3.4 Representation

One issue which came across strongly during the study was the farmers' desire to have a 'voice' which could be heard to the outside world. There was a strong feeling that the media and the general public misunderstood and misrepresented the farming community. Even supposedly representative organisations such as the NFU were not felt to properly represent farmers in the dales region. This study was welcomed by many of our interviewees precisely because it did offer some opportunity for considered expression of viewpoints to an interested audience.

This reinforces the view that a more enriched understanding of the farming community for public and policy debate is needed. The feeling of isolation and alienation we have discussed is known amongst specialists within the social science community, but not much more widely. Even within the social sciences, there has been relatively little work of the sort reported on here, since most previous work has concentrated on much more intensive, large-scale and arable farming in the south of England.
3.3 Different Sorts of Farmers

The above discussion has attempted to capture some of the key priorities of the dales farming community, but should not be read as suggesting that there are no differences between such farmers. Indeed, whilst the present study sample was too small to illuminate differences in detail, it does provide confirmatory evidence of typologies developed in a study of upland farmers by the first author. With some modifications, the four following groups were identified in the present sample, although the small sample size means that only one or several farmers could be identified with all categories except for the first (which was more frequently found in the sample).

- **autonomists**: who tended to perceive conservation schemes as interfering with the tradition of change in farming communities, restraining motivation, individual initiative and farming skills and judgement based on long experience. There was also a tendency to view conservation schemes as just another layer of controls, adding to those already imposed by organisations such as the MAFF and NPA. However despite attitudes, conservation schemes may be an offer they cannot resist given economic pressures and fluctuations in farm income.

- **traditionalists**: who continue to farm in a way more characteristic of farming before its post-2nd World War production ethos (often because of biophysical constraints). In such a way the requirements of conservation schemes often coincide with their farm management regime. These farmers also tend to consider that the quickening and intensifying pace of agriculture in the dales (or elsewhere) was not entirely a desirable trend. Hence attitudinally they identify with conservation schemes which act as a challenge to the system which encourages intensification.

- **progressives**: who have pursued fairly high input/high output farming regimes for a number of reasons. Joining conservation schemes would be out of the question since it would entail major disruptions to the farming system, plus loss of income (from production loss) which would not be compensated for by conservation payments. They are likely to have identified strongly with the earlier productivist ethos.

- **instrumentalists**: who tended to see farming as moving towards greater diversification, and who wanted to take advantage of new opportunities even if this means diverging from the farm/production oriented role. Such farmers may take the ‘package’ approach; that is, calculating their economic well-being on the basis of intermixing various schemes, subsidies and market (farming and non-farming) opportunities. Hence they saw conservation as a new opportunity.

Of course, there are simplifications arising from such a typology which need to be recognised before reading too much into the groups. For example, in practice many farmers are likely to share characteristics of more than one of the above groups. Nevertheless, recognition of such differences suggests that no single conservation policy will appeal in the same way to all farmers. Instead, a range of differently-formulated policy incentives might be necessary to appeal to the range of farmers represented in the above scheme.
shifting policies of the MAFF in response to changes in public perceptions of agriculture, have left farmers in some confusion and uncertainty over their role in society, in particular as producers of food. Overall, farm policies and support systems now give mixed and inconsistent signals to farmers.

Yet, for all their apparent autonomy in day-to-day decision making, the economic well-being of farmers is profoundly underpinned by a dependence on state and CAP support. In this sense they remain vulnerable in the face of changing directions of agricultural policies. In this sense too, the uptake of conservation schemes may reflect the precariousness of their economic well-being: many farmers may have little choice but to go with the flow. That some consider conservation as a fashion or a fad, only adds a further dimension to their sense of powerlessness. Farmers also analysed their dependency on subsidies in a positive sense, given that they were producing a worthwhile and socially-valued landscape as well as high quality products. They made comparisons with teachers, who could also be seen as in receipt of a state subsidy in one sense, but are more usually perceived as professionals necessary to the operation of a modern society.

3.2 Stability Through Change

Changing directions in policy suggest that the future existence of farming communities in the dales is less than certain. Yet though much diminished, farming has historically displayed much stability in terms of the continuity of families over generations which might indicate more resilience than at first sight. The dales farming community appears to adhere to a value of survival on a longer time scale than typically encountered in modern societies. Such survival, however, is based on the flexibility and change at very short time scales. There is a need to remain flexible in response to the myriad uncertainties encountered in farming - from weather to policies - mitigating against medium or long term planning. And there is a further need to be adaptable. Thus farm families and their communities, survive over time through the ability to respond rapidly to broader processes of change within society - locally, regionally, nationally and globally - through their interaction with them. This farming community is a culture which undergoes continual, incremental change, change which apparently contributes to the long-term maintenance of the dales farming community. Thus resistance to planning restrictions on new or old buildings for example can be understood as inhibiting the opportunity for short-term adaptability so as to ensure long-term survival.

Considering this process of adaptation, conservation schemes could be interpreted as a relatively new survival strategy for the immediate future. Their diversity and patchiness, and short-term outlook, might even be welcomed by some farmers, since this could be perceived as increasing the leeway for incremental adjustments to changes elsewhere - say in the production support system. Against this however, there is a plethora of schemes in the Yorkshire Dales and this causes some confusion and a sense of bureaucratic overload in the farming communities. It could be conjectured that farmers will only express a serious interest in conservation schemes after a widespread farm conservation programme has been implemented, to which there is a long-term commitment. This could add credence to the longevity of conservation/environmental aims.

The culture of short-term change/long-term continuity also has an important effect on how farmers perceive and understand conservation. Distinctions that are frequently made by conservation agencies and other professionals, between farming and conservation, the landscape and farming practices, ecology and land-use, are much less clearly defined as discreet categories or activities by farmers. Farmers tend to think of conservation as referring as much to their social communities and networks as it does to the flora and fauna, or to the walling system as much as to traditional barns. Since many farmers believed that the National Park landscape was the result of the efforts of individual farm families over generations - before conservation and environmental issues were prioritised - they tended not to distinguish between their own land-use, farming practices and natural processes. Their understanding is
3 Farmers and Conservation Schemes: Reflections

Altering farming methods since the 2nd World War has wrought fairly extensive changes in the landscape, particularly in the arable areas. As a result environmental and countryside issues are now prioritised in public discourse and farmers in our new agricultural landscapes are likely to be aware of the plethora of criticisms in regard to landscape change, pollution problems and loss of biodiversity, as well as animal welfare and food production issues.

In the National Parks the rate of environmental change has been relatively slow, in part due to their protected status but also to the fact that they are, by and large, located in the upland regions where 'nature' is not so amenable to human induced change. Yet, the Parks are positioned at the apex of the hierarchy of environmental designations and concern over their future is a paramount policy issue. In fact, these areas are the focus of many new conservation schemes and environmental protection policies.

But despite a fairly substantial uptake of these conservation schemes by farmers this study suggests we should be wary of presenting this as a straightforward indication of positive attitudes towards conservation aims, or of an acute awareness of conservation issues generally. The major influence on farmers continues to be the production support structure and it is more the happy congruence between economic signals and conservation policy which accounts for the good up-take of schemes. Whilst myriad other factors will also influence decision-making, the longevity of this production support structure relative to any other scheme, and farmers' long-term reliance upon it, can militate against their identifying more positively with conservation aims.

The countryside is now being redefined more in terms of the conservation of a landscape rather than in terms of production but the productivist ethos, encouraged over four or five decades by successive governments, is still likely to be embedded in the dales farmers' psyche and culture. Unlike in less protected areas, where massive changes in the landscape brought about by production-oriented farming are all too evident, the dales landscape has retained much of its historical identity. Ironically, this may have made the farmers less aware at one level of the emergence of a conservation ethos in policy. Whilst some farmers in more intensively-farmed regions may have deliberately shifted towards conservation this may not have been the experience of farmers in the more protected dales. Indeed more comparative analysis is needed in order to ascertain the differing attitudes, expectations, aspirations, concerns and sensibilities of a range of different types of farmers. This would aid in public discourse on the future of rural/agricultural policies and potential new 'partnerships' in rural areas.

However, the present study by itself suggests possible points of departure and new insights for a more in-depth understanding of the dales farming community, as indicated below.

3.1 Autonomy and Dependence

Agency - that is the individual capacity for taking actions - is central to farmers’ perceptions and behaviours. Farmers are in many ways the epitome of the individualist adhering to core values such as independence, autonomy, self-help, just reward for labour, and so on. Certainly 'being your own boss' was a valued attribute in the dales sample and for many this was the rationale of self-employment and private ownership of rural resources. Autonomy in their daily operations and decision-making characterises those farmers’ work situations. Encroachment upon this agency, for example from the increasing interest of different organisations in land use management and the perceived creeping bureaucratisation of MAFF (with the expanding surveillance of the latter in regard to new schemes such as the ESAs, and other forms of control such as the IACs) has become of heightened concern in farming communities. Certainly the
"Well, they can cause trouble with local people. They go up to the parish councillors and they start shouting about all sorts of silly things, quarries, street lights, just any little thing ... I don’t know why they do it, I mean, they know when they come it’s going to be a very different life”.

To some degree also resentment was felt by local residents towards the farming community. This was, by and large, based on the perceived growing affluence of the farmers over the decades since the 2nd World War and created by comprehensive government support: "They’ve got the subsidy. £25,000, £35,000. So that’s before they get out of bed in the morning". Such largesse was not paid to other struggling local minorities in rural areas:

“Doing alright? You don’t see a farmer going round in new Land Rovers and big fancy cars if they’re doing badly. Can’t do it, can’t do it! Can’t be done! I mean I’m talking about this, but I think I’m talking pretty good sense about it, because I’m the only one out of this carry on which isn’t a bloody farmer. I had my chance to be one ... No, I had my chance, and one thing I’ve got to say, they did better than me”.

This sense of unfairness by local residents was not experienced by the more affluent newcomer residents. Yet their own sense of separateness was expressed. It was suggested that with local families (including farming ones) there was a closure of communication if outsiders endeavoured to influence events. Furthermore, even after many years of living in a locale, only inklings into local knowledge between families could be gleaned. Full acceptance into these local enclaves was generational.

A further temporal dimension was explained by newcomer residents. In contrast to the relatively short existence of agencies such as the National Park and English Nature, the structure of farm families had existed over generations. Due to the lack of major landlords in this region over the centuries, farmers traditionally were an independent and free-thinking group and were, therefore, by nature, mistrustful of bureaucratic organisations. This rather sentimentalised view of the farming community by newcomer residents ended to overlook farmers’ established reliance on state support; and also contrasts with the more critical and prosaic views of local residents in the dales.

2.10.5 Summary

English Nature had a low profile amongst non-farmers in the dales study areas. Hence, knowledge about its attractiveness was gained from second-hand sources and some conflictual opinions were expressed regarding conservation schemes and farmers’ motivations and economic well-being.

