



# Farming Matters

Autumn 2022

## A welcome from the team

It's been a while since our last Farming Matters. Since then, we've had the Covid pandemic, new government policies, the cost of living crisis and staff changes here at ERT to contend with. Despite these challenges, we are delighted at how the Facilitation Fund farmer groups have kept going during turbulent times. The addition of our new Fellside group brings fresh perspectives, new opportunities to share best practice amongst all of our members and do more to foster sustainable, water-friendly farming in the Eden.

As we move into a new era of financial support for farming under the Agricultural Transition Plan and more specifically the Environmental Land Management schemes, we look forward to working closely with you all to make the most of any new opportunities (whether from the public purse or private investment) that will create more resilient farm businesses and healthy river environments so that people and nature in our catchment can thrive.

Thank you for your ongoing support and willingness to work with us, not just on water quality management, soil health and infrastructure projects, but on bigger river restoration, natural flood management and habitat improvement works to improve the riparian environment running through your land. We couldn't do it without you.

We hope you enjoy catching up on recent events and the latest water-friendly farming news.

Andy, Anna and Hilary.

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# UPDATE:

## Farming Rules for Water

**The eagerly anticipated statutory guidance on applying the Farming Rules for Water (FRfW) regulations was finally released at the end of March 2022. Here are some of the key takeaways:**

### **Enforcing the rules**

The Environment Agency (EA) proposes to maintain their current position of advice and guidance, unless there is clear evidence that any advice and guidance given by them is not being complied with, in which case enforcement action may be taken.

### **Application of organic manures and manufactured fertilisers:**

Farmers and land managers need to be able to demonstrate that these have been planned to meet the crop nutrient requirement.

### **Applications of phosphate on land to meet crop need**

Any applications of phosphate that are over and above what constitutes crop need will be required to be justified on a farm-by-farm basis. If exporting off farm is impractical or unachievable then phosphate applications (via manures and slurry) may be allowed to continue in some cases.

### **Applying nitrogen**

Crop need will be based on what the crop requires over an annual crop cycle.

Farmers and land managers will have to take action to avoid any significant risk of diffuse pollution due to nitrate leaching.

This will largely depend on the readily available nitrogen (RAN) content of organic manures and adherence with closed periods (similar to NVZ regulations) when additional restrictions on the applications of high RAN (greater than 30% RAN) manures will apply.

### **Requirement to establish green cover**

There will also be a requirement to establish a green cover (commercial crop, green manure or cover crop) by the 15th of October unless an appropriate justification to not do so can be demonstrated.

### **Mitigating the risk of diffuse pollution**

Farmers and land managers should aim to incorporate organic manures into soils to mitigate the risk of diffuse pollution occurring.

There will be a few cases where incorporation is not appropriate, for example if organic manures are applied to grassland or where precision application methods are used that are deemed to be better than incorporation.



# Planning ahead: Managing slurry - crop needs and reducing risk of diffuse pollution

With fertiliser prices rocketing in 2022, awareness of the value of organic manures once more comes to the fore.

With clearer guidance on the application of the Farming Rules for Water (see left) and the forthcoming announcements on the Slurry Investment Scheme (which will form part of the grants available within the Farming Transformation Fund), dairy and beef farmers and land managers can now begin to plan ahead with a bit more certainty regarding the potential to create six months slurry storage capacity on farm; make best use of the nutrients within those slurries and manures to meet crop needs and continue to mitigate against diffuse pollution risks from spreading activities.

As a river conservation charity, we welcome the increased awareness and understanding of the FRfW as it has clear benefits in terms of water quality; a lot of the winter spreading of manures and slurry will now no longer be taking place as there will be no clear evidence of there being a "crop need".

Many farmers within our region have been used to working within the Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) Regulatory framework, so closed periods (when high RAN products can't be spread) will be familiar to them. However those farming outside the NVZ's now also

face the challenges of having to store organic manures for longer or adapting their farming practices to work within the rules.

The challenge for many maize growers will be how they ensure that they do not allow areas of bare soil over winter to be present. We have been investigating with Lancaster University how the broadcasting of seed to form a cover crop in standing maize can be achieved and are trying to obtain data from trials in Cheshire as to how this has worked in practice.

