

Dyddiad: Dydd Gwener 7 Tachwedd 2001
Amser: 2.00pm hyd 5.00pm
Lleoliad: Ystafell Bwyllgora, Adeilad y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol

Nid yw'r cyfieithiad Cymraeg ar gael ar hyn o bryd.

TIR GOFAL: PROGRESS ON STOCKTAKE

Purpose

To update the Committee on progress with the stocktake and to present the results from the third application round.

Summary

The paper details the changes that now need to be submitted to and approved by the European Commission before they can be implemented, together with the administrative changes that have already been introduced. It also summarises progress made to date with the scheme.

Timing

Full details of all modifications to the Rural Development Plan need to be submitted to the Commission by the end of December to allow implementation to take place next year.

Background

Tir Gofal was launched in March 1999 and re-approved in October 2000 as part of the Rural Development Plan. The Scheme is run on behalf of the Assembly by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW). In February 2001, the Minister for Rural Affairs agreed that a stocktake exercise should address the administrative procedures and delivery systems associated with the scheme as well as elements of the policy framework.

A paper covering all aspects of the stocktake was presented to the Committee on 4th July 2001. Several proposals, including the introduction of measures to assist group applications, together with the alteration of the scoring system to benefit young farmers were particularly welcomed by members.

Consideration

The changes that need European approval are as follows:

Changes to the application assessment system

Extra application points for:

mixed farms

farmers prepared to introduce a limited amount of arable cropping into their livestock enterprises.

young farmers

These will all reduce the average cost of an agreement by reducing the amount of expensive prescriptions work successful application will have to commit to.

Replacement of the detailed application form, and specific periods within which applications have to be submitted, with a simple expression of interest form that can be submitted at any time of year.

Project officers would then visit farms in order to score them with those that score over 100 points being offered an agreement.

Rationalisation of the number of management prescriptions

We propose merging and withdrawing around 16 optional management prescriptions and capital works to cut down and simplify the number of available options. For example, we propose combining High Mountain Heath with Upland Heath and withdrawing prescriptions for hay crop on neutral grassland and semi-improved grassland.

New Administrative Rules

In order to help control agreement costs the following two administrative changes are proposed:

Introduce a single rate of payment of £2.50 per square metre of pond for all types of restoration and construction work, up to a maximum of £500. There are currently no set limits on the amount that can be allocated.

Introduce new financial limits for capital works excluding field boundaries of £5,000 for farms of less than 20ha; £10,000 for farms of over 20ha but less than 50ha; and £20,000 for farms of over 50ha. The current limit is £20,000 per farm regardless of size.

Introduce a system for group applications.

Amend the requirement that crops must be established by 20 April and harvested no sooner than 1 August which has caused a very low take up in uplands to "do not harvest within 14 weeks of sowing, and in any event do not harvest before 25 July".

Minor changes to payment rates

We propose:

simplifying payments for capital wooden items by introducing a 20% bonus for the use of Welsh oak. This will reduce the number of payment options by around half a dozen.

Introducing a 10% incentive payment for introduction of cattle grazing during summer months with a further 10% incentive payment for use of traditional breeds

Simpler farm management agreements

Create a much simpler agreement document by taking out prescriptions that are repeated throughout and amalgamating them all in a composite section at the front of each management plan.

The overall benefits of proceeding with this new approach will be substantial. Farm management plans can be prepared more quickly, and they will be far easier for farmers to understand and use on a day-to-day basis. We estimate that the average plan will be reduced in volume by almost 50% in most cases.

Administrative Changes

One of the major components of the Tir Gofal stock-take was an examination of the administrative procedures with a view to identifying process improvements that would lead to greater efficiencies. A summary of the findings of the Process Improvement Team was also presented to the ARD Committee on July 4th.

Since then, a number of the recommendations have been implemented. In particular, the 'quick wins' have been put in place, including a revision of the system of delegated authorities in order to speed up the signing of completed draft agreements by CCW staff. In addition, the mapping codes have been simplified, so reducing the number of features that the project officer has to identify on the farm.

