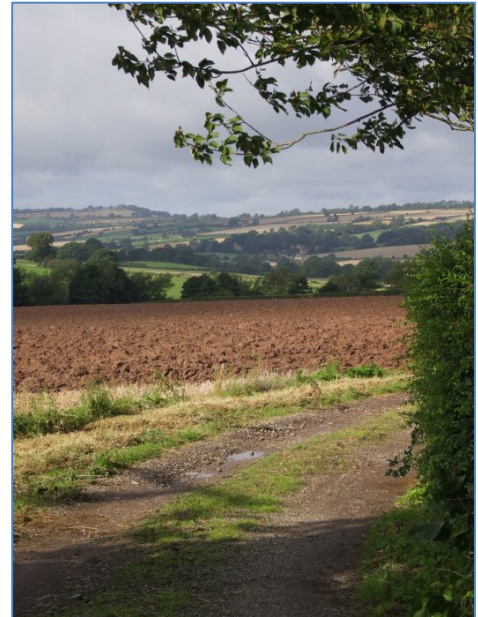


The contribution of UK farm assurance schemes to environmental policy

Introduction and background

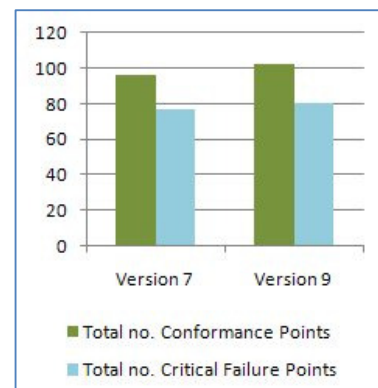
In November 2010 an article¹ was published reporting a study undertaken to evaluate the contribution UK farm assurance schemes could potentially make towards supporting a range of environmental policy objectives. For a number of reasons, quantifying the environmental benefits of the assurance schemes is not an easy task, not least because of the scientific challenge of associating 'practice based' standards with specific, measurable environmental effects when the links are often vague, indirect and variable from one farm to the next. Consequently, the study used a 'content analysis' approach based upon detailed analysis of the documented standards of each scheme together with the guidance notes used by the scheme assessors. The work was not an environmental impact assessment but intended to provide an indication of policy coverage and perhaps more importantly identify gaps for which other delivery mechanisms may be required. LEAF Marque was one of the assurance schemes evaluated.



Perhaps unsurprisingly, because of the clear environmental objectives of the scheme, the LEAF Marque stood out as the best performer particularly with respect to protecting water and soils from pollution, and mitigating climate change. It did, however, show some gaps in coverage for emerging policy concerns, in particular water efficiency. As a consequence LEAF asked the research team to compare the latest version (version 9.0, 2010) with that considered by the original study (version 7.0, 2008). This briefing paper reports the findings. The data was derived using identical techniques to those used in the original study.

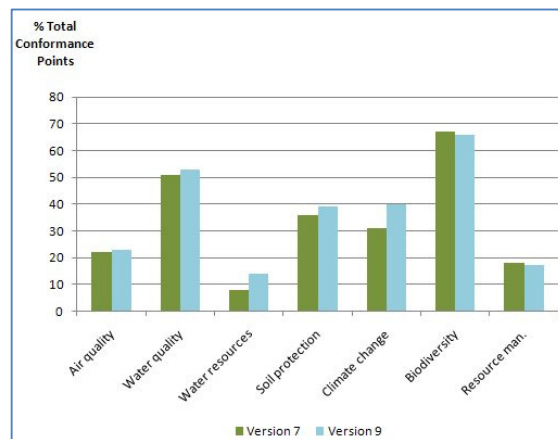
The findings

1. Version 9.0 of the LEAF Marque has a number of changes compared to version 7.0 with respect to both the total number of Conformance Points (CPs) and the total number of Critical Failure Points (CPF). The ratio between CPF and CPs has decreased marginally. Out of the seven new standards three were identified as CPFs, the remaining four are recommendations. One standard has been deleted. Three of the new CPs are concerned with improving the efficiency of water use (two of which are CPFs), one with carbon footprinting, one on IFM training and another considers nitrogen efficiency. The final one is concerned with LEAF Marque administration (a CPF).



¹ The Contribution of UK farm assurance schemes towards desirable environmental policy outcomes, *Int. J. of Agricultural Sustainability*, Lewis *et al.*, 8(4), 2010

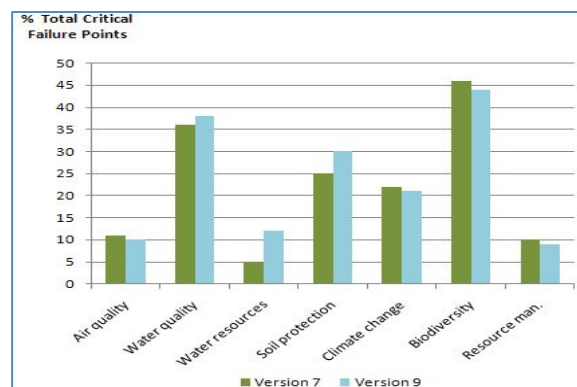
2. Comparing the % total CPs addressing the different policy issues improvements are evident in most areas. The small drops shown in the graph opposite for biodiversity and resource management do not mean that there are now numerically fewer standards relating to these issues than in the earlier version but that as more standards have been added to the scheme, overall a slight 'dilution' of the percentage coverage of these particular issues is seen, achieving a more rounded coverage across all environmental protection areas. The biggest improvements are seen in the areas of water efficiency and climate change mitigation.



3. The original research had already classified climate change coverage as HIGH (>30%) but water efficiency was assigned as LOW (<10%). However, new standards addressing this issue 'push' coverage into the MEDIUM category' (10-30%). The figure above reveals a little more here than can be seen from the basic coverage classifications in the table below. Climate change mitigation only just crossed the threshold for the High classification in version 7 but version 9 clears the threshold easily.

	Air quality	Water quality	Water efficiency	Soil protection	Climate change	Biodiversity	Resource management
Version 7.0	Medium	HIGH	Low	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	Medium
Version 9.0	Medium	HIGH	Medium	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	Medium

4. The figure opposite shows the coverage of the two versions across the different policy areas for the weighted % CFP's. At first glance it appears that whilst increased coverage can be seen for water and soil issues, some areas appear to have less coverage. This is only true in percentage terms and is a result of two new CFP's have been added only one of which directly addresses environment protection.



Discussion

The recent addition of new CP's to the LEAF Marque (V 9.0) has helped to address some of the gaps in policy coverage particularly in the area of water resource efficiency. It has also delivered a more 'rounded' environmental scheme covering all the 'priority' policy areas.



Contact: AERU, School of Life Sciences, University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 9AB; Tel: 01707 284582, Email: K.a.lewis@herts.ac.uk