

Policy briefing
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The Eden Model

Lessons from two private
sustainable land management
schemes

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The Eden Model: lessons from two private sustainable land management schemes

Policy briefing

by James Elliott

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Introduction

In March 2020, we shared a briefing with the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) outlining our initial thinking on the advantages of integrating public and private payments for sustainable land management, how this might be achieved in practice and the challenges to be addressed, as well as offering some lessons for the development of the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme from our previous work.¹

Here, we provide further insights and lessons from two private payments schemes which are underway, one in the Hampshire Avon catchment, and one being established in the Eden river catchment in Cumbria through the Eden Model demonstration project, co-ordinated by the authors of this briefing. We also draw on additional detailed interviews with a range of farmers in the Eden catchment.

As set out in our previous briefing, the Eden Model demonstration project aims to develop a working system for private sector investment in sustainable land management, particularly for interventions that bring together consortia of buyers and sellers.² The model provides an example of what can be done at catchment scale and replicated elsewhere and, since part of the project became an ELM test, it has also been exploring how public and private funding can be combined to maximise impact.

Our focus is on ensuring projects are designed to attract and retain private sector beneficiaries of environmental services alongside public funding. We have not yet considered the role of financial products or the financial sector although they may become increasingly important as the scale and ambition of schemes grow.

Lessons from two private trades

To reach our conclusions we gathered feedback from participants in the Eden Model demonstration project in Cumbria and the recently established Landscape Enterprise Network in the Hampshire Avon catchment. The feedback comes from stakeholders involved on the demand side as buyers, intermediaries (the platform through which agreements are reached) and supply side aggregators (a farmers' group and a farm co-operative).

Below, we give information about these trades and the lessons from them we believe will be useful in designing the new ELM scheme.

1. How the trades work

In our Eden Model project, we are in the process of concluding an initial trade between United Utilities and Nestlé, and First Milk affiliated farmers on the Petteril river in Cumbria (part of the Eden catchment).

In the Hampshire Avon project, Wessex Water and Wiltshire Council have begun procuring land management measures from farmers in Pewsey Down Farmers Group, managed by Black Sheep Consulting, via the EnTrade environmental trading platform.

The demand side interests

In the initial trade in the Petteril catchment, **United Utilities** have an interest in reducing phosphorus pollution in the river to meet regulatory requirements. They have secured agreement from the Environment Agency to pay to reduce the amount of phosphorus leaching into the river from farmland, rather than upgrading treatment works. Catchment based solutions are considered to be cheaper and more environmentally beneficial than hard infrastructure solutions. Beyond the first trade, United Utilities also have interests in the quantity and quality of drinking water supply, sustainable drainage, protecting assets like treatment works from flooding, carbon sequestration and obtaining biodiversity net gain offsets.

Nestlé have a long term interest in the sustainability, resilience and productivity of dairy farming in the wider Eden catchment. They procure milk from members of the First Milk dairy co-operative. Their 'milk plan' offers farmers a premium if they undertake environmental projects on their land, such as hedge planting and fencing waterways. Beyond the first trade, Nestlé also have interests in carbon 'insetting' to reach climate change goals.

In the Hampshire Avon, **Wessex Water** and **Wiltshire Council** both have interests in reducing phosphorus pollution; Wessex Water to offset waste water treatment plants, and the council to offset the

likelihood of additional pollution caused by a new housing development.

How the parties work together

In the Petteril, the ultimate ambition of United Utilities and Nestlé is to pool funding to jointly pay for outcomes and interventions of mutual interest. This full co-investment is expected to deliver greater efficiency and open up a broader range of environmentally beneficial interventions by enabling multiple outcomes of interventions to be funded. For example, interventions which help with nutrient management, carbon sequestration, flood risk reduction and biodiversity would become more attractive overall, and could deliver outcomes at a lower cost than if just one or two outcomes are purchased.³

However, in the initial trade, the two will invest separately, but in an aligned way. This is to enable Nestlé to continue engaging with its farmers through the existing milk plan in the short term, rather than creating an entirely new scheme and budget. Nestlé and United Utilities have worked together to jointly agree on the sorts of interventions that will meet both of their interests, ie phosphorus reduction and resilient farming. They will prioritise these interventions when paying farmers in the catchment.

