

Permanent pasture delivers the greatest public good. All area-based ELMS should be paid to permanent pasture.

The public spend their high days and holidays on permanent pasture. The tourist industry is a crucial component of the UK economy, and without permanent pasture that industry would be decimated. Maintaining a viable beef and sheep sector in the less favoured areas is absolutely vital to the UK economy, and that simply will not happen without ELMS payments.

The greatest challenge facing mankind is climate change. Permanent pasture is the most stable, most effective carbon store we have. More effective than any other agricultural use, and more effective than trees. Plant trees on permanent pasture and we not only reduce our ability to feed ourselves but reduce our levels of carbon sequestration.

We cannot tackle climate change without reducing our food miles. Increasing our self sufficiency in food is a pre-requisite to building a more sustainable society. Our most productive land needs to remain just that; productive. Pay for an acre of grade 2 land to be taken out of production, and you send a signal to the marketplace for someone to plough up more than an acre of grade 3 land to provide the lost tonnage. Take cropped land out of production, and you cause more environmental harm than good.

We cannot afford wastage in the system. If this was always true, then post-corona it will be even more so. The public purse simply cannot afford an army of advisors and clipboard police. Pay ELMS to permanent pasture and all that will be needed is drones, satellites and minimal visits to ensure best practice.

What an arable farmer desires, above all else, is a 'high floor' in the price of grain and straw. A vibrant livestock sector ensures a competitive marketplace for grain and straw (with this destination being far more environmentally sustainable than power plants). Loss of chemicals and increased awareness of soil conservation are leading to arable farmers adopting more sustainable practices already. Arable land needs no payment of public money, and no public good would be delivered by doing so.

People will tell you that ELMS, with its broad range of environmental, social and economic objectives, is trying to achieve the impossible. They are wrong. Pay all area-based ELMS to permanent pasture and you achieve all of those objectives. It is the only way to do so.

(Note this only applies to area-based payments. The other elements of ELMS - landscape features, public engagement etc - will present many opportunities for other sectors to deliver public goods).