice, such as not supplementary feeding, spraying or applying fertiliser within six metres of the top of a bank of a watercourse. Others, such as the removal of bracken to prevent further spread and collecting of plastic close to watercourses, are things that you’re probably doing anyway.”

As the group walked back to the farm for a cup of tea and a chance to ask any more questions, the farmers talked about the benefits to them from the best practice farm walk.

“It’s really useful to see how someone on another farm is putting everything into practice. And because I did my own application form, it’s a useful refresher. Although there’s lots of information in the handbook, it’s good to get reassurance that I’m doing everything as I should be. It’s the little details that can catch you out, so I’m confident now that if I get inspected, I won’t get penalties!” said Mr Halthwaite from neighbouring Meltham.

More information about Best Practice Farm Walks across England can be found on the Natural England [website](#).

Where can I find out more?

Please follow this [link](#) for the latest information on Environmental Stewardship.