In the Hampshire Avon, Wessex Water and Wiltshire Council are reaching separate agreements with farmers in the Pewsey Down Farmers Group, but they are using the same platform to receive and assess bids from farmers. This is because both want to reduce phosphorus pollution, but different regulatory drivers mean they are interested in different interventions to do so. To meet Natural England's nutrient neutrality guidance the council needs permanent land use change, taking land out of agricultural production and creating new woodlands or wetlands.⁴ In contrast, Wessex Water needs solutions that can be funded on a short term basis to fit the sector's regulatory cycles.

In both the Petteril and the Hampshire Avon catchments, the supply side has been co-ordinated by a 'supply aggregator', acting on behalf of the farmers to create a package of measures that satisfies the combined demand need, and also makes practical sense to the farmers. In the Petteril catchment this is First Milk, and in the Hampshire Avon catchment it is Black Sheep Consulting, working on behalf of the Pewsey Down Farmers Group.

The stage the trades are at

In the Petteril scheme, United Utilities and Nestlé have agreed on a set of suggested interventions expected to deliver mutual benefits. These have been integrated in the Nestlé milk plan. United Utilities has meanwhile engaged First Milk to work further with its farmers on a detailed plan for delivery of its nutrient management needs. A programme of measures and participating farmers is being finalised

and agreed with the regulator (the Environment Agency) in advance of contracting and implementation in 2021.

In the Hampshire Avon scheme, 13 of the farmers in the Pewsey Down Farmers Group have uploaded interventions they could carry out onto the EnTrade platform as part of the first round of negotiations. Wessex Water and the council have agreed to fund interventions on most of these farms, which will provide about a third of the phosphorus reduction needed. A further round of bids will now be held.

The basis for payments

In the Petteril scheme, the proposal under negotiation is for United Utilities and First Milk to agree a price per kilogram of phosphorus reduction. This would be applied to all First Milk farmers taking part, and will be the same across all measures or activities undertaken.

In other words, the price will not be based on the cost of implementing the intervention, but rather on the effectiveness of the outcome. This more market driven approach allows farmers to put forward interventions which are most effective and efficient on their farms.

It is important to note, however, that contracts will not be fully outcomes based. The effectiveness of the interventions to be undertaken has been modelled and farmers will be paid on the basis of these modelled outcomes, as opposed to measured reductions in phosphorus, or the cost of interventions or funding needed to drive them.

The delivery risk sits with United Utilities, who will measure phosphorus loads in the river and take responsibility if they are not reduced by a sufficient amount. It has agreed its modelling approach with the Environment Agency.

In the Hampshire Avon scheme, the buyers agreed fixed rates for particular interventions which were then uploaded to the EnTrade platform for farmers to choose from. There was also an option for farmers to put in their own bids. The buyers selected the suite of bids which delivered their phosphorus reduction needs most cost effectively.

Summary

	Petteril (first Eden trade)	Hampshire Avon
Demand side interests	Phosphorus reduction, resilient farming	Phosphorus reduction
Demand aggregation	Aligned investment facilitated by 3Keel	Demand interests using the same platform to procure
Supply aggregation	Farmer co-operative negotiating single agreement on behalf of its members	Consultant advising and negotiating on behalf of members of farmer group. Farmers have individual agreements with beneficiaries.
Status in September 2020	Developing supply proposition	Initial agreements made with farmers
Basis for payment price	Outcome	Land management activity
Basis for agreement	Land management activity	Land management activity

2. What we have learnt

Using modelled outcomes to determine payment levels in ELM

It is expected that, in the early years due to practical restraints, ELM will pay for the implementation of activities and interventions, rather than for measured outcomes. In the private trades outlined above it was also found that the science and technology to enable the cost effective, robust measurement and verification of outcomes on a farm level is not yet available for most outcomes.