Conversely, non-farmers had more knowledge about the activities of the National Park Authority and held strong opinions. Overall the feeling was that outside interests were over-ruling local interests, that the Authority had over-stepped its legitimate bounds and was adversely affecting local economies by suppressing local initiative deemed unsuitable in the Park enclave. Within this context, concern was expressed over the future viability of delicately balanced working communities. Local self-determination was being eroded. Local opinions and feelings, despite the medium of the parish councils, were being ignored. Yet, in spite of this consolidated local front vis-à-vis the National Park Authority social restructuring has caused new rifts in local communities, particularly the influx of ‘offcomedens’. Non-farming locals also provided useful insights into the character and causes of ecological changes as well as being more critical in their analysis of the fortunes of the farming community.
It was felt quite strongly that working communities were under threat. In particular the National Park Authority was felt to be exercising a control on local enterprise whilst engaging in enterprise initiatives itself. Young people were leaving the dales because they could not either acquire housing, employment, or set up small businesses where these were deemed unsympathetic to the aesthetic aims of the Park Authority. This contrasted with more laissez-faire enterprise policies operating beyond the Park boundary where there was evidence of more lively and healthy local economies.

It was also argued that whilst visitors came to the dales for the various recreational opportunities and the scenery, they also came for its more intangible qualities, ones which had vanished elsewhere: its community spirit, its ‘way of life’ and local culture. In a modern society where contractual relationships dominate, where alienation and anomie are pervasive, a sense of community and belonging could be discovered in the few remaining working villages in the dales: this is what visitors valued. However, these community qualities arise from the variegation of its inhabitants and a more dynamic and diverse local economy. In such a way, local residents came to stress the importance of retaining working communities, to encourage new initiatives especially in the local and young, with the conclusion that the National Park Authority and other organisations with an interest in the conservation of the dales should actively broaden their remit to include the socio-economic well-being of the people who inhabit them.

2.10.4 Local Dales Communities and Social Division

As the above suggests, when a community presents itself to the outside world, particularly when it feels threatened by the power, influence and controls of exogenous agencies, the tendency is to project a simplified, condensed, coherent image of itself. But to interpret small communities as consensual and cohesive ones is to misrepresent the reality with its myriad conflicts and divisions. Essentially small traditional rural communities tend to be based in reputational status systems. This was noted in section 2.6.4 in regard to farmers’ social networks but can also be applied to indigenous rural populations. With the influx of a newcomer, virtually middle-class population there has been a degree of dismantling of traditional local status structures, one significant aspect being the creation of new cleavages and tensions. In many cases this has induced a polarisation between newcomers and local interests.

In the study dales there appeared to be a concerted front in regard to the National Park Authority in particular. The creation of a dales organisation seeking to represent affected and aggrieved local interests vis-à-vis National Park Authority power suggests generally a crisis of the legitimisation of the Park’s authority as well as evidencing a definite national versus local conflict. However, a more complex picture emerged when further consideration was given to the representation of local interests. In the first place some resentment was voiced by local residents over the fact that the parish councils comprised, by and large, “offcomedens” equipped with their own value judgements, expectations and opinions of what issues were important locally. There was also an alleged lack of knowledge of the locality:

“This parish is 18 miles long ... you talk about the local council, there’s only one (name of village) man on that, t’others are all offcomers. And 50 yards north, south, east or west of the outer limit and they’re bloody well lost ... Of course, they all come with the same idea, oh, there’s this here, and that there, we can do this. They can do nothing. But they think they can... They come here, buy a house, and they can look out north, south, east or west and they haven’t a bloody clue what they’re talking about”.

The expectations of ‘short-stay newcomers’ were also criticised where often aesthetic considerations conflicted with the realities of a working community - quarry wagons for instance:
the ruled. Thus when an organisation oversteps the boundaries of this sphere resistance is
directed at the system itself.

With older residents, ones who could recall the inception of the National Park, this feeling was
more acute:

"It didn’t make a lot (of difference) to start with. But it has done now,
they’ve got too big, too much power, too demanding altogether. Er, used to
do the job alright but they’ve gone beyond themselves”.

Frustration was felt over the lack of accountability of the National Park Authority particularly
with the planning process, that it paid only lip-service to the views of the parish councils and
that there were inconsistencies in the planning process itself. Some resentment was felt over
the expenses incurred in planning disputes. The move towards the creation of parish council
seats on the new free-standing park committees seems to be a positive step in the direction of
involving local interests.

2.10.3 Precarious Local Economies

The dales communities, similar to other rural locales, have undergone both social and economic
change over the years. According to older local non-farming residents in the study dales,
earlier this century the economy had been more diverse. Agriculture had been an employer of
labour. The quarries had been a major employer. Villages had many small enterprises. A
substantial village such as Horton-in-Ribblesdale had shops, services, peripatetic retailers, a
school, post office and two public houses. Socially levels were fairly undifferentiated. Or as
one elderly Hortonian remarked: "I would say 80 out of a 100 would all be on’t same line.
They either had a bob or two in their pocket or they had nowt" and "everybody sort of mixed
in" suggesting a more integrated community life than in the present.

Economically the dales have become less diverse. With mechanisation, agriculture and
quarrying have shed employed labour substantially. Horton has now only one shop combined
with a post-office, a small school, though the two public houses have survived. Tourist and
recreational enterprises (B&Bs, camp-sites, bunk-barns, tea-shops and tourist attractions such
as White Scar Caves in Chapel-le-dale) have increased.

The rural social structure has undergone change also, now generally comprising a nucleated
indigenous working class, a diminished farming population and other small self-employed local
people, and a numerically increasing, often ex-urban, middle-class. Whilst Kingsdale is
remote with only two farm families inhabiting, Chapel-le-dale and Ribblesdale still retain a
working atmosphere, despite socio-economic change. Nonetheless, concern prevailed over the
influence of exogenous agencies on the future of these dales. One resident explained:

"... there is a feeling among the parish council and non-farmers, and possibly
among farmers as well, that ... National Parks, English Nature, they’ll finish
up with all the farmers running around in smocks, like museum curators.
That’s not a community. We have a community which is a working community
and by reducing it, making farmers less efficient, and less able to survive in
fact, then it can destroy a community. The economy of a place like this is very
finely balanced. You have farming, tourism and quarrying. You only need to
take one out and they’re like a pack of cards, it collapses. The shop is
borderline ... we have a post-office there which has been reduced to 3 half
days a week. We have a school which must be on the borderline - 25-30
pupils. Now once you loose these things from a village then it starts to die
and it becomes a museum or dormitory place".

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bank accounts". With the purchase of land by English Nature (and renting it back to the farmer at a "cheap" rent) farmers were perceived as being "highly suited".

Certainly with older local residents, who could recall farming in their localities over a long period, there was a more positive conservationist stance in the sense of a desire to see local wildlife and habitats regenerated. They understood that government policies had been a significant factor in the demise of mixed farming systems, that they had encouraged specialised sheep production, with consequent over-grazing, loss of heather moorland and other vegetation and wildlife. With the benefit of long experience of working in the dales there was some criticism of blanket conservation schemes, emphasis being given to the complexities of environmental processes for which local knowledge was needed.

2.10.2 Other Agencies and Local Distinctiveness

Similar to the attitudes of farmers, non-farming residents interviewed were unhappy with the activities of the National Park Authority though discontent was voiced over other agencies such as the Countryside Commission and Rural Development Commission. More detailed knowledge about other agencies contrasted with the more vague and ambivalent opinions about English Nature. Generally what emerged was a dislike of, and concern with, the proliferation of quangos and planning organisations. These were perceived as reflecting national and urban interests but which had "fingers in our pie", i.e. local and rural interests. Bureaucratic interference in local interests had started with the 'war ads' in the 2nd World War dictating to farmers how they should farm irrespective of the local knowledge farmers possessed. Overall it was perceived that what was occurring was an erosion of local democracy which had become more acute since the National Park Authority had become a unitary planning authority.

Dales communities are peripheral ones in geographical terms, but also marginally in that they are on the boundaries of mainstream society. The latter is a relational boundary; and recognition of this, via myriad mechanisms, encourages a sense of local distinctiveness and collective self-identity. A knowledge of, and a commitment to, this sense of local identity is strengthened by perceived exogenous threats. This was the case in the study dales with the growth of National Park Authority power and the growth of influence of other national organisations. There was the belief that the local community is more efficient and expert in resolving its own affairs than are politicians and bureaucrats. This belief was based on local knowledge of the needs of local people; of how people on the ground experience, interpret and resolve their own problems, conflicts and contradictions within highly complex social milieus. Distant authority had no, or little, understanding it was felt of the latter. Indeed, distance per se militated against it. As one local resident related to us over a planning application:

"So all the local people (councillors) in the area who know the business, knows me, knows all the area, voted for me and the rest 28, 7 or 6 all voted against me from Tadcaster, Wetherby, York, Knaresborough, Richmond voted against me, doesn't know anything about the area, they stitched me up ... When your local councillors vote for you and people from forty, fifty miles away vote against you, there's something wrong somewhere".

Residents realised there was a need for some control or guidance over development in the dales and that the National Park Authority had a role to play in this respect. They also recognised that a careful balance was needed between development and controls because changing technology, lifestyles, work organisation, etc. accelerated the pace of change with consequent threats to the environment. All this was well understood. Nevertheless, there was also the assertion by those we interviewed that the Park Authority had overstepped its legitimate bounds. Here it is worth noting that the legitimised authority of an organisation is also a relational concept. Power is legitimised by the consent of the ruled. Also the exercise of bureaucratic authority is restricted to a sphere of specific practices deemed legitimate, again by
technical goods available in contemporary society. Thus farmers were becoming much more cost conscious and farming was becoming increasingly a business.

2.9.3 Summary

For the majority of farmers, good husbandry was considered the most important attribute in the constitution of good farming, but it was often stressed that a strong personal commitment to farming as an occupation was also a necessary and important attribute. Hence good husbandry and personal commitment were, in many cases, linked as interdependent. Given farmers' own definition of conservation, the latter became a consequence of good husbandry farm practices. Conservation schemes which curtailed good husbandry practices (an example of that would be the production of good quality hay) were perceived circumspectly.

Though to a great extent farmers are price-takers in regard to their stock, good marketing techniques (and, therefore, higher profits) were thought to be of importance though these attributes, according to farmers, are curtailed and controlled by factors largely beyond their influence. Even so, farmers generally have become more money oriented with increasing material expectations. Whilst the introduction of modern farm practices was deemed to be constrained by the harsh biophysical environment, there was some difference of opinion expressed about how far modern methods should be taken before they became detrimental.

2.10 What are the Non-Farming Community’s Perceptions of Conservation and the Conservation Agencies?

Five individuals from the non-farming community were interviewed to canvass their opinions and perceptions of nature conservation and the agencies involved, of farming and other local activities, and of the local community and life in the locality more generally.