We are running a series of winter meetings on these and other topics and will also be able to give more detailed one-to-one advice on how to go about assessing storage capacity for manures on farm and the benefits of clean and dirty water separation around the farmyard to help reduce the volumes of slurry stored.

Please watch the local press/Eden Rivers Trust website for more details on meeting times, venues and dates.

## Meet the ERT farming team



**Andy Dyer**

Senior Farming and Conservation Manager

Part time Tuesday and Thursday,

For all farming and environmentally-related matters.

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# Facilitation Fund farmer groups go from strength to strength

Many of our readers will know that we have been successfully running two farmer groups for some time, since 2015 (Petteril) and 2016 (Lowther/Leith). The combined membership of the two groups now numbers more than 60 farmers/landowners with a wide geographical spread across these two catchments.

## Lowther/Leith & Petteril Groups

Group members farm a wide range of enterprises - from intensive dairy and arable operations to extensive beef and sheep units and many group members are also active graziers on the commons that adjoin their farms.

The resilience of the groups was brought sharply into focus during the pandemic when the inability to hold face to face meetings resulted in a switch to online meetings via Zoom and other media. We all struggled with poor rural broadband speeds, unfamiliar IT and the inability to talk face to face with remarkable stoicism.

The two groups have weathered these challenges and remain as cohesive entities with new members joining us at meetings now that we can meet on farm and indoors on a regular basis again.

The funding from Defra for the Lowther/Leith and Petteril groups came to an end in September, and we're looking at alternative ways to share information, good practice and developments in water-friendly farming with our farmers, starting with our Water Works series of free events (see page 11).

## New Fellside group

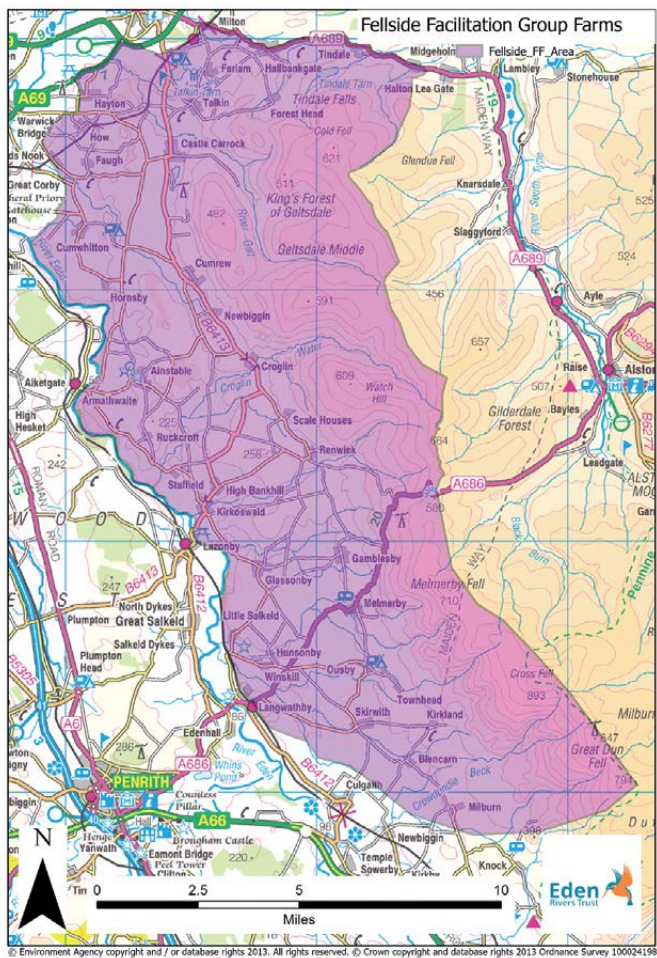
In recent months, we have successfully bid for the opportunity to run another Facilitation Fund farmer group on the Fellside (see map).

This group has brought new areas of discussion into focus such as regenerative agriculture, carbon capture and mob grazing, whilst at the same time we continue to learn more about soil health, soil structure, organic matter and hedgerow management.

