

FARMING IN A PROTECTED LANDSCAPE (UK CONTEXT)

Fraser Hugill

Farmer and former head of conservation management, North Yorkshire Moors National Park Authority, UK

fjhugill@yahoo.co.uk

A key characteristic of UK protected areas is that they encompass landscapes that have developed and evolved through human activity. The UK National Parks fall within the IUCN category 5 definition of a protected area being “an area of land where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value, and often with high biological diversity. Safeguarding the integrity of this traditional interaction is vital to the protection, maintenance and evolution of such an area”.

As a farmer managing this landscape the key challenge is how to maintain a viable business while at the same time respecting the landscape and environment within which you work.

Farming in a protected landscape has its advantages and disadvantages such as:

Advantages

- Greater access to environmental grants from both National Schemes and National Park Authority’s own dedicated state aid approved schemes
- Higher visitor numbers attracted by the landscape and the business opportunities this provides
- Opportunities for diversifying farm income created by the landscape
- Access to National Park Staff who support farmers with work to protect the landscape and access national grant schemes.

Disadvantages

- Physical disadvantage makes land less productive and limits cropping (most UK National Parks are in upland areas)
- Controls on development may limit certain opportunities
- Agricultural and environmental support payments calculated on the basis of income forgone provides lower payments for certain features in what is defined as severely disadvantaged areas (SDAs).

How have farmers in the North York Moors succeeded in maintaining their businesses?

- Providing accommodation or products for visitors, such as Fowl Green Farm where redundant farm buildings have been converted to provide visitor accommodation www.fowlgreenfarm.co.uk or Westerdale apiaries where a local farmer has diversified into keeping bees and making high value bees wax products sold through local visitor centers.
- Being rewarded for maintaining the environment through environmental schemes such as Environmental Stewardship, which offers farmers payments for maintaining environmental features such as traditional hay meadows or drystone walls. www.naturalengland.org.uk
- Off-farm employment due to proximity to urban areas.

In conclusion, family farmers in the North York Moors are surviving by a variety of means, using their individual skills and circumstances to ensure future generations are farming in the area and maintaining the local environment and traditions.