2.10.1 Non-Farming Attitudes Towards English Nature

When the non-farming residents (either local or ‘offcomedans’) were questioned about English Nature, its aims and activities, not a great deal was known. This again reflects the relatively low profile of English Nature in the dales communities, and in contrast to the National Park Authority. But also this is not so surprising given that English Nature deals specifically with farming and land-owning interests and not the community at large. In consequence no strong opinions were voiced. However feelings and opinions arising from second-hand knowledge about English Nature were somewhat ambivalent.

There was some concern expressed about the future ramifications of conservation schemes generally, with the assertion - similar to that of farmers - that conservation manifests through farmers maintaining the land themselves. There was, therefore, from non-local residents an implicit querying of the appropriateness of conservation schemes, whether they were an unnecessary interference in other words. Deleterious effects were also noted. Whilst there was knowledge of the over-grazing problem and the need to prevent this, there was also concern that conservation scheme prescriptions could, in the longer term, make it difficult for farmers to make a living from the land. Such a situation would differ from the past when livings had been made, and exclusively, from farming for generations of families.

Conversely, from a short-term perspective and according to local residents, the attitudes of farmers to conservation schemes were, by and large, instrumental: "I mean, a plant’s a plant to them, whether it’s a very rare plant or whether it’s just a dog daisy, and, I mean, all they want is money in the bank" and that “most farmers - they’re conservationists when it comes to their
which were run on a one-man family basis. Doubts over relatively new methods prevailed. For example, sheephouses now existed on some farms permitting easier lambing:

"... sheep are supposed to be environmentally friendly now. But if people really realised how they were kept, some of them ... that they were lambed in big sheds and it wasn't just Mother Nature out behind a wall and lying amongst the buttercups, I think lamb would go out of favour. And a lot of it goes abroad now."

Diverging from the traditional custom of raising and selling store stock, the fattening of stock, as section 2.8.1 indicated, had increased, spurred on by market prices. Or as one farmer put it: "These chaps up here have seen that there's a pound or two in it, put buildings up, and they keep them, and they have the pound or two. They're taking them right through. Whether it's good or not, I don't know". The increased pace of change was reflected in changing marketing techniques, direct selling to the abattoir for example: "Some may go Sunday dinner time, they're killed first thing Monday morning - they can be in another country by Tuesday night. An' this is where farming's going". Continually emphasised was the fact that the store system was being diminished, more farmers were fattening, export trade was increasing and farmers were 'playing the market' whilst it was there.

However, according to many farmers, 'good marketing' - if that is to mean gaining good prices for stock - was only a relatively important attribute in the constitution of good farming. This does not indicate a low market orientation on the part of the dales farmers. Rather it indicates their relative powerlessness to influence the level of prices. Whilst farmers are reacting to market signals, they are still predominantly price-takers. In the first place, there are limited options regarding marketing choices; and secondly, in times of low stock prices farmers would encounter difficulties in retaining stock indefinitely on the farm (until prices improved) due to inter alia the costs of maintaining them. Thus 'good marketing' and, to a degree, making profit were considered to be controlled by factors beyond their influence. Nevertheless, it was clear that the pace of change was considered with a measure of ambivalence by some farmers. One older farmer opined:

"Farmings now is not relaxed enough. Things have gone too far. Farming's like a production line, more of a business; a case of getting stock more quickly onto the market".

And comparing the present with the past:

"Farmers are victims of their own success plus modern methods. Expectations are higher. Forty years ago we were satisfied with one lamb per ewe, now they expect one and a half lambs. Younger men are keen to make the last bob. The younger generation are keen to make money, make as much as they can, as quick as they can. The older generation was concerned more with agriculture, getting drainage right or putting up a good agricultural building. But things aren't standing still. The younger generation have families, and lads of farmers who want to carry on have got to be ahead of the job. And everybody's wanting to buy up land. Half the farms have gone in my time here."

The pressure to make money and, in consequence, intensify or alter farming methods, is encouraged by greater expectations (as the above quotation expresses) and the desire for a higher standard of living. Whereas once, as certain older farmers informed, farming was more concerned with survival, now farmers were more concerned with profit and disposable income. Farming, being a highly complex process, consumed an increasing array of inputs - machinery, fertilisers, herbicides, food supplements, medicines, vaccinations, dipping materials, etc., all at a cost. The complexity of farming also demanded the employment of the service industries: land agents, solicitors, auctioneers, veterinary surgeons, agricultural business advisors, bankers, etc. Simultaneously, personal living was more complex with the array of material and
of future incertitude over farm policies and support measures, the majority of farmers were confident about the future viability of farming. They considered themselves indispensable as producers of stock for lowland units, and also essential environmental managers of the National Park landscape.

2.9 What Constitutes Good Farming?

A check-list of possible criteria for defining good farming was presented to the interviewees, who were then asked to order them in terms of relative importance. Whilst many of the issues raised have been covered in earlier sections, several new perspectives were usefully identified.

2.9.1 Attributes of Good Farming

It was explained in section 2.3.1 that the majority of farmers considered ‘good husbandry’ as the most important attribute in the constitution of good farming. This largely pivoted on the care and well-being of stock and was equated with keeping the land in ‘good heart’ which involved putting back what had been taken out, maintaining a certain level of fertility and, thereby, producing a constant quantity and quality feed for stock (though the weather is an important determining factor in this process). Farmers also equated looking after the land as sound conservation and this was contrasted with ‘set-aside’ land which grew “rubbish” and looked utterly neglected. Further, the National Park landscape was a farmed one, and a cultural one, not simply a natural landscape. It was therefore necessary, most farmers felt, to take on board ‘good farming’ in order to maintain the character of the National Park landscape. But to do this, it was often stressed, a strong commitment to farming was needed, as well as economic stability. Indeed, in the study dales, farmers opinions concerning the most important attributes of good farming were in accord with previous studies carried out in the Pennine Dales and the Lake District.6

Being ‘progressive’ was viewed ambivalently and much depended on how this was interpreted. On the one hand, it was considered - correctly - that the biophysical environment placed great handicaps on change. On the other, it was felt that ‘new ideas’ were needed as stimuli to farming activities. From this point of view an agricultural college background could prove worthwhile though the majority felt the latter a peripheral attribute and considered agricultural qualifications as least as important in the constitution of good farming. One could farm well without them and many had done so. Having a farming background was thought to be far more important though there were a few farmers who disagreed with this. Where new techniques facilitated increased productivity (slurry use and taking two or three silage cts per season for instance) doubt was voiced. This was taking too much from the land: it did not constitute a respect for the land and was, therefore, bad husbandry.

2.9.2 The Pace of Change in Farming

Nevertheless, change had, and was, taking place. From some quarters, particularly the older generation (though not exclusively) who had the benefit of long experience and memory, the feeling was that the quickening and intensifying pace of agriculture in the dales was not a desirable trend. Stock numbers had increased and this placed great work pressures on farms

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However, there was some concern elicited over live exports and the welfare of stock once in the country of destination, particularly in regard to light-weight lambs and methods of slaughter in some other countries met with disapproval. Preference, therefore, was laid on the carcass trade in exports though farmers pointed out that once they had sold their stock, they had no influence on their movements after that; a fact often lost on the public and the media.

2.8.4 The Future Viability of Dales Farming

Perhaps more than at any time in the past, Dales farmers now face an uncertain future. Yet, as was demonstrated in section 2.7.2, their general attitude is one of acceptance; that uncertainty is endemic in farming life. Considering their own socio-economic survival and the importance of subsidies in this respect, statements such as "they can alter the rules with a toss of a coin" reflects their vulnerability to policy changes which has already been stressed. Conversely, when asked whether they seriously thought there was a viable future for hill farming, the overall response was in the affirmative.

This was explicated in terms of two criteria which were founded on the belief of their own indispensability. In the first place they saw hill farming as occupying a necessary role in overall sheep production, stressing the latter's integrated and interdependent character, with the hills representing a reservoir of breeding ewes and store lambs for lowland producers:

"... there's a need for stock for all over the country, the sheep industry all over this country is dependent on producing, bringing sheep out of these Pennines and higher up... and without these hills, they won't survive either".

The increase in the fattenling of both sheep and cattle has encouraged greater trade in commodities such as provender and straw, produced on lowland farms. Again interdependency was stressed. "What would the arable man do with all his straw? ... it's for the hill farmer. It's him what buys it all". These reasons, plus the growth in export trade, were proffered as justification for a sound economic future in hill farming though it was also pointed out that, given the trend towards bigger farms, more marginal producers would "tie their belt another notch" or else fall by the wayside. All farmers could state that there were fewer farms in the dales and that the thirst for buying land, growing bigger and increasing stock, was an on-going process. Aside of this, the increase in tourism was also mentioned as a means of diversifying the farm enterprise to gain income to supplement that from the farm.

The confidence in the future may have been influenced by the economic buoyancy experienced in the present. As one farmer put it when referring to the prices paid to dales farmers for horned tupps: "Farmers, especially in this dale, have never seen such big cheque books". And also: "There's money to be made in farming if you are in a big enough way and you're good at it".

In the second place, farmers stressed their indispensability in another way; that if the socio-economic survival of dales farmers was jeopardised the landscape would suffer also. "If you don't have a hill farmer making a living it's just going to go wild and it won't be the Dales anymore." Thus farmers indicated their role as environmental managers albeit manifested through the medium of 'normal' farm management (see section 2.3.1).

2.8.5 Summary

In spite of biophysical constraints, dales farm management has changed in a number of ways: in terms of increased yields from the land, increased fattenling of stock, improved buildings and marketing techniques, for example. Farmers explained that this has been in response to economic pressures, but also due to changing market trends also. Many farmers seemed keenly aware of changing market trends in the expanded EU and globally. In fact, irrespective
Sheds where cattle roam at will give rise to slurry production which is used again to fertilise the land particularly for silage production. Sheephouses facilitate some over-wintering, permit the fattening of stores and easier lambing, and generally reduce pressure on the land.

Since the introduction of the sheepmeat regime in 1980 farmers now carry more stock, but which cannot be carried over winter, hence the practice of away-wintering has become more prevalent. New methods of beef production have gained momentum, particularly bull beef. The fattening of stock has become more predominant largely facilitated by bought-in supplementary feeds. Thus farmers have been able to free themselves to some degree from their traditional dependence on the fortunes of lowland units in the selling of stores. This ability, however, varies within each dale. In the higher reaches this ability is more curtailed given greater altitude and more adverse conditions than at the bottom of the dale.

2.8.2 Changes in Marketing

Methods of marketing have changed to some extent with an increase in selling fatstock straight from the farm to the abattoir rather than through the auction mart. Business dealings with Beacon Electronic Auctions, an organisation with a nationwide network was prevalent, at least, in Ribblesdale, a system which has certain advantages financially. A farmer who sold all his stock by this method explained:

"... we've no costs, no travel ... you never go off you farm, you see ... If you don't want to take the price, you've no need to sell them, you see, they're still on the farm. You haven't to go riding to auction and bring them back. You can make a lot more money..."