At the forefront of these discussions is how all of these topics will enable us as conservationists and farmers to weather the challenges currently being placed on us in terms of global food security, flood resilience, energy use and a whole new set of schemes designed to bring income onto farms by delivering public goods such as water and air quality.







**Join the Fellside farmer group**  
Contact Anna for more details



Map showing new Fellside Facilitation Fund farmer group boundary, plus photos from recent farmer group events!



# Water-friendly farming in action

## Exploring opportunities on farm in the Petteril catchment to enhance water and air quality



Cover crops trial with Lancaster University

We have a long association with the River Petteril, having worked in the catchment for over 12 years now on a wide range of farming and environment related projects. Our first Facilitation Fund farmer group was established here back in 2015 and over the last couple of years we have been working closely with 15 farmers, landowners and land managers in the catchment to explore opportunities on farm to enhance water and air quality.

The aim of our **water-friendly farming** programme is to deliver one-to-one advice and support in the key areas of **water quality, nutrient management, air quality and soil management**, advising on improvements for that particular farm's situation on both appropriate nature-based solutions such as Natural Flood Management (NFM) and habitat creation and farm infrastructure and processes.

### Building a picture

As part of the programme we undertook walkovers of the farm and drone surveys; mapping areas and features on the farm that contribute to **natural capital**. This mapping, combined with other potential improvements meant that we could identify opportunities for the farmer to access funding through Countryside Stewardship (CS) and/or the potential to take the findings to a private funder.

### Opening doors further afield

Previously, funding restrictions meant that we were limited to exploring improvements to farmland immediately adjacent to the Petteril. Our new *water-friendly farming* programme meant that we could go as far as the catchment boundary, opening up the opportunity to gain permitted access to a greater area of connected farmland, influencing land management and identifying potential opportunities for interventions on a much wider scale.

### Results

Outcomes identified in terms of water quality (via Phosphate reduction) as a direct result of the farm walkovers has led to a third party funder investing a six figure sum spread over several farming units to create additional on farm features, such as new hedgerows, buffer strips and a large wetland area, as well as improved soil management practice – improving water quality and hopefully increasing natural capital potential within the River Petteril catchment.

Land holdings outside of the catchment boundary, *which are in the same business ownership* could also be included, meaning that we could look holistically at the whole farm business, extending our reach and ability to influence practices on land draining to other watercourses such as the Roe and Ive and the main River Eden itself.



### Turning opportunity into investment

The multiple environmental opportunities identified have formed the basis of CS applications in the past three years, bringing in an estimated £700K of capital grants and annual revenue to farms in the catchment.



Scales Farm drone photography. Photo courtesy of Rob Grange.



### Could water-friendly farming benefit your farm?

If you would like to learn more about our Water-friendly Farming Programme and how it operates then please contact **Andy Dyer** or **Jenny Garbe** on **01768 866788** for more information.

"By engaging on a one-to-one basis, we have enabled a closer working relationship to be developed with farmers in the catchment and the value of our input and interest in their businesses along with the "fresh pair of eyes" approach from a complete walk-over of the farm has been of benefit to all concerned."

Andy Dyer

## Introducing Anna, our newest member of the farming and conservation team

I have lived on a working sheep farm all my life in the Cumbrian lowlands - from there my interest for the natural world soared. I studied Ecology and Environmental Biology at Newcastle University, where I found a particular interest for plant ecology.

After graduating, I volunteered for the Penrith and District Red Squirrel Group whilst still working on the family farm. A role with North Pennines AONB Partnership followed, where I was a trainee on a nature restoration project, integrating nature recovery with traditional upland land use.

Along the way, I found a passion for combining conservation with farming - using traditional farming practices to improve biodiversity, such as native breed conservation grazing and upland hay meadow restoration and management.

I'm looking forward to using my background and insight to enhance farming productivity and efficiency whilst improving its impact on the environment and enriching our biodiversity in the Eden Valley in my twin roles of running the Fellside Facilitation farmer group in addition to being the Woods for Water representative.