However, a new payment methodology, ie how the payment rate for each intervention is set, is one way to take a clear step towards a more outcomes based system. The *Environmental Land Management: Policy Discussion Document* suggests that for both Tiers 1 and 2 of ELM payment rates will be based on some variation of ‘income foregone plus costs’, possibly with the addition of a margin or top up payment.⁵ However, an alternative administrative price setting mechanism under consideration is to base payment rates on the value of the outcomes delivered, or expected to be delivered, by the activities (a natural capital valuation approach).

This natural capital approach is more similar to the payment methodology under negotiation in the Petteril trade, basing the

payment rate for interventions on an estimation of the value of the outcomes expected (in this case their value to United Utilities as opposed to their full natural capital value to society). This would be a better model for ELM than income foregone plus cost. It would help to clarify for farmers what they are being paid for, and would provide a financial incentive to pick the most environmentally beneficially activities. Measures which deliver multiple benefits, or which target rare habitats and species, are likely to have a higher payment rate in this system, making them more attractive.

In contrast, an 'income foregone, plus costs' model, is not likely to be very successful in encouraging widespread uptake of agri-environment schemes based on past experience. It fails to target measures and activities which can most cost effectively deliver the goals of the government's 25 year environment plan. For any single piece of land, there will be many activities which could be carried out. Different activities will have very different environmental value but, in an income foregone model, farmers and land managers are given incentives to choose the cheapest and easiest interventions to implement, not what delivers most for the environment. This can be frustrating and disengaging for them. A recent study involving participants in the national Peat Pilots found support for payment by results because it respected local knowledge, enabling "land managers to find the solutions that work for their land adaptively, rather than following prescriptions".⁶

The outcomes based valuation model suggested above need not be overly complicated or too sophisticated in the early years of ELM. The 'values' assigned to different outcomes could be based on available estimates of social value, and modelled outcomes of interventions based on the available science. A perfect natural capital valuation is not needed, rather the point is to make the link between the intervention and the desired outcomes.

Over time, the 'value' assigned to each outcome should be altered based on farmers' responses, to ensure progress is being made towards all the goals of the 25 year environment plan, ie lower values would be assigned to those outcomes which are over delivered, and higher values to outcomes that are being under delivered. Varying payment rates to secure sufficient delivery has also been proposed for ELM Tier 2 in the Policy Discussion Document, but a natural capital valuation makes the rationale for this much clearer than the income foregone model. Income foregone and costs of implementing an activity on land do not vary depending on how much of that activity has also been undertaken by other farmers in the country, so price variations would be arbitrary, whereas the value to society of an extra unit of something does vary depending on how much has already been delivered.

Using ELM to improve delivery in private led schemes

A challenge identified in both the Petteril and the Hampshire Avon trades is that the narrow focus on just one or two outcomes does not always enable the most environmentally beneficial interventions that

deliver multiple benefits. In time these trades will be built up, bringing in more beneficiaries with wider interests. We are already planning a second trade in the Petteril catchment which adds carbon sequestration and natural flood management as additional outcomes. ELM could assist and accelerate this by providing extra funding where private beneficiaries do not have material interests in a full suite of outcomes.

An example of this highlighted in both trades is conversion to permanent pasture and holistic grazing practices which promote healthy soil biology and carbon sequestration. These measures cut phosphorus pollution as they reduce erosion. But they also have significant benefits in terms of public goods, including soil health, tackling climate change, boosting biodiversity and reducing flood risk.

Unfortunately, in both trades these measures have not been funded because they are relatively expensive ways of delivering phosphorus reduction compared to other activities. But those other activities, which include measures such as improving slurry storage, deliver far less overall environmental benefit.

ELM funding could be used to top up private schemes so that relatively specific private interests can be achieved using more expensive activities which also deliver public goods. This will achieve greater value for money and better outcomes for the environment, and ELM should be designed in a way that enables match funding or co-funding in this way.

Removing regulatory barriers

The Environment Agency has been a vital enabler of the Petteril trade but accepting catchment measures instead of treatment upgrades has required considerable work, and can be considered an exception rather than the default. The Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) has been focused narrowly on water quality rather than having a more holistic environmental focus, and this has led to the vast majority of investment in the programme going into hard infrastructure, rather than nature based solutions.