Trading in this way, whilst it had obvious cost and time saving benefits, failed to present social interactive and integrative opportunities beyond the confines of the farm enterprise (see section 2.6.4). However, this new method of marketing suggests that interactional status systems and networks contextualised through the auction market systems are being, to some degree, eroded. In consequence a 'way of life' was disappearing because farmers could not survive without going with the market trends.

The opinion prevailed that with economic pressures, changing market trends and the increase in paperwork (see section 2.2.3), farming was turning inexorably into a business like any other:

"... they tend to work all the year producing lambs for the backend and if they produce a good lamb they get quite a good price at the market, and that was it. Whereas now a lot will depend on how they can do the figures for the stock trying to produce a good lamb... but he'll tend to have to pay more time to his paperwork... It's come to that now."

2.8.3 The Globalisation of Agriculture

Farmers were cognisant of the importance of the growing export trade with the expansion of the EU in reference to their own economic well-being and had some confidence that this would continue. A competitive edge emerged with the recognition of the need to "tap" new markets on the Continent. Conversely, the need for subsidies was still stressed insomuch that liberalisation of trade could mean cheaper production abroad, undercutting home producers. Yet at the same time there was pride in the high quality of British stock. "We've the best beef in the world. And it's the safest".?

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7 This interview, along with all the others, was carried out before the BSE scare of mid- to late-March 1996.
The representation of animal rights/welfare and BSE were common complaints. Media coverage was held to misinform and even increase the ignorance of the public further. "Everything's a veal calf to a town person", stated one farmer, "they just don't understand and there's never anybody there to put our viewpoint".

Farmers also felt some resentment that the media portrayal of isolated incidents was sufficient to denigrate the whole:

"It's the same if something cruel is done to livestock. If one person's cruel to livestock, we're all cruel... If somebody shoots somebody else in a town they don't blame everybody else, do they? Yer know, it happens... Ninety-five per cent are perfect, yer know, it's to your own advantage to look after yer stock, but they put it on like we're cruel uns, yer know. It doesn't happen like that."

Modern methods of farming, encouraged by the state and adopted in many cases for survival, were also mentioned as causes of conflict. Regarding slurry usage:

"That's all modern farming, well that all goes on the land and all these big dairy farms, they're a tremendous amount of it, and sometimes it gets in the water supply. There's all sorts of regulations they come up with now. But I don't think farmers do it deliberately. It's just the way it goes. So you're back into public image again. Them bloody farmers like, they're doing this, that and t'other".

2.7.4 Summary

The majority of farmers did not feel their views and opinions were adequately represented within the agricultural industry itself, the greater resources of other farming sectors creating an imbalance in power relations to the disadvantage of hill/upland farming interests. A loss in credibility (in the public view) of the major agricultural organisations has heightened this feeling of representational impotence. Farmers were particularly concerned about the future uncertainty of the livestock subsidy support system though accepted possible changes resignedly. Farmers also felt that the media distorted farming issues and was a significant determinant in the negative stereotyping of farmers generally.

2.8 How has Farming Changed and How Might it Change in the Future?

Farmers' approaches towards conservation have to be located in the context of the wide variety of past and future changes in the socio-economic and political contexts of farming, from the local to the global. The interviewees all alluded to the wider set of changes they faced, and we asked them questions to find out how nature conservation fitted into this climate of change.

2.8.1 Changes in the Dales Farming Community

Despite the limiting parameters of the biophysical environment, changes on dales farms have occurred over the years. Far fewer farms now specialise in milk production. Productivity improvements from hay and silage grass meadows have occurred through drainage and artificial fertiliser application, and the 'gripping' of moors. Old traditional buildings militate against the efficient handling of stock given inadequate size, design or location. Hence, modern cattle sheds have been erected near farm dwellings reducing time and work burdens.
inarticulate, and also politically apathetic: "I think it's more we go with the tide, whatever is going you go with it, but it could be the way we've been brought up".

Alternatively, representation at the local level was considered a matter of self responsibility. One farmer put this well when referring to the NFU:

"... they're alright in their own way, they represent somebody well at some time, but on the whole you're on your own to negotiate your own deal, because everybody's fragmented, everybody's an individual, everybody's in business for himself, one farm here, one farm there... It's up to yourself".

2.7.2 The Changing Fortunes of Agricultural Organisations

At the national level, historically, the relationships between agricultural interests and landowning interests and their respective government departments have been highly successful ones. Farming and landowning interests, in fact, succeeded remarkably in preserving their autonomy and power. Only latterly, during the 1980s, with the excesses of the CAP, the politicisation of environmental issues, etc. has this long established autonomy and power been challenged and eroded.

Farmers were aware of the loss of credibility and legitimization of their farming organisations:

"Ministry of Agriculture many many years ago was always a government heavyweight. Jim Prior, Peter Walker. They were big names in Government ... it was a good, high profile job then, important job, but now it isn't ... everything has turned onto this conservationism...".

With the empowerment of the environmental lobby and public concern over many issues related to agriculture, MAFF has abandoned its expansionist rationale and broadened its remit to include farm diversification and farm conservation schemes.

The greatest concern was the effect of these changing emphases on the system of support subsidies. Certainly a degree of doubt prevailed over their continuity despite their longevity. "They could be chucked out overnight the way they talk" stated one farmer. Whilst the merits of this system in terms of equity were elaborated upon (section 2.4.2), and their necessity in terms of preserving the hill farm structure emphasised constantly, future incertitude was a common theme. Whilst many farmers stated that the uncertain future of their farming disturbed them, uncertainty in farming - from weather to policies - was also an accepted agricultural fact of life and therefore regarded with some fatalism. "You live with it" was a common and simple response.

2.7.3 Media 'Misrepresentation'

Without much doubt farmers felt unhappy at the media representation of farmers and farming generally. What farmers perceived as biased reporting and media distortions, were felt to be enhancing the power of other interests groups within society; and at the same time misleading the public. Sensitivity to the diversity of the agricultural industry in the media was non-existent and possibly not understood or realised. In consequence there surfaced a stereotypical imagery of the farming role which failed hopelessly, it was felt, to reflect the complexities, problems, and struggles, of making a living through farming. In this sense too, there was no effective 'farming voice', no organisation or individual who could or would correct the imbalance caused by 'misrepresentation'. Reflecting their generally weak positions politically, farmers felt there was little they could do to ameliorate this situation.
... and everything used to have to be right and I wouldn't go if I couldn't win. I've enough rosettes upstairs to cover a wall". A farmer's reputation in this sense is known far beyond the confines of his own dale, materialising and being maintained through social networks at auction markets, agricultural shows and the activities of breeding societies. These, however, are essentially farming networks, closed and fairly obscure to the non-farming public, thus fortifying further feelings and experiences of detachment and difference from mainstream society.

These far-flung geographical networks of social interaction were not exclusively confined to the male members of farm families. A farmer's wife indicated her own network covering areas such as Gargrave, Gisburn, Skipton, West Marton, Hawes, Bentham, and into Lancashire, remarking also: "it's all a community and everybody knows everybody else... I know people can't understand what a wide range of people you know when you're in the farming community, but you do."

2.6.5 Summary

Farmers tend to perceive themselves collectively as a misunderstood and maligned minority. The public, many farmers believed, had a negative stereotypical image of the 'farmer' which failed to incorporate the realities and heterogeneity of the farming industry, but particularly hill farming in a National Park. They also feel unable to rectify this, a powerlessness reflected in other dimensions such as state/EU policies.

Conversely, farmers realise their own sense of difference vis-à-vis 'society', implicitly at least. Given socio-economic restructuring in rural locales, they have become more marginalised. Yet farmers' own social networks are relatively stable and strong given their strong closure to the non-farming population. The latter in itself fortifies their sense of difference.

2.7 Do Farmers Feel Their Views are Represented?

Given that perceptions are frequently related to how well one's views are publicly represented, it was important to find out the farmers' opinions of national agricultural organisations and the media.

2.7.1 The Diversity of the Agricultural Industry and Representation

Often not acknowledged or overlooked is the wide diversity in the agricultural industry itself, involving a wide range of life-styles, work orientations and material standards. The role of the 'farmer' can cover a 'dog and stick' farmer eking out a precarious subsistence from a hill farm with a heavy dependence on state subsidies to the agribusinessman of the south eastern corn areas managing his farm from behind a desk.

Farmers were fully aware of this diversity. It was felt by the majority that inequalities of wealth, consumption, etc. were also reflected politically. Possessing the necessary resources, having much more time, a great deal more money, and possibly better educated, larger farmers in other agricultural sectors had, therefore, a greater voice in the organisation that is supposed to represent all farmers' interests - the National Farmers' Union. Statements such as: "Corn barons, they've all the say" and: "... there's too much (power) on the arable side. They're running it" were common.

In contrast, hill men were counted as: "... too busy making their own livings", as being only a minority in the agricultural industry as a whole, as not being committee men by nature,
it was often remarked by non-farming residents that the farming community was a world apart, as one put it:

"The farming community’s separate. They’ve been here a long time, farmers and that, and there’s an awful lot of history. The length of time they’ve farmed the area, they know the area, they know what they’re talking about. They know the land".

Farmers inability to affect the course of events vis-à-vis state and EU policies, plus a dependence on the latter economically, bolsters a sense of collective identity. The growth of national agencies of influence and control such as the National Park, English Nature, the National Trust, etc. can bolster further a sense of locality with feelings and experiences of imposition and “interference”. Being at the receiving end of a good deal of public criticism also reinforces a sense of being a beleaguered minority, apart from the mainstream of society. However, in the local communities themselves other forms of change have served to exacerbate the social marginalisation of farmers.

2.6.3 Social Marginalisation in the Community

Over the years the extent of informal interaction amongst farmers has decreased. At peak times in the farming calendar labour intensive mutual aid was prevalent: as with communal sheep dippings and clippings, hay-timing and shepherds ‘meets’, all of which afforded opportunities of social interaction. Mechanisation and the growth of contract work had superseded these practices and along with the numerical decline in the farming population, farmers have withdrawn further into the confines of their work situations.

Added to this, (as with other members of the indigenous population) farmers have become more socially distanced with the social restructuring of rural locales and the influx of a newcomer population. Whilst Ribblesdale still maintained the ambience of a working community; and Chapel-le-dale exhibited a fairly coherent local social interaction network (though pub activities - domino drives, etc.), expressions of the ‘loss of community’ were still voiced, particularly from older farmers. As one recalled about his village:

"Once on a day you could go round this village and walk into anybody’s house. Now you just don’t get to know people. There’s people who’ve lived in this village three or four years. If I’ve seen them to speak to once you do well.”

2.6.4 Extended Networks of Farm Families

But it would be erroneous to suggest that farmers and their families have limited social networks, or that where these exist they are highly localised in character, as within one dale. Many farmers use the auction markets for the selling, in the main, of store livestock. This presents an arena for informal interaction between farmers from different areas. Indeed, for many farmers in the study areas this was the main means of gaining information, opinions and ‘news’ about conservation schemes and other matters.

