

Jonathan Webb, Kent based woodland and countryside management consultant, guides us through the new Environmental Stewardship grants available for the conservation management of farm land including woodlands.

Many woodland owners will be aware of the closure last year of the *Woodland Grant Scheme* and the impending launch of the new *England Woodland Grant Scheme*. Forestry Commission seminars briefing woodland agents and managers on the latest developments in the England Woodland Grant Scheme will be held later in the year (details in next WoodLots).



There are other changes happening this year in the whole rural grants system that land owners with woodland should be aware of. The *Countryside Stewardship Scheme* is being replaced with a whole new system of grants under the heading of *Environmental Stewardship*. This comprises three elements:

- **Entry Level Scheme (ELS):** this is a whole farm scheme open to all farmers and owners/managers of land, some of which must be in agricultural use or part of the 'farm environment'. Woodlands may be included within the eligible area for payment, which will be at a flat rate of £30/ha./year, with agreements lasting for 5 years. This grant can be paid in addition to WGS or EWGS grants. However, owners with only woodland and without land in some form of agricultural use will not be eligible (N.B. grazing by horses & ponies can now be officially counted as 'agricultural use').
- **Organic Entry Level Scheme (OELS):** similar to ELS, but as the name implies is for holdings which are organically run, either in whole or part. Woodland as part of the holding is eligible.
- **Higher Level Scheme (HLS):** a discretionary scheme designed to deliver significant environmental benefits on wildlife sites of higher importance. Specific capital projects (including the creation and management of small farm woodlands) can be grant aided, though the application process will be quite complex and requires specialist advice. Only land which is already included within one of the Entry Level Schemes will be eligible.

Of particular relevance to owners of agricultural land (in its broadest sense) is the new *Single Payment Scheme*. This constitutes the most dramatic shift in agricultural policy for 30 years and moves the subsidy emphasis away from production to the management of land. Anyone who owns grazing land managed to an agreed standard could be eligible, even if the grazing is being let to someone else. However, woodland is not eligible.

Further information can be obtained from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs :
DEFRA Helpline 08459 335577 (local rate, available between 9am and 5pm, Monday-Friday)
Website: www.defra.gov.uk, Email: helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Alternatively seek advice from an agent or consultant.

Registering with the Rural Payments Agency by 16th May 2005: All land owners should be aware that in order to qualify for environmental grants in the future (including the England Woodland Grant Scheme) they must first register their land with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) by **16th May 2005**. This date also applies to applications for the Single Payment Scheme.

Rural Payments Agency Customer Service Centre: 0845 603 7777
Website: www.rpa.gov.uk
Email: customer.servicecentre@rpa.gsi.gov.uk

Jonathan Webb is a freelance woodland and countryside management consultant, currently retained by Sevenoaks District Council to consult on woodland and countryside matters. In addition he provides advice and management to many other landowners throughout Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex and Surrey. Email: jonathanwebb@onetel.com, tel: 01732 740378