The mismatch between different regulatory needs in the Hampshire Avon catchment, outlined above, similarly illustrates how fragmented policy and regulation, even within sectors, can stifle progress on environmental recovery. In this case the interpretation of EU habitats regulations has led to guidance that permanent land use change away from agriculture is required to offset potential increased pollution from new developments. While such land use change can be beneficial, it also leaves open the possibility that farming will simply be intensified on remaining agricultural land, causing more pollution. Systemic changes to agriculture, towards systems that work more with nature, have fewer inputs and keep nutrients from slurry and manure within the limits of what the land can use, could be more beneficial in the long term, but are precluded by the current approach.

As one of the principal vehicles for delivering the 25 year environment plan's goals, it is vital that ELM is able to integrate effectively with other areas of policy and regulation to create the systemic changes to land management that are needed. Any opportunities to review and align other policy areas, such as WINEP, should be taken.

Feedback from farmers

We tested the main elements of the Eden Model proposals with eight farmers in the Petteril and Ullswater catchments in Cumbria, where we are in the process of expanding the initial trade involving Nestlé. First Milk, the Eden Rivers Trust and the Ullswater Community Interest Company acted as intermediaries. The farms varied in:

- Type, including dairy farms with some beef and arable, and sheep farms with some beef.
- Size, from around 50 acres to 600 acres.
- Ownership model.
- Previous engagement in agri-environment schemes, from none to constant involvement since the 1990s.

Farmers who agreed to be interviewed were sent the questions beforehand to allow time to prepare. The interviews were partially structured, following a standardised set of questions while allowing room for exploring answers and following leads of interest. Due to Covid-19 restrictions they took place by phone and typically lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

Level of interest in the private payments schemes

We asked farmers about their previous involvement in agri-environment and private payment schemes, and whether they would consider taking part in a local, private driven scheme.

All of them expressed at least some interest in the idea. Those for whom the concept was new were more wary and questioned how it would work, while the most enthusiastic were those who knew more about the concept of 'payment for ecosystem services' or had been involved in meetings or talks about private payment schemes.

Only two farmers, one in Ullswater and one in the Petteril catchment, had specifically heard of the concept of payment for ecosystem services.

ELM could play a clear role in preparing farmers with the knowledge and skills needed to take part in private payment schemes.

None of the four dairy farmers interviewed in the Petteril catchment were currently involved in an agri-environment scheme and one had never been in an agri-environment scheme. However, the three First Milk farmers were taking part in the Nestlé milk plan and had implemented measures such as planting and fencing hedges, fencing waterways and better management of soils. The other dairy farmer had an arrangement with the Eden Rivers Trust whereby they undertook environmental work on the farm. All the farmers were satisfied with these arrangements and showed interest in further private schemes.

Time was cited as a key barrier, with the dairy farmers in the Petteril catchment preferring arrangements where other organisations, such as Eden Rivers Trust, carrying out any work required.

On the dairy farms it was felt to be particularly important that measures complemented the core business. One farmer commented that he would only be interested in measures that benefited the farm, and that getting some extra income to help implement these would be a bonus.

All four sheep farmers in Ullswater were, or had recently been, in agri-environment schemes. The smallest, farming about 50 acres, was the only one not currently in a scheme, although they still had management obligations following a grant for hedge laying. This farmer felt like their farm had “fallen through the cracks” in qualifying for current government schemes because of their size, and they were keen to move to private schemes for delivering services and away from the idea of ‘subsidy’.

Two of the Ullswater farmers were especially interested in a possible private payments scheme. In these upland farms, desire to farm in a more sustainable way and deliver public goods like biodiversity, carbon sequestration and flood management were key motivators. The farms are more diversified and are looking more actively for alternatives to basic payments.

Interestingly, there were different levels of trust between government and private schemes. Some farmers thought private schemes would be less bureaucratic with more reliable payments, but one farmer in Ullswater thought trust had been developed within government schemes, and questioned how farmers would know if they could trust private buyers.