Additionally, the auction market provides the opportunity to exhibit well-bred, well-groomed stock contributing to the status enhancing and competitive aspects of farming. It is worth noting that farmers tend to espouse what may be termed a reputational and interactional status system (i.e. where esteem is awarded on the basis of personal qualities and skills) meaningful only within a specific localised milieu. The strength of farmers’ reputational system is evidenced in farm-houses some of which display the accoutrements of success: trophies, rosettes, photographs of prize-winning rams, bulls and other stock. "I go judging Swaledale sheep all over, Yorkshire Show, Royal Show, and we breed rams at all sorts of stupid money
effects both aesthetically and ecologically of modern farming practices, all conspired to erode the idyllically imbued public image of farming.

With a host of new criticisms, exacerbated by the media, farmers feel they have become a much maligned minority group, but the same ignorance and dearth of understanding about the realities and complexities of farming still stubbornly prevailed:

“They think farmers are multi-millionaires, they ride around in Volvos and they get huge cheques from the Ministry for subsidies for doing nothing. I think that about sums it up of what Joe Public think farmers do. Reality is a little different”.

Particularly the economic realities of hill farming, and in a National Park with its visitors pressures, were felt by farmers to be misunderstood. Contributing to farmers’ feelings of alienation from public opinion, their relationship with MAFF has undergone change. Farmers feel maligned, misunderstood and censured for many of the issues now confronting their industry. Furthermore, their self-identity as producers of food for the benefit of society has come under a degree of strain. Now “Production is a dirty word” remarked one farmer. According to another: “Food was becoming secondary”.

2.6.2 Powerlessness and Sense of Difference

In the everyday activities of their work situations, compared to other occupations, farmers do enjoy a high degree of independence and autonomy. Independence as a value can be strengthened by social detachment. Long work hours often in complete isolation, the lack of divorce between work and personal life (compared with most other occupations) and generally restricted social contacts can all contribute to the maintenance of their value system. However, it would be erroneous to over-emphasis the independence and autonomy enjoyed in the work situation since there exists a heavy reliance on state and EU support. This means farmers are very vulnerable, and lack resistance to altering farm policies. “In a way we are farming the way the government wants us to farm” stated one farmer.

The market situations of hill farmers and, to an extent, upland farmers are also vulnerable as well as inflexible. With few production options they are dependent on decisions made on lowland farm units. Precariousness and contingency lead to an awareness of their powerlessness to alter events or directions. One farmer made this clear when referring to HLCA changes:

“... when they were going to cut these subsidy rates on livestock ... they’ll brainwash you first. You’ll notice they’ll say six months before there will possibly be cuts, and then they’ll say it again and then it comes, well we were expecting that, so you don’t bother”.

Nor can the farmer influence his life chances or economic well-being by turning to another occupation so readily. In the first place there is generally a lack of educational and agricultural qualifications in the farming community. Secondly, they possess little alternative work experience which could facilitate a change of occupation. Indeed, a move out of farming, thereby resisting dependence on the state, would usually entail downwards social mobility.

Additionally, the majority of farmers have long established farm family backgrounds. This applies to the wives of farmers also. The longevity of farming backgrounds can act as a stabilising factor perpetuating the existing social and economic strata of the farming community. A further stabilising factor can be recognised in the very early internalisation of the farming role and its maintenance by the lack of division between work and domestic/personal life. One consequence of this is the feeling of a sense of difference. Indeed,
itself out, ground dried up, and heather shot up all over. That's capital - it took ten years, now it's a beautiful area. But it had nothing on it for ten years”.

2.5.4 Summary

Local knowledge arises from the longevity of experience and intimacy with an area: it is expert knowledge ‘on the ground’. However, a number of farmers did not feel that their knowledge was being taken fully into account in the pursuit of conservation aims. In fact, most farmers could point to instances where conservation practices had ‘failed’ and employing their local knowledge could, rightly or wrongly, state why. The Dales Advisory Group is a significant move in the recognition of local knowledge, involving farmer ‘representatives’ from certain dales. However, farmers are not exclusively the possessors of local knowledge. Older members of local communities, with long experience in land management, are further sources.

2.6 How Do Farmers Perceive Their Social Role?

Given the distinctiveness of farming, it is important to place the specific opinions of farmers in relation to conservation schemes, agencies and policies in the context of their perceived position in society. Through general discussions, the interviewees indicated their own social identity, including their perceptions of others, and how they think others perceive them.

2.6.1 A Misunderstood and Alienated Minority

Whilst aesthetically pleasing to many of the public, the terrain and climate of the Yorkshire Dales National Park enforces difficulties, myriad problems, and hard physical work for farmers. But the latter fact, according to many farmers interviewed, seemed to be lost on the public, or as one farmer put it: “they think farmers are living the life of Reilly in this National Park, but it's not true”. Constantly the farmers reiterated that the public at large were ignorant of the realities of farming. To some extent this is explicable simply in terms of the geographical divorce between urban dwellers and farmers. Nevertheless, even rural “offcomedens” closer to the farming community often failed to understand. “They come and they don't like change. They want to come and they want to be in their little cocoon and that's it”.

Possibly with stereotypical expectations of country living, nor did newcomers necessarily appreciate the fact that the countryside is a working environment:

“But they tend to look on the farmer - well, they don’t like the sounds and smells of farming life; and some have dogs and yet if there’s a fight - well, we don't have our dogs on a lead because they’re working dogs ... And yet they tend to look down on us as being irresponsible. They’re not village people. They’re not country people at all. Their idea about living in the country is about having a nice big house, views over green fields. They tend to forget that there are farmers who have to keep those fields, make a living from them”.

This alleged lack of understanding is reflected at a more general level. Until the last decade farming enjoyed a positive public image, being portrayed as the ‘backbone of Britain’. With spectacular increases in yields and expansion of self-sufficiency in temperate foods, the agricultural industry was projected as a post-war ‘success’ story. It is only within the last decade that agriculture came under severe attack from myriad sources. Inter alia issues such as economically and socially unacceptable food surpluses, animal welfare concern and the adverse
doubt expressed when farmers were confronted with the question of whether English Nature understood hill farming, the complexities of its daily management, the uncertainties involved and the need for flexibility. In the majority of cases the response was in the negative. Most farmers took the view that English Nature knew little, or not nearly enough, about hill farming. However, given the monopolisation and esoteric nature of hill farming knowledge generally, the same criticism could be aimed at any organisation or individual beyond the confines of the hill farming community. Indeed, farmers also included MAFF in this, though to a lesser extent.

Comments aimed at English Nature such as: "'Expert' knowledge of growing someat in a greenhouse" and "when somebody says they're an 'expert' you have to stand back a bit" and "they just do it from a general thing" suggest also that farmers are sceptical of the knowledge English Nature incorporate into their agreements. The scepticism farmers felt towards the expertise of English Nature was concretised by known examples of 'failure' to achieve conservation objectives. Interference with natural processes did not always work:

"Many a time they make a mess of what they do. This is what everybody tells us anyway. Some schemes will work. Others no. If you just take a natural stocking of the land as it always has been and always will be ... if they start, or anybody starts messing about, turning things round, they will do away with the flowers and everything else there is."

"I don’t think they understand botany, as much as anything. You would think it would twig with them that if something’s growing there, it wants leaving as it is, rather than altering it”.

In some cases the knowledge of English Nature had been confronted. Regarding a wetland and discord over the blocking of a drain one farmer related:

"I said oh no, if you block main drain up, that’s no good to me at all, it’s just going to ruin everything and also you will create a lake ... They didn’t want a lake, they just wanted it to be soft. Well they wouldn’t accept this idea. Well, I knew there would be a lake, because before I drained it there was a lake. And they brought some people in ... spent 2 or 3 days sizing all this area up and they was going to get back to me, but they never did because it was as I said ... It was plain to see what was going to happen, but they wouldn’t listen. But with me owning and controlling land, they couldn’t do anything about it ... But if I hadn’t had proper control over that drainage system they would have stuffed it up on me. And there’s an example of them not taking any notice of anybody local”.

2.5.3 Other Sources of Local Knowledge

The points made above are not meant to suggest that local knowledge is a form of 'absolute knowledge' i.e. that farmers are always right in their judgements and opinions. Indeed, the very nature of local knowledge is its complexity and variability. What works on one piece of moor will fail on another; and information gained from elderly non-farming locals (though with long experience of land management) provided examples of farmers using blanket prescriptions themselves. In regard to heather moorland management it was related:

"In my young days, when I were a kid, it got over-grazed and over-stocked - in the war years and that - until you couldn’t get a piece of heather to put in your hat. And anyway, for the shoot, and what have you, we fenced it off. And it grew grass - light grass - that high, it was like walking on a feather bed. And all the farmers said 'Oh, you'll have to put sheep on it ... grass'll smother it'. But it's a complete fallacy! After about ten years the grass grew
2.4.5 Summary

Farmers like flexibility in schemes because of their need to juggle with the many uncertain factors in everyday and longer-term decision-making. This translates into a preference for shorter-term schemes, or ones which can be re-assessed and re-negotiated. In addition, flexibility in the precise implementation of schemes on a particular farm is preferred so that special circumstances of each can be taken into account. This desired flexibility creates some ambivalence, however, because of the difficulty of assessing the equity associated with farm-specific arrangements (compare, for example, the subsidy system where everyone knows how other farmers will fare). This factor is of some importance, given the secretive aspects of farming culture, and the suspicion which can breed if some farmers are seen to be benefiting disproportionately to their status within the community as a good farmer (just because they inherited land containing SSSIs, for example).

2.5 What Can Farmers Contribute to Conservation?

Questions were posed aimed at identifying the different sorts of knowledge and understanding of the land ecology held by farmers and English Nature. In addition, we explored how farmers’ own local knowledge is taken into account during decision-making for nature conservation.

2.5.1 Local Knowledge and Experience

In managing their enterprises and having to deal with the uncertainties inherent in farming on a daily basis, farmers employ a stock of knowledge which is based on their own experiences, as well as knowledge which has been handed down from father to son over the generations. Local knowledge and intuitive abilities are, or can be, established early in life through the early internalisation of the farming role. As essentially local knowledge, it’s character is in-depth and intimate. Farmers, by and large, farm in the same dale all their lives. Hence this geographical immobility enhances and refines such knowledge. Yet it is also dynamic in character, interacting, adapting, and changing when confronted with new situations and problems as the years pass by. Some farmers will inform that they are always learning and adding to their stock of knowledge about their own farms and their locality.

Farmers make decisions on a daily basis, founded on their stock of local knowledge yet it is a decision-making process which, of necessity, must be highly flexible and informal. In other words, an exogenous set of rules, prescriptions or standardised principles cannot be imposed with entire success.

