

Collaborative Approaches to the Development and Implementation of Agri-Environmental Measures in the UK

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The development and implementation of agri-environmental measures for diffuse pollution have to-date relied on the objectivity of scientific research to produce recommendations on mitigation measures through experiments and monitoring. While this approach has strong merits as it produces independent objective measures, it does not take into account the human factors that will impact the effectiveness of implementation nor differences in perception of how the problem could be solved. Consequently, it has not fully negated the potential for conflict and uncertainties which can impact the effectiveness of mitigation measures during implementation at farm-scale. Closer collaboration between researchers, policy makers and stakeholders has been proposed as one option for overcoming these barriers. In the UK a number of collaborative approaches to the development and/or implementation of agri-environmental measures have been employed. The Lough Melvin Nutrient Reduction Programme in Northern Ireland implemented a collaborative approach to the development of a suite of measures to decrease phosphorus export from farms in the catchment. This approach has resulted in a partnership agreement between farmers, researchers and other stakeholders for further collaboration to develop economically and environmentally sustainable agriculture in the Lough Melvin catchment. In the Loweswater catchment in the English Lake District, a community approach to catchment management is being taken through the establishment of the Loweswater Knowledge Collective (LKC). The stakeholders in the LKC are working closely together to try to understand why conditions in the lake have deteriorated and what additional measures might be introduced in an attempt to improve water quality. The Pontbren Farmers Group in Wales was established by neighbouring farmers who work together to develop sustainable farming systems in the Pontbren catchment. In addition, the farmers collaborate with the Pontbren Co-ordination Group, made up of a range of stakeholder groups, to disseminate and discuss ideas and findings arising from Pontbren activities. The aim of this paper is to evaluate these collaborative approaches to the development and/or implementation of mitigation measures and to identify criteria for successful collaboration between researcher, policy makers and stakeholders. The value of incorporating different forms of knowledge into the development and implementation of measures will be examined from the perspective combining subjective and objective data. The potential of collaborative approaches to improve the environmental outcomes of mitigation measures for diffuse pollution will then be considered.