Attitude to pooled public and private funding

The focus of our ELM pilot is to explore how ELM funding could be integrated with the private transactions we are demonstrating in the Eden catchment. We asked farmers for their views on joined up or pooled funding and whether they had any concerns.

Only one farmer, in Ullswater, expressed doubts, wondering if it would be less complicated to keep public and private schemes separate. The other farmers could not see a problem and some saw potential benefits, but thought the details of how funding would be integrated was important. Potential benefits of joined up funding identified by some included:

- Dealing with one person or organisation to manage multiple funding streams would make it easier.
- Private payments for services feels more valid and less like a subsidy, but there is also an argument for some continued public support for farmers as custodians of the natural environment and heritage.

- Joining up with private interests could be refreshing for government schemes which can get stuck in “fixed ideas” and become “blinkered in their approach”.

The farmers emphasised that it is important to ensure payments get made on time. There would also need to be processes in place for farmers to easily show that they had delivered what was required for different beneficiaries.

Attitude to collaborating with other farmers

A central element of the Eden Model is aggregation of supply, bringing farmers and land managers together to develop joined up proposals to meet demand and to negotiate agreements as a group. This helps to reach the scale needed for interventions to be effective, as well as helping to avoid an unbalanced negotiation which could occur between large demand side players and individual farmers. Supply aggregators could take various forms.

So far in the Petteril and Ullswater schemes we have been engaging with a farmers’ co-operative (First Milk), a local NGO (Eden Rivers Trust) and local Community Interest Company (Ullswater CIC). In the Hampshire Avon scheme the supply aggregator is the Pewsey Down Farmers Group, managed by Black Sheep Consulting. Where there are not suitable bodies already, farmers could create a new consortium or CIC to allow them to take part in schemes more effectively.

Because we recruited farmers for the interviews through existing groups, all of them were already collaborating, although none mentioned any other collaborations outside of First Milk or the Ullswater CIC. Enthusiasm for both of these was high and farmers valued the opportunity to feel part of a group, share experiences and learn from others. It was mentioned that collaboration enables farmers to plan strategically and have more of a positive impact on the catchment, especially for smaller upland farms. Some saw this as the future.

Overall, farmers were positive about the idea of collaborating further to take part in a private payments scheme, and this was felt to be particularly important for smaller upland farms to reach the scale needed to have an impact and to avoid being dominated by others or swallowed up. Two farmers expressed reservations about further collaboration. One of these worked full time in addition to running the farm and did not feel there was time for more collaboration with others. The other, a dairy farmer, felt it might be easier to work individually, but doing things as a group would not be a deal breaker.

Other insights

Importance of relationships

Good personal relationships were often emphasised as being important to the current collaborations. First Milk farmers mentioned how they had good access to the co-operative's staff and farmer representatives, who they felt could represent them well. In Ullswater, the founder of the CIC, Danny Teasdale, was seen as a good ambassador and widely known and trusted in the community, a "good bloke" with a good way of speaking to people.

Different motivations

There was a clear contrast between the motivations of the dairy farmers and those in the uplands.

Dairy farmers were clear they would only implement environmental and land management measures which benefited the dairy business. The Nestlé scheme is attractive because it increases the marketability of their product to Nestlé and improves relationships with this important buyer. They like the opportunity to get some extra money for doing things they are already doing or want to do for their business but cannot afford, such as planting cover crops.

For the upland farms there is still an element of seeking measures that fit in with the business, but there was more of a sense of seeing this as diversification. These farmers talked about their personal motivations for improving wildlife. They took part in agri-environment schemes to enable them to do things they already wanted to do for wildlife, as opposed to doing things for wildlife because there was money in it. It is important to note that these farmers had all chosen to be part of the Ullswater CIC, and may not be representative of the wider upland farming community.

Different attitudes towards government schemes

It was notable that none of the dairy farmers were involved in a government agri-environment scheme. Three had been in the past but were no longer interested. Current agri-environment schemes were not seen as suitable for this type of farm, and one farmer reported that they had been told so by someone who came to inspect their previous Entry Level Stewardship activities.

