

Hugh Townsend



Pasture-fed group marks anniversary

A MEMBERSHIP organisation which champions the virtues of livestock raised exclusively on pasture and their unique produce has celebrated its 10th anniversary.

The Pasture-Fed Livestock Association (PFLA) was incorporated as a Community Interest Company (CIC) in March 2011, a year after the four founder members, including three livestock farmers, met to discuss the potential for 100% pasture-fed farming systems in the UK.

A strong and diverse community of farmers, butchers, conservationists, academics and consumers, the PFLA officially turned 10 years old on Sunday, March 21.

To observe this landmark, the PFLA directors have conferred honorary life membership to the members of the certification standards committee. They have been responsible for devising, developing and updating the rules for how certified 100% pasture-fed livestock farmers manage their animals.

These include high animal welfare principles, the feeding of a natural forage diet with no corn or grain ever, and practices that encourage the formation of wildlife-friendly farms.

Chairman of the committee is Devon-based animal welfare specialist, Anna Heaton. She has worked with PFLA founder member John Turner, a farmer from Lincolnshire, and dairy farming adviser Mike Thame on the certification standards since they were first established in 2011. These are continually being reviewed with three updates published since the start. The team consults widely and the revised versions take into account comments from within the membership and the wider industry.

Fidelity Weston, chairman of the PFLA, said: "The certification standards are at the very heart of the PFLA – outlining a very distinct method of animal farming which is sustainable and environmentally friendly, yet also producing high quality, healthy meat and milk.

"The certification team has worked tirelessly and voluntarily to produce and maintain a set of standards we are proud of. Our independently audited certified farmer members follow these rules and can use the Pasture for Life rosette when marketing their products. This means consumers can easily recognise that what they are buying comes from truly 100% pasture-fed animals."

Other anniversary celebrations planned by the PFLA include a membership drive to increase its members from the current level of 700. Later in the year, the organisation will also be launching an oral history film, charting the significant milestones as the PFLA moved from being a small group of farmers meeting in a pub, to becoming a leading player in UK agriculture and conservation, inputting into policy, research and supply chain development.

In addition, a social media campaign is underway in which members and supporters are being encouraged to share the reasons why the PFLA means so much to them, using the hashtag #PFLA10.



> The Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme allows farmers to apply for funding to improve their local environment – from restoring wildlife habitats to managing flood risk

Increasing interest in CS scheme as BPS subsides

THE UK's departure from the EU has led to a variety of changes to the Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme. This has brought both limitations and new opportunities, which are important to new applicants and existing agreement holders alike.

New Capital Items

As part of a drive to improve air quality, two new capital items have been added to the scheme as part of a dedicated air quality grant. These are automated slurry scrapers (funded at £2,760/channel) and new flooring for livestock buildings where this would reduce ammonia emissions (funded at £72/m²).

Applicants should remember that these new items, as well as some popular existing capital items such as concrete yard renewal (funded at £27.14/m²) and new livestock troughs (£110 per trough), require the consent of your local catchment-sensitive farming officer. This needs to be requested no less than six weeks before the final submission of the application, so June 18 at the absolute latest. We would recommend requesting the consent some time earlier to allow time for the application to be adjusted once the consent is received.

More Reasonable Inspection and Penalty System

Previously if a claimant was found

Land agent and surveyor expert, Hugh Townsend, advises farmers and landowners on changes to the Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme for 2021

to have declared more of an option than was found on the ground at inspection, even if only by a small amount, they could be subjected to a significant penalty on the rest of their claim above the amount they overclaimed. In the worst cases this would both wipe out the entire claim year and be deducted from other claims in the future. This system has now been removed, and the deduction will only be by the value of the overclaim.

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) also says they have "changed the focus of Countryside Stewardship inspections for domestic agreements to support the delivery of environmental outcomes", which presumably means a procedural change of some kind, but it is unclear as yet in what form.

Changes to Maximum Capital Payment Values

Prior to the latest round of applications, capital only agreements were limited to a maximum of £10,000 worth of items, but Mid-Tier agreements could include an unlimited amount of the same items. This

meant that putting a single field into a low input grassland option could then allow in excess of £100,000 of grant funding for capital works in some cases.

This has been changed so now capital agreements allow £20,000 of payments each across three different categories, so £60,000 in total. Under Mid-Tier this increases to £50,000 per category so £150,000 per total. The three categories are: improvements to boundaries, water quality and air quality.

This means, in theory, that a Mid-Tier agreement allows only a maximum of £50,000 of capital items for boundary improvement. Water quality items include fencing to protect watercourses in addition to concrete yard renewal and similar items, so may effectively increase the cap.

In addition, it is not unusual for a single large farm to fall under several agreements, so applications could be staggered according to when works are required to ensure that grants are still used to their maximum. This does, however, mean that more

planning may be needed than previously for grants to refence and improve all of the hedges on larger farms.

The increase in capital-only agreement values is more welcome as this will remove the need for some smaller holdings to make management changes they would prefer to avoid in order to access the capital funding they need.

With the reductions to the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) now clear, we have seen increasing interest in Countryside Stewardship as a means to meet the funding shortfall until the Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme is fully in place, so these and future changes will only become more relevant until the scheme finally closes for new entries in 2024.

We believe that a properly designed CS agreement can be an ideal tool for this, and would urge farmers who have yet to look into the scheme to devote a little time to seeing what might be available to them through it.

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