Some emphasis has been placed on the heterogeneity of dales farms, with each farm unit possessing its own peculiarities and variations. Considering this, each farmer possesses his own individualised stock of local knowledge relating to his own enterprise, his stock and land. A farmer will know the varying conditions at any one time; for example, just where the snow will lie in a certain gully when the winds are in a particular direction. He understands intimately the behaviour and habits of sheep. Experientially he knows the right moment to start mowing his hay. This form of knowledge is expert in its own right.

2.5.2 Local ‘Expert’ Knowledge and Conservation Schemes

In section 2.1.2 it was pointed out that interpersonal relations with English Nature officers were regarded by farmers on the whole as good; that in some respects there existed a compatibility between farmers’ interests and those of English Nature. Nevertheless, there was
there were farmers who preferred an acreage rather than headage form of support measure. But given the differences between farms, even within one dale, the problem would remain that some would benefit more than others.

2.4.3 Uncertainty and Time Scales

Despite the desire for a shorter duration of schemes, paradoxically the time scales of farmers’ thinking tend to be long. In family farming intergenerational continuity and economic security can be an important value and goal. Whole farm schemes with agreement durations of - say - ten years tend to be viewed circumspectly. On the one hand, there exists a guaranteed income for that period though a future dependency on an exogenous organisation may have been created. On the other, there can be worries over the adverse effects on the productivity of the land, though this will depend on the level of intensity of the farming at the onset of the scheme. If a scheme was terminated a farmer could be in the unenviable position of having to raise productivity levels again (which could involve some time given processes are slow in agriculture) and would entail costs. Exacerbating this dilemma is the lack of credence given to the continuity of schemes and a lack of trust in governments who are perceived as changing tack overnight.

Even for farmers who have taken conservation seriously on board the same concern prevailed. If a scheme was abolished the economic facts of farming would dictate a return to more intensive farming. However, the feeling overall was that farmers were not burning their bridges. In other words, they were maintaining stock numbers and were ready to switch back into ‘normal’ farming if this was necessary. Farmers thus resist, to some effect, the influence and dictates of organisations in order to protect, as best they can, the continuity of the long term interests of their families in farming.

2.4.4 Tailoring Schemes

To the cursory view dales farms and their management seem homogeneous. This is far from the reality. Indeed, there exists a wide degree of difference. Farmers stress that all farms are different and there are many factors which contribute to this diversity. But a very broad distinction can be made between the upper reaches of a dale where farming is dictated, to some extent, by biophysical constraints; whereas down dale there is more leverage for intensification and relatively more options available. Hence, it is worthwhile emphasising the heterogeneity of farm units even within a single dale, each with their peculiar advantages and disadvantages consequently demanding differing management systems. As one farmer put it when considering the application of standardised management agreements aimed at conservation:

“Every farm’s different. You can’t really say whether it’s [schemes] good or bad. One farm might just suit it and, for another, it could be no good whatsoever ... if the landlord would only take less rent for to farm with less stock on it - alright, but he won’t, will he?”

Compounding the heterogeneous nature of dales farms are the goals, values and characteristics of farmers themselves. Another farmer was to comment:

“I would say mixed bunch right through ... When I look round farmers, I know some a bit older than me, you’ll have some working their head off and getting bigger, and some stood still, and some that doesn’t want to know it, just laid back and let it go. Think it’s the attitude to life really, in’t it?”
Two dimensions of this were apparent. In the first place there is a high degree of uncertainty in farming activities (weather is an obvious example). Therefore, because of the natural environment and its uncertainties, there is a resistance to the imposition of rigid decision-making structures. The need for flexibility is inherent in the work situations of farmers. The future uncertainty of farming (which was a relatively strong dislike) and particularly in the present climate of change, was held, nevertheless, as an agricultural fact of life. Secondly, there is a need to realise the inter-related nature of farming. This is essentially the case with the sheep rearing sector; a change in one area can cause deleterious repercussions in another. In the event of the latter, farmers need a fairly liberal rein to manoeuvre and to judge what is the best course of action. Schemes would need to incorporate this if they are to increase their attractiveness to farmers.

Farmers criticised the lack of flexibility associated with ESA type farming in the Pennine dales given its prescription of the hay-cutting dates. This did not amount to traditional farming. Indeed, if flower rich hay meadows still existed then this was held by many farmers to be due to the weather-determined variability of mowing times in the past. In other words, standardised rules did not incorporate the flexibility realised through long practice and experience.

2.4.2 The Equity Problem

One area of concern with farmers was a lack of equity in English Nature agreements, as they regarded it, with substantial amounts of money being paid to a few farmers, but not those who were not necessarily deemed the ‘best’ farmers. This was because the opportunity of benefiting financially from English Nature schemes lay solely with the fortuity of having an SSSI designation on the land. As one farmer put it: “They’re just making too much difference between one farmer and another as way things are”.

To some degree this inequity was not apparent with more blanket designations such as the ESAs (though boundary problems still exist), nor with whole farm schemes, such as the Farm Conservation Scheme, which evaluate the whole of the farmland on the basis of what is worth conserving (walls, traditional buildings and structures such as sheep pens as well as conservation of habitats).

A further dimension introduces a selectivity effect (aside of designation) in that individuals farming on more traditional lines tend to be located in the higher reaches of the dales where more harsh environmental conditions prevail (see section 2.3.5.2). Farmers recognised this determining factor but were also keen to point to attitudinal factors also. Successive governments, up until the 1980s, have encouraged increased production and the modernisation of farms and, being exposed to this ethos many farmers believed this was their role. Those that heeded to the requirements of ‘the nation’ now feel excluded from the conservation largesse simply because there is little to conserve on their farmland. Non-agreement farmers, those with no SSSIs designated on their land, felt some resentment and cynicism: “The officer will come round only if they’re interested in a certain piece of land. If you haven’t anything to offer them I don’t think they care two hoots about you”.

It was also conjectured that the monies saved from reduction of livestock subsidies was being diverted into environmental schemes, adding salt to the wound so to speak. Some expressed the opinion that all farmers in the National Park, or even the Less Favoured Areas, should have the option of entering an environmental scheme.

Whilst farmers felt a degree of ambivalence over the livestock subsidy system, some tended to regard this as more equitable given that all farmers are treated alike. Whilst it was recognised that larger outfits, carrying large numbers of stock, reaped the major benefit, it was pointed out that there was a degree of certainty in this arrangement in that everyone knew to what they and others were entitled. Everyone knew what the stocking limits were for subsidy. Alternatively,
In spite of conservation schemes, there was the assumption that farming would continue to develop because farming for conservation aims was not an attractive option for some. What began to emerge was a checkered future scenario which was based, to some extent, on the aims, aspirations, values, attitudes, personalities and socio-economic circumstances of farmers. "In an area like this there's always somebody that's go-ahead, get ahead, there's some as are following up behind, there's some that's stood stationary and there's always some that's going backwards."

2.3.8 Summary

Farmers conflated conservation with good husbandry and considered the National Park landscape to be the creation of the 'normal' farming activities of generations of farm families. Thus they could argue that future conservation was 'safe' in their hands. They also perceived an aesthetically pleasing landscape as one of order (as with a well maintained walling system) and fertility; and considered areas left to 'grow wild' as reprehensible. At this point they diverged with English Nature in that the latter sometimes require farmers to leave areas of land completely unmanaged. Whilst English Nature pursue a more ecological definition of conservation, many farmers emphasised the importance of conserving the present farming community and its distinctive way of life. Farmers tended not to distinguish between their own practices and the processes which contribute to producing the current ecological landscape.

Whilst farmers were aware of the public benefits of a well maintained landscape, they did question the conserving (and costs of conserving) of certain habitats beyond public purview. In addition, they felt that the public knew very little about the natural environment, arriving at the conclusion that conservation in this sense benefited specialist interests.

Given changing directions in farm policies over the years, a number of farmers considered conservation schemes to be an ephemeral 'fashion', one associated with the general 'greening' of many issues. However, farmers were also fully cognisant of their dependency on state and EU support and possible changes to the present system. They, therefore, felt that agri-conservation schemes, as a new means of support, may be difficult to resist.

Opinions on conservation schemes as an integral part of farm management were mixed. Whole farm schemes were thought to be suitable for particular farms (upland, less intensive ones for example) and farmers (those willing to 'wind down' for example); whereas the 'progressives' and the 'autonomists' would not entertain schemes due to the limitations on farm management practices, income and independence. However, some farmers were of the opinion that conservation schemes would encourage a more calculative approach, becoming part of a 'package' of various monies on offer from different organisations.

2.4 What Makes a Good Scheme?

The interviewees were asked about what in their view constituted a good support scheme for conservation purposes. The specific criteria they identified emerged from a comparison between different schemes (production and conservation oriented) and implementing agencies.

2.4.1 The Need for Flexibility

Flexibility in schemes, particularly in regard to duration, was a fairly important issue for farmers. There was a preference for short length schemes which, at their expiry would offer the option of continuing or terminating entirely.
going to give up with that job. Because these schemes, however good they are, they'll never pay”.

The latter point expresses well the fact that certain farmers will never be attracted into conservation schemes, given that they have pursued a fairly intensive high input/high output farming regime, who are likely to be highly capitalised, possibly (though not necessarily) burdened with a degree of indebtedness and paying high rents if they are tenants. Such farmers are likely to be located at the bottom of dales where the land is of better quality. Joining a conservation scheme would be out of the question because the change would involve a major disruption to the farming system and the loss of income (from production loss) would not be compensated by the conservation payments. Additionally, these units tend to be smaller than those higher in the dales and, therefore, where payments are based on hectarage, the payments received would be much less.

2.3.6 Conservation Schemes and the Erosion of Autonomy

There are those farmers who are unhappy with conservation schemes because they feel it amounts to a neglect of farming; that it is ‘back-peddling’. “They’re only paying them to do half the job” stated one. Added to this, scheme participation would, it is felt, involve an erosion of their autonomy and independence in the work situation: it would entail a frustration of farming skills, of judgement based on long experience and force a brake on progress. Many farmers are owner-occupiers and, therefore being told how to farm their own land goes against the grain. “Why farm if you can’t do how you want to farm? You’re going back to how you were in Russia, being told what to do”. For many of our respondents, it amounts to just another layer of controls, adding to those imposed by MAFF, the National Park and other exogenous organisations ‘interfering’ with farming. The high value placed on ‘being your own boss’ was recognised even by non-farming residents. As one remarked about farmers: “... it comes a bit hard to be told by people, you know, how they should do this and that”.

2.3.7 Tradition of Change and Conservation Schemes

Farmers on the whole felt uneasy with the idea of standing still. And this is another area where they tended to conflict with conservation interests in the sense that the latter tend to stress limits and stability rather than continuous development. Farmers agreed that agriculture was, historically, a progressive process: they had experienced this for themselves and, for the older generation, this had been profound. Whilst realising that successive governments had facilitated and encouraged the direction of change, they believed, nonetheless, that agriculture would have progressed irrespectively. This, at times, seemed like another agricultural fact of life to farmers.