# 'X' marks the spot for natural capital

In advance of the roll-out of the new environment land management schemes, Defra is funding some test and trial projects to:

*"...work with stakeholders to understand how critical building blocks of the new scheme could work in a real-life environment, with different user groups and across different geographies.*

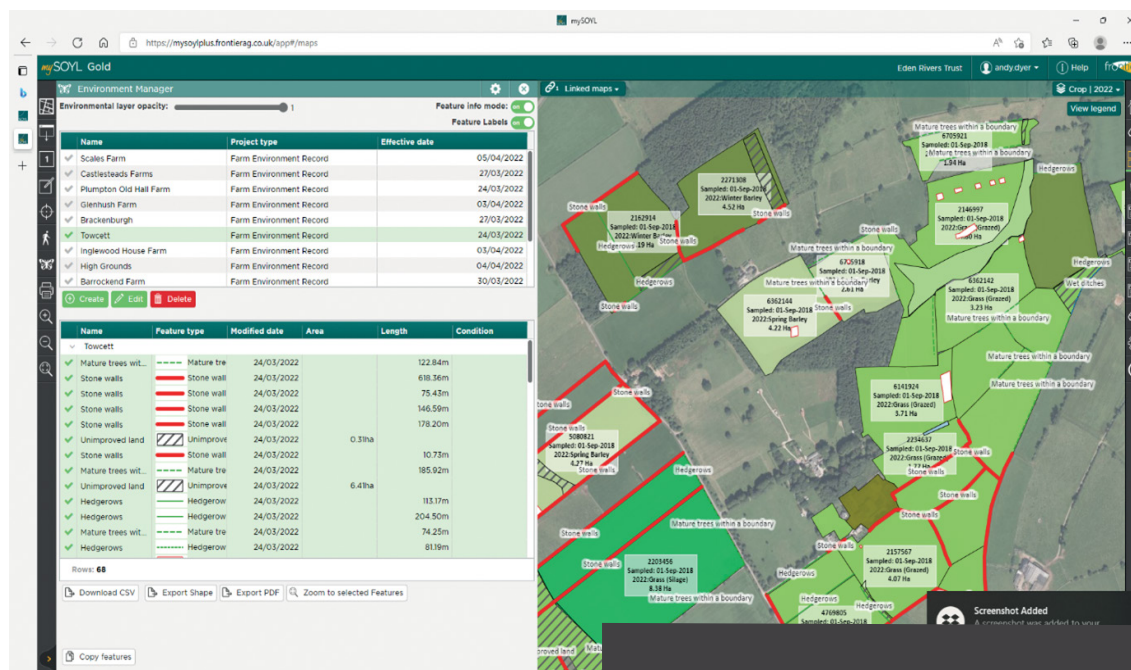
*This also provides an opportunity to trial new or innovative approaches to understand if and how they could be used within the new scheme."* (gov.uk website)

We've always been interested in harnessing technology to improve the quality of our advice and decision-making to optimise opportunities for environmental improvements, so back in 2021, we successfully bid to be one of around 30 test and trial projects nationally.

Our two-year project looks at how data, technology and physical farm walkovers can be used to build up a picture of the natural capital assets which currently exist, identify opportunities to create new assets and enhance existing ones, not just on a single farm, but also at a landscape-scale too.

We plan to work with 50 farmers during this project. 30 have currently signed up to the scheme and **there is space for a further 20 to join in by the end of 2022.**

We're now in the midst of working with the initial 30 farmers to map natural capital features on farm via the Farm App, in conjunction with our partner, **Frontier Ag** (SOYL).



## What is the Farm App?

The Farm App is an on-line tool (also available as a phone app) which enables us to record cropping information and land use, draw in linear and area based features onto a map of the farm, attach photographs and other information and also to assign a score of its quality to any feature.





## About the project:

### Year 1:

We are undertaking individual farm walkovers of farms within the Petteril and Lowther/Leith catchments to identify the baseline natural capital features on farm, quantifying their quality and quantity (length and/or area) and then record this electronically in a format that farmers can then access.

The process of actually walking over a farm, as opposed to driving around the fields, over-flying it with a drone or viewing the land from a computer screen is very rewarding (and healthier) as you get to see nature at its best and are also able to see how the farm sits within the surrounding landscape.