The farmers see themselves as forced into a choice between maximising money from their animals, or going into agri-environment schemes. The private Nestlé scheme was seen as simpler and more beneficial to their businesses. There was heavier involvement in government agri-environment schemes from upland farmers, but some difference of opinion on these. Some saw them as beneficial and well

run, while others expressed concerns over bureaucracy and thought the schemes too restrictive in what they allowed farmers to do and try.

Our recommendations

Test the use of natural capital valuation of expected outcomes to determine payment levels for ELM activities

Using a valuation of the expected outcomes of ELM measures and activities would help to target delivery and ensure uptake of the most environmentally beneficial activities, rewarding those that deliver better public goods outcomes more highly. In contrast to income foregone plus costs, this model will enable farmers to see clearly what the interventions are trying to achieve, engaging their knowledge and innovation. And it will help the sector to develop the knowledge and skills needed to deliver on an outcomes basis, preparing more farmers to take part in private payments schemes.

Use ELM funding to top up private sector led schemes

This will broaden the set of interests participating in schemes and enable more environmentally beneficial activities which deliver against multiple aspirations for public and private goods. It will simplify things for farmers by bringing together multiple funding sources to provide a clear package of activities. There is strong support from the private sector interests involved in our Eden Model work for such an approach, and it was also supported by most of the farmers we spoke to.

Green Alliance and National Trust have previously proposed that ELM could match fund private investment in sustainable land management, and our ELM tests and trials project is developing more detailed proposals for how this could be done.⁷

Increase flexibility and join up between policy areas

Fragmented policy and regulation, even within the Defra group and within sectors, makes it harder for private sector led schemes to be initiated and to reach an effective scale. Defra should explore ways to align different regulatory regimes and introduce flexibility so that businesses and public sector bodies can explore nature-based solutions more easily.

Design ELM so that it can take advantage of local farmer collaborations and trusted facilitators

Delivering joined up schemes across multiple farms will be essential to achieving the goals of the 25 year environment plan. While opinions of existing government agri-environment schemes varied, farmers were unanimous in their support for the farming groups they were involved in and almost unanimous in seeing these as a good vehicle for delivering environmental schemes. Designing ELM so that it can take advantage of these local initiatives will also help integration with private schemes, which will be seeking to engage the same people and groups. This will help to build confidence among potential private sector investors that the delivery mechanisms are effective and aligned.

Next steps

In September 2020 we held a series of ‘gaming workshops’ where we simulated the process of developing a trade with various private and public beneficiaries, and potential farmer aggregators. Based on the outcomes of this workshop series we will shortly share our proposals for how ELM and private funding for sustainable land management could be integrated. Then we will draw together the learnings from this tests and trials project and the wider Eden Model trades into a ‘toolkit’, outlining the private payments model and how it interacts with ELM.

Endnotes

¹ J Elliott, March 2020, *The Eden Model: combining public and private funding for sustainable land management*, Green Alliance, National Trust and 3Keel

² The Eden Model builds on previous work by the partners involved, including the Landscape Enterprise Networks (LENs) approach developed by 3Keel, the Natural Infrastructure Scheme (NIS) concept created by National Trust and Green Alliance. See: 3keel, 'Landscape innovation', www.3keel.com/landscape-innovation/; Green Alliance, 'Natural Infrastructure Schemes', www.green-alliance.org.uk/natural_markets

³ J Elliott and A Francis, February 2019, *New routes to decarbonise land use with Natural Infrastructure Schemes*, Green Alliance and National Trust, www.green-alliance.org.uk/new_routes_to_decarbonise_land_use.php

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⁶ www.researchgate.net/profile/Mark_Reed8/publication/343851324_Social_barriers_and_opportunities_to_the_implementation_of_the_England_Peat_Strategy/links/5f44cbd9299bf13404f160c8/Social-barriers-and-opportunities-to-the-implementation-of-the-England-Peat-Strategy.pdf

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