From this perspective, conservation schemes such as those operating in the ESAs, were deemed to be interfering with this process. Conservation was seen to be restricting the ability of farmers to be responsive to new agricultural incentives if they chose to do so. It restrained individual initiative, motivation and innovative ability in the interests of “flower power” (farmers’ reference to Swaledale ESA). As one farmer expressed it: “...it would progress instead of flinging money at them (farmers) and saying ‘we’d like these little pictures - it looks nice - so please keep it like that’. Oh, I don’t agree with that”.

Nor did it amount to good farming. Here the hay-cutting dates came to fore, as often they did. There was the assertion that: “You’re only making second class hay or whatever-silo; you’re only making a second class feed for them”, referring to the stock. The fact that ESA monies could be used to make up the shortfall if quantity was impaired or to purchase better quality hay, did not appease. A farmer should try to produce to the best of his ability.
2.3.5 The Future of Conservation Schemes: Farmers’ Opinions

2.3.5.1 Conservation Schemes as an Integral Part of Farm Management

On the question of whether conservation schemes should become an integral part of farm management, farmers were less confident and more uncertain. Farmers entertaining the possibility of entering the Farm Conservation Scheme were calculating possible advantages and disadvantages largely in economic terms. Some discontent surfaced over the ceiling on payments particularly when walling requirements (and costs of this) were taken into the account. Some were not altogether clear how the scheme would affect them. Others were satisfied that the scheme would not disrupt the usual routine of work and output. ESA type farming operating in other dales was understood in detail (apart from the contentious mowing dates) hence farmers overall could only offer general points and opinions some of which are set below.

2.3.5.2 Conservation Schemes and the Selectivity Effect

It was felt, by and large, that conservation schemes were appropriate for certain individuals. The diversity of farm management practices, of farmers’ attitudes and circumstances comes to the fore. One farmer put this well: “A lot of people that will be in will be on wild farms, or somebody that’s wanting to cut down anyway, and if they think they can farm a bit easier, some of them might just take it.” This might include, for example, farmers nearing retirement and with no-one to take over the farm and those farmers in the higher reaches of the dales managing their land less intensively. The latter, in fact, would be unlikely to have to alter their management, or very little, to meet the requirements of the scheme. As one farmer commented: “if you’ve got a big farm with a lot of poor old land, yes, you’ll have a bonanza”.

2.3.5.3 Conservation Schemes and Instrumentality

Most farmers agreed scheme participation would be due to financial ‘carrots’. Hence the levels at which payments were pitched were important for the success of scheme participation. For example, the Moorland Scheme, operated by MAFF was considered a failure because the payment for taking ewes off the moors was less than the sheep premium paid on each ewe. Such a scheme offered no incentive whatsoever.

A further dimension of this approach involved the attitudes of younger farmers, ones perhaps who had not been subjected to the expansionist ethos of earlier farm policies. It was suggested that younger men may take the ‘package’ approach, calculating their economic well-being on the basis of intermixing various schemes, subsidies and market opportunities. Or as one younger man stated succinctly: “an’ between ’em we’ll make a living”. This could reduce the risk of becoming dependent on one particular scheme and organisation as well as maintaining a degree of flexibility. This approach, however, would demand much more attention to the calculation of the finances involved. In fact conservation schemes, in themselves, were considered to be one casual factor in the transition of farmers into businessmen.

2.3.5.4 Conservation Schemes and the ‘Progressives’

Conversely, it was conjectured that the younger generation, taking over farms, being “keen and wanting to go” would not find conservation schemes attractive. An older farmer was of the opinion:

“You won’t get you go-ahead younger fellas into these whole farm schemes. They’ve all put the big silos up and they have to be filled. You have to put the til on the land and do two cuts a year to fill these silos to keep all this stuff... anybody that’s go-ahead and young, family coming on, isn’t going to go into these schemes... People have put buildings up special for this bull beef job. They’ve put silos up, big silos, and they have to cut twice... They aren’t
directions, policies can be difficult to resist irrespective of whether they are considered to be “fashions” or otherwise. Farmers were cognisant of this fact and accepted it with a degree of resignation:

“Yes, conservation now, what it will be next, I don’t know ... It’s like the general public, you know, it’s all green at the moment, green friendly, and that will change with something else in a bit. If you look back it’s been one thing after another. I suppose it’s summat ... we’re brought up, we accept it.”

2.3.4 Conservation... But for whom?

Farmers were keen to emphasise the benefits of a well-maintained walling system which was highly visible, and could be appreciated by all, including visitors. Similarly they realised the importance aesthetically of topographical features such as the limestone pavements which were dramatically visible. However, there was a querying of the benefits from conserving wild flowers and vegetation particularly on areas beyond public purview - inaccessible areas and ones not on a public right of way. Without any prompting many farmers queried the logic of spending public money on the conservation of areas very few would ever see and appreciate.

It was realised that access could pose its own problems, that vulnerable sites would be destroyed either by feet or by theft. Very few farmers had a longer term vision in that conservation sites were for ‘future generations’. Of course farmers had a vested interest in the limitation of public access. It was suggested that, with a change of government and the knowledge that large quantities of money were being spent on conservation the public, becoming aware of this, would demand wider access to the countryside:

“Whose going to see all these flowers, I’ve asked that myself many times but you don’t get an answer out of them (English Nature). I’ve asked them, but you don’t get an answer out of them, not a straight one. And I think eventually somebody is going to turn round and say that all this public money has gone into these schemes, the public have a right to see these plants that have been preserved ... with a different climate in politics, different governments come along and suddenly say that we’ve put all this money into these schemes. They are well aware of what’s in these schemes because accountants and income tax people have all been told to watch out for all this money spilling about in farmers’ accounts ...”

In the present the only people they could consider benefiting from conservation schemes, aside of farmers financially, were ‘scientists’: “I don’t know what their idea is really (English Nature), because Joe Public couldn’t care less, the majority of them. I think it’s for a few of the specialists.”

As this last quotation indicates, farmers believed the public were ignorant of designations such as the SSSIs. English Nature kept a “low profile”: they did not advertise their presence, nor their aims. More generally the public had little understanding of the countryside in its natural forms. “Honestly, a lot of the general public who come to look at these areas, they don’t know a celandine from a buttercup”. The majority came to the dales for the challenge of the Three Peaks walk, others never emerged from their cars. So the question stubbornly remained - who are they conserving for? Farmers implicitly questioned whether their farming practices should be changed because of scientific definition of nature conservation which had little connection to the public.
in their environment. The requirement of English Nature to fence land off and leave it to grow wild met with disapproval and incomprehension. Given that farmers tend to value an environment that looks tidy, orderly and well managed wild areas were considered a “mess”. In this sense conservation was sometimes seen to be taken too far. One farmer could speak for all when he commented: “You’ve got to do something with land or it will just go back to nowt”. When nature was left to it’s own devices nettles, thistles and “parasitic weeds” would, farmers felt, dominate. Apart from being aesthetically displeasing, wild areas were held to be symbolic of barrenness, of use to no-one.

Adopting a more subtle approach, certain farmers valued a varied landscape, one full of contrasts, and created by the different intensities of farming and which, at times, incorporated conserved areas:

“You get the fell ground, you get the pasture ground, you get the meadow ground, and then you get the meadow which is right down at the house which they can fertilise and slurry and put different things on. So you get a pattern, and that looks a lot better than putting all the slurry onto that hay meadow ... it keeps the landscape in harmony. It harmonises. You know, as you come down from 2000 feet, right the way down the area, you can see the changes. You can see the change in the autumn when it changes colour. Even the ground changes colour, not just the trees. The browns and the greens and the rusty colours, and then down to the green bottom in the valley land”.

Other more expressive and personal perceptions at times emerged which had no connection with farming practices. The limestones pavements were often mentioned. As well, appreciation was sometimes expressed in the peculiar ambience of a particular date:

“When I get up the hill here, just at Christmas time, when those hard frosts were on and the clear skies and I can enjoy those quarries across there. It’s a contrast and I can go up the field and look across. It will do me. Not obtrusive to me and it’s work for people. Then look the other way up towards Pen-y-ghent and there’s nothing in the way and money couldn’t buy it for me, but that doesn’t pay my gas man at the end of the year. But it never will, even with these schemes”. (non-agreement farmer).

2.3.3 Conservation as a ‘Fashion’

Taking conservation schemes as a whole the attitude of many farmers was that it might be a fashion, something that could be overturned quickly with new imperatives, problems and issues on the home front and even globally, as with a food shortage. Farmers were able to reflect on, and periodise the differing directions of government and EU policies:

“What I’ve found over the last 20 years or something, going back to when I were a lad, is the government seems to push you the way they want you. Going back 20 years it was all production, then we’re going to quota yer if you’ve too much stock, so we got used to quotas and then they shuv you another way, now we’re on these ESA things [referring to conservation policies generally], I keep thinking what will it be in another 3 or 4 years? It could be blow them we’ll do something else.”

Akin to other self-employed groups farmers adhere to a value system which emphasises independence, autonomy, self-help and ideas of just rewards accruing through one’s own labour with the natural environment. “Being your own boss”, for instance, was constantly picked out as being a strong attraction of farming as an occupation. The major contradiction, however, is that whilst farmers adhere to these unit ideas of individualism, their economic well-being is profoundly underpinned by a dependence on state and EU support. Despite changing
always fully justified. Hence, for these reasons farmers could be left to farm ‘normally’ without conservation schemes: the best policy was to allow farmers to continue as they had been:

“I always think that their idea of conservation is by altering, by changing farming practices. Rather than saying ‘What do you do now? Carry on doing it but don’t do anything different’, they say ‘Oh, you can’t do this anymore, and you haven’t to do that’ ... and then it quietly disappears because what they were trying to preserve has been taken over by other stuff ... they’re changing practice, they’re trying to preserve what’s already there by changing farming practices.”

Alternatively, there could be a congruence between English Nature’s requirements and farming interests. Whilst overstocking was admitted to be a problem in the dales, though not uniformly, destocking the fells allowed them to “sweeten”, benefiting both sheep and vegetation.

2.3.2 Conservation and Farmers’ Perceptions of Landscape

By and large, the majority of farmers perceived their environments from a farming angle which had evaluative, comparative and even competitive components:

“A farmer will look at someone else’s farm and could tell whether it was well farmed or not. They wouldn’t look at the view and think ‘What a good view!’ they look and see whether it had been well farmed. Yes, they’ve a different way of looking at it. (Interviewer: What would they look for?) Tidiness, walls are up, general upkeep of the land. It would looked green”.

Also a contrast emerged between farmers’ perceptions and those of the public:

“If a piece of land’s conserved, it tends to get overgrown, it gets brown. I suppose people from off will tend to look at that and admire its tones, in autumn sort of thing. Or golden spring, or whatever. But a farmer will look at it and think - it’s overgrown”.

