



b) Farm conservation policy:

With the demise of compulsory set-aside, the estate has opted to continue with its policy of maintaining a diverse habitat with the use of uncropped strips. All in-house farms now have a six metre uncropped margin between the hedge and the crop. Approximately one third of this area is funded under Entry level and Countryside Stewardship Schemes, the rest is funded by the estate. All are managed to DEFRA standards. Wherever possible, mowing is delayed until late July in order to limit damage to ground nesting birds. Game cover strips to provide food and insects for game birds and wildlife are also planted.

Conservation headlands

As well as the six metre margin between crop and hedge in cereal crops, a further three or six metres of the crop is farmed to a 'conservation headland' standard, where no fertiliser or agrochemicals are used. This results in a thinner, weedier crop that is ideal for cover for young birds and supplies a plentiful source of insects. A small area of conservation headland is funded by DEFRA. With root crops, conservation headlands are not practical however the six metre margins are still respected.

Hedges and hedge banks

Many hedges have now been coppiced and replanted where gaps have appeared. Cutting is limited to two years in every five with no cutting taking place between the end of February until August to allow hedges to fruit. Cutting is delayed as long as possible into the winter to leave food (such as berries) for wild birds. Roadside verges and hedges have to be cut more frequently for road safety.

Fertiliser

All fertiliser is applied as liquid across in-house farms and analysis is monitored to ensure minimal levels of heavy metals are applied. Liquid fertilisers can be applied more accurately than solids, avoiding the risk of drift into hedges where high nutrients encourage hedgerow plants to grow unnaturally big. Organic manures (both imported and home produced) are used to try and help maintain the soil organic matter content.

Agrochemicals

Integrated Crop Management techniques are used wherever possible to minimise pesticide use. Use of resistant varieties has resulted in no aphicides being sprayed onto wheat ears in the last 5 years. This allows the populations of ladybirds and lacewings to flourish. When pesticides have to be used the safest product is always selected, even if it costs more.

Countryside stewardship scheme and entry level schemes

All of our in-house farms are in countryside stewardship schemes which are a DEFRA funded agreement which runs for ten years. This concerns the management of certain hedgerows and field margins; a policy which has been extended to all in house farmed farms. It has also helped fund the returning of some arable land to traditional grassland, populated by locally native species, and managed without the use of fertilisers or pesticides.

Single Farm Payment

In 2004/5 the system of subsidy payment to farmers was decoupled from production and payments were made even if a crop was not grown, as long as the land was kept in 'good agricultural order' (as defined by GAEC12). This was to reduce the incentive for farmers to produce a crop into an already oversupplied market. A series of conditions have to be complied with and deductions are made to the payment for breaches in the conditions. Another condition was that land was taken out of production and 'set-aside'. The area of compulsory set-aside has been slowly eroded in 2007 and 2008 as concerns over shortfalls in European production grew. The introduction of set-aside in 2005 resulted in many poorer areas of land being taken out of production; this has also included many small areas and field corners. With the demise of set-aside, Holkham has decided that they will not take all of these areas back into production but leave them to help increase the biodiversity across the farms. With the easing of the set a side rules many of these areas can now be used to grow crops purely for the benefit of wildlife.