Other recommendations will require longer to implement. For example, during this autumn, a change to the computerised systems used for preparing Tir Gofal agreements will enable CCW staff to input the measurements for linear features directly into the database, rather than relying on cartographic input. In addition, work is in hand between CCW and the NAW Cartographic Unit to increase the use of electronic data transfer between offices.

One of the factors adding to the perceived complexity of the scheme is the fact that all Tir Gofal applications have to be cross-checked against IACS records in order to comply with European Regulations. The stock-take recommended that this task should be removed from the Project Officer, and further investigation suggests that this particular change can be implemented once the digitisation of all IACS data has been completed by the Cartographic Unit.

Whilst it will take some time for all of the recommendations of the Process Improvement Team to be fully researched, tested and implemented, the improvements introduced so far have already led to efficiency gains.

Enabling a greater number of farmers to benefit from the scheme

Part of the terms of reference for the stocktake was to identify options to enable a greater number of farmers to benefit from the scheme, for a given budget, while maintaining the whole farm approach and delivering environmental outputs effectively. A number of the changes detailed above will work in this direction, but the effect will be limited. More work needs to be done to address this aspect of the terms of reference.

Scheme Progress to Date

In response to the difficulties caused by FMD, the closure date for the third application round was put back to 31st August. A total of 1205 valid applications were received, of which 1107 (92%) scored over the 100 point threshold. This compares with success rates of 51% and 75% in the first and second application rounds respectively.

Analysis of data from the three application rounds shows that during the third round, the percentage of very small farms scoring over the threshold dropped from 24% to 15% whilst that of the medium sized farms rose from 43% to 48%. There was little discernible change in the type of eligible application with the vast majority made up of sheep and beef units (89%), whilst the percentage of dairy farms remained low (2.4%). Similarly the geographical distribution of the eligible applications remained broadly similar to previous years, although the percentages rose both in East (21%) and North East (20%) whilst dropping back somewhat in the both West (39%) and South (9.2%). A detailed breakdown is shown in Annex 1.

A total of 700 agreements have been sent to farmers who applied during the first and second application rounds, with those signed to date covering an area of 52,000 ha. CCW staff are currently working on the remaining applications from the second round with a projected completion date for this work of 31st March 2002. A total of 1000 agreements will then have resulted from the first two application rounds.

Contact Point: Alan Starkey, FFD1 ext 5776

Size Distribution of Successful Tir Gofal applications

Size class (ha)	Round1	Round2	Round3
0-19.99	187 (27%)	158 (24%)	170 (15%)
20- 49.99	183 (26%)	132 (20%)	247 (22%)
50-200	252 (34.5%)	284 (43.5%)	547 (45%)
>200	88 (12.5%)	84 (12.5%)	169 (15%)
Total	700	653	1107

Farm Type of Successful Tir Gofal Applications

Farm Type	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
Arable	7 (1%)	8 (1%)	13 (1.2%)4
Dairy	23 (3.2%)	32 (4.9%)	27 (2.4%)
Sheep/Beef (SDA)	392 (56%)	302 (45.9%)	593 (53.8%)
Sheep/ Beef (DA)	142 (20%)	185 (28%)	280 (25.3%)
Sheep/Beef (non-LFA)	72 (10%)	82 (12.5%)	108 (9.8%)
Other	64 (9.1%)	49 (7.4%)	86 (7.5%)

Location of Successful Tir Gofal Applications

CCW Area	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
North West	158 (22.5%)	115 (17.4%)	226 (20.4%)
North East	62 (8.8%)	62 (9.4%)	114 (10.3%)
East	134 (19.1%)	92 (14%)	230 (20.8%)

West	263 (37.5%)	305 (46%)	435 (39.3%)
South	83 (11.8%)	84 (12.7%)	102 (9.2%)