The mosaic of drystone walls, an integral feature of the cultural landscape, were seen as important from the perspective of stock management, shelter and shade for sheep, and keeping the countryside looking “tidy”. To most farmers “gappy” walls proved an eyesore. In fact what emerged was a consensual pride in having a well maintained walling system in each dale. Any farmer who had allowed his walls to fall into disrepair was considered reprehensible. Walling, of course, is considered ‘dead work’ in the farming account (i.e. having no direct economic return), hence has to come low on the list of priorities particularly given increased work pressures generally. Public money was therefore felt to be necessary to preserve this important feature of the dales landscape, to save a dying craft and to facilitate more work for local people, those “loose-ending”.

Trees and woodland were appreciated by farmers aesthetically though they did not figure largely in their attractive landscape scenario. Firstly, it was considered too wet and windy in the study dales for successful growth. Secondly, on tenanted land woodland is the responsibility of the landlord. And thirdly, tree-planting was considered to be the role and responsibility of the National Park Authority. Again where trees, woodland and forestry were mentioned this was couched mostly in terms of their functional ability as providing shelter for stock.

A conflict of interests emerged in the interviews in terms of nature conservation (rather than landscape conservation) and farmers’ perceptions of what they considered aesthetically pleasing
2.2.4 Summary

The majority of farmers did not identify with the official aims of the National Park and were critical of the Authority’s policies on planning and access. Interpersonal relations were regarded as lacking and, overall, the Authority was considered to have too much power. Related to farm management, many farmers had experienced disbenefits regarding the recreational activities of the public. However, a very small minority of farmers positively evaluated living and working in the National Park, perceiving their ownership of land from a ‘stewardship’ perspective. All farmers who had had contact with the Farm and Countryside Service of the Yorkshire Dales National Park looked upon it favourably.

There was some resentment and concern over the National Trust buying farm properties. On the one hand, there was a mistrust over the public ownership of land generally. On the other, it created unfair competition in the land market, disadvantaging potential young entrants into farming. Historically, farmers have identified most with the MAFF. Changes in farm policy directions during the 1980s have partially eroded this identification. Farmers now feel some confusion over their role as producers of food. Strengthening bureaucratic controls by MAFF, in addition to the increased burden of form-filling was felt by the majority of farmers to be detrimental to good husbandry.

2.3 How do Farmers Perceive Conservation?

Farmers’ opinions of English Nature and other conservation agencies have to be understood in the context of their own understandings of what conservation is, and should be, aiming to achieve. Farmers were asked about what they valued in their environment, about how they perceived the approach of the conservation agencies and about public perceptions of farmers and of the dales.

2.3.1 Conservation and Good Husbandry

Despite farmers’ benign attitudes towards English Nature a more complex and sometimes contradictory picture emerged when farmers began to consider their farming practices and conservation. In terms of attributes which constitute for them a ‘good’ farmer the majority prioritised ‘good husbandry’ and often linked this equally with ‘personal commitment’ to the work. Good husbandry was often equated with the conservation of the land. In fact many farmers did not divorce the two: there was no experiential split. The National Park existed because of farming; farmers had created that landscape over generations. In such a way they came to justify a case for ‘non-interference’ as these comments illustrate:

‘... it’s taken a long time to get that land into the condition it’s in now and now they come along and want to conserve it’.

‘... they’re trying to make them into park-keepers. I’m sure if they left us to it we could make a far better job and save the public a lot of money. You just leave it to farmers to get on with the farming. Farmers made this what it is, before the conservation people came along’.

Additionally it was argued, conservation of the land was in farmers’ best interests. Whilst economic pressures could push farmers in the direction of intensification—heavy application of artificial fertilisers and slurries use, particularly down dale on better land and smaller farm units, for example - in the long term this was considered deleterious for the land and future incomes. Looking after the land, keeping it in ‘good heart’, was first and foremost an agricultural fact of life. In the higher reaches of the dale, the ability and willingness of a farmer to finance improvements - when considering the financial returns from increased productivity - were not
One major criticism was the bureaucratisation of farming, the excessive amount of MAFF paperwork, which was increasing according to farmers. Paradoxically, whilst MAFF has pledged to lessen the burden, it has increased nonetheless: Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS), Cattle Identification Documents (CIDs), sheep movement books for example. Farmers became somewhat vehement on this issue, seemingly uncomprehending of the need for so much detail:

"I mean, when we set off with some sheep on this latest job, we had to put down the date we loaded them, time we loaded them, estimated time of journey, time of arrival, what they were that you were carrying, whether they were ewes, fat lambs or whatever. Blimey, it's just getting ridiculous".

In some cases the paperwork 'problem' was explained in terms of a lack of understanding of the realities of farming and, at times, implied a cultural divide:

"Well, they've got some of these chaps educated that's in these centrally-heated offices in London, they never get out onto a farm, they never get down to the grass roots and see work ... you know, they'd get a different complexion on the things if they saw how it worked on the ground. I mean, lambing time. A fella with 500 lambing ewes - he can't be sitting down half a day filling a damn form up - what's died, what's lambed, what's been wrong with this, and your medicine book to keep, what's he injected this for and what's he injected that for. It's impossible!"

MAFF mistakes regarding IACS forms, and time consuming processes needed to rectify them, had also created irritation and anger within the farming community. Whilst some elderly farmers admitted they could not cope without the aid of sons/wives/other (usually younger) farmers more accustomed to form-filling (possibly a new form of mutual aid), others were employing agents and professionals. And a number complained that paperwork competed with, and militated against, the responsibilities of farming, the concluding assertion being that stockmanship would eventually suffer:

"They're going to be half-breed accountants and what other half-breed they're going to have to be. I don't know. But they're not going to be stockmen, and this is where the Ministry is going wrong now. They'll find out, they're going to do away with the stockman, and they're going to find nothing but book and computer people trying to run British agriculture, and it will not work... Because paramount of everything is stockmanship".

Added to this MAFF was perceived as tightening controls and becoming more dictatorial. In general, it seemed that 'job satisfaction' was being eroded through the bureaucratisation of the farming role, a few informing us similarly to this comment: "... to be right honest, I'd be out if I hadn't a lad that was holding on, I'd be out". Yet historically MAFF was more trusted. One farmer recalled the installation of dipping system, in what seemed to be, the halcyon days of agriculture: "... they had an open day and came here to look at it ... they were enthusiastic; they came to help me. It was 'what can we do' and you felt to be part and parcel of something worthwhile ... The Ministry today .. they seemed to have changed attitude".

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5 The Ministry has set up an "anti-bumph" committee which has been looking for ways to reduce the burden of paperwork on farmers.
6 Doing "spot" checks on farms, for example.
2.2.2 The National Trust

In marked contrast to the National Park Authority, the National Trust had no presence in the study dales (to farmers' knowledge, the nearest locale of concentration for Trust operations and policies being in the Malham area). Even so, farmers were aware of the Trust's purchase of Darnbrook Farm in that vicinity, a hill farm of a quite substantial acreage adjacent to another Trust farm property.

On the one hand, farmers tended to view the Trust's conservation management scheme for this farm as suitable. Referring to the tenant: "He's gone in, knows what his rent is and gets so much for doing different things, and that isn't a bad scheme for that farm. There's plenty of acres there to do it". On the other, the purchase of farmland by the Trust was viewed with suspicion as a form of 'creeping nationalisation' or nationalisation by the back door. The fact that the National Trust had purchased this property with National Lottery gains provoked further disapproval, being perceived as unfair competition with farmers, particularly potential new entrants hoping to purchase also. Such a view has to be placed in the context of the general decline in the number of privately owned independent farm units in the dales, which farmers constantly remarked upon, in addition to the extraordinary difficulties confronting young people wishing to take up farming as an occupation. Indeed, a number of older farmers remarked that whilst their first son would eventually take responsibility for the home farm, their second son would never farm despite the strong desire to do so.

2.2.3 The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

In relation to general agricultural policies, farmers' attitudes to MAFF tended to be ambivalent. In part, this was explained by their awareness of the change of direction during the 1980s, from production oriented policies to ones with a wider remit, including farm diversification and conservation. Many farmers, in fact, had taken advantage, to differing degrees, of agricultural improvement schemes which had been in operation, in one form or another, since the Second World War.

Dairy farmers, on the periphery of the National Park but with land in the study area, were quick to point out that the "Ministry" had encouraged the modernisation of dairy units, encouraged farmers to expand and produce more, resulting in overproduction and quotas. Conversely, with modernisation and a greater rationalisation of farm buildings, workloads had been lightened significantly.

Despite the partial 'greening' of MAFF, most farmers felt that with the liberalisation of trade and the expansion of the EU, the overall orientation was for farms to become bigger, more efficient and more competitive. This had been the rationale of previous policies despite the aim of aiding the smaller farmer. MAFF's own policy and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) were still having this effect. The commoditisation of sheep quota, for instance, and the necessity of its purchase, was perceived as a further barrier for 'new blood'. Farmers who mentioned the sheep quota all disagreed with the system. Further, with no improvement grants available, smaller farms would, it was felt, fall by the wayside; and with the possible phasing out of production linked subsidies only the 'fittest' would survive. As most farmers prognosticated, this was to be the future irrespective of conservation type schemes.

Regarding grants, it was often pointed out that all that was available now were walling grants which were, nonetheless, considered to be extremely important and for a number of reasons. In particular, grants facilitated the employment of local contract labour and disgruntlement was expressed with the reduction of money available for walling work along with the belief that, with the termination of the Farm and Conservation Grants Scheme, they would no longer be available.
Most farmers also felt that the Park Authority did not work for, or benefit, Dales people. Comments implied discrimination in favour of short-stay "offcomedens":

“They’ll say they’ve a job to do, they’ll tell you, and they have, but they don’t work for the dales people. You can have a barn coming up for planning around this area and you’ve a job to get planning on it happen, but you get it. Someone from out of London or somewhere will come and buy it. They can get away with changing that building ... they get away with it. They make a mess in the village. They’re in six months, they’ve gone again.”

Farmers commented that interpersonal relations with the National Park were perceived as poor and National Park officers hard to contact. Parish councils - supposedly reflecting the concerns of the local community - were over-ruled and, generally, the Park had, according to respondents, ultimately "too much power".

One statutory duty of the National Park is the provision of access for quiet recreation. Whilst recreational pressures can manifest itself in myriad ways and affect different groups (including tourists and recreationists themselves), farmers earning their living from multi-used land will likely be the most affected. The majority of farmers interviewed had experienced some problems - though to differing degrees - associated with recreational activities (gates left open, litter disposal, blocked access to name a few). On the one hand, there was resentment expressed over the 'disbenefits' of farming in a National Park as these comments highlight:

“Why should we - farmers in here - have to put up with people going over yer land, paddling it up and making it black. We’ve a main path that March and April, it's 20 foot paddled black. We don’t get any payment for that. It’s your own land and it’s just paddled. They don’t do a thing about it (the Park). Parks are encouraging people out, yer know, they’re just blocking roads with their cars.”

References to private landownership were contrasted with what farmers perceived as the ‘misnomer’ - 'National Park'. According to farmers, this apparently misled visitors into thinking the