The flora and fauna on the farm can be seen within their local environment and their presence recorded both on film and as data, all of which is highly valuable when looking to assess the natural capital of the farm.

This magnificent oak is a great example of being able to get 'up close and personal' with some of the impressive features found on farms. We see how it can provide natural shade and shelter for livestock, note its water retention capabilities as well as how it acts as a habitat for many other species.

We are also currently working with Frontier Ag on the launch of a phone version of the app so that individual farmers can upload and amend their own data in the future.



**... An oak tree supports over 4,000 different species of insects and animals, more than any other tree.**

Douglas Tallamy, *Bringing Nature Home*,

### Year 2:

1. Prepare individual land management plans (LMP) for each farm using the data captured that will be in line with future Defra guidelines,
2. Prepare a whole project LMP showing how lengths and areas of natural capital features link up across the river catchments.
3. Identify an independent means of evaluating the monetary value of the natural capital, with a view to then attracting third party funding to enhance and/or maintain that natural capital to deliver public goods such as water and air quality within the catchment as a whole.

**Being able to quantify a current and future financial value for natural capital features on farm will be highly beneficial, both for farmers and river conservation charities such as ourselves. It will increase the opportunities and our ability to work within the River Eden catchment alongside our current and (hopefully) new partners.**

**Identifying opportunities for collaborative working to enhance and create new natural capital features is a key part of our existing work on NFM and river restoration.**

**Our aim is to see if we can extend this way of working with our farmers/landowners and delivery partners over a longer time period to maintain those natural capital features for delivery of public goods.**

Andy Dyer, Senior Farming and Conservation Manager, ERT



**Read about the progress of the national Test and Trial projects on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website**

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## Interested in being involved?

We are focusing on the Petteril, Lowther and Leith catchments within this Test and Trial project, but are also very happy to hear from farmers and landowners with land in adjoining river catchments and how they might want to become involved, as this project is all about working at landscape scale.

There is no upper or lower limit to the size, shape or nature of your farm. We currently have test and trial participants who farm a few acres to those who farm many thousand acres, so size doesn't really matter, an enthusiasm to become involved is just as important.

Why get involved? Well, as farm support payments diminish (BPS payments will be reduced by a minimum of 20% this year, as compared to 2020 values) then assessing what additional funding and support can be brought into play on farm becomes increasingly important. Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust's (GWCT) Chief Executive, Teresa Dent covered this well in a recent blog and observed that when discussing the potential to deliver biodiversity goals at scale ...

... GWCT's experience in working with groups of farmers through Farmer Clusters came to the fore. Teresa stated, "the thing that we would be looking for in the future within these schemes, is the opportunity for farmers and land managers, possibly collaboratively at a greater scale, to put forward cohesive conservation and species recovery plans that cover quite big areas in the uplands and the lowlands.

I think there is, in Defra's mind, scope for that to happen in Landscape Recovery, but I think it would be helpful for it to be brought into Local Nature Recovery as well. So often to achieve the type of reversal of species decline that Defra has as its target, you have to have a cohesive plan and that has to have scale. The more you can get farmers to collaborate, the better".

## Find out more/sign up now

Be part of our Test and Trial project - contact **Andy Dyer** on **01768 866788** for more information.



# Water works

Cultivating a water-friendly farming future

## EVENTS

### November- March

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| 10 Nov | Water management around the farm with Andy Dyer    |
| 15 Dec | Carbon on the farm with Helen Dent, Carbon Metrics |
| Jan    | Hedge laying and natural flood management          |
| Feb    | Slurry Investment Scheme                           |
| Mar    | Nutrient Neutrality & Biodiversity Net Gain        |

Join us for our new series of **FREE** events open to all farmers in the Eden catchment.

We will cover current issues and future developments in water-friendly farming with guest experts and a focus on practical real-world application for Cumbrian farms.

## BOOK/INFO

- ✉ [hilary.clarke@edenrt.org](mailto:hilary.clarke@edenrt.org)
- ☎ 01768 866788



Environment  
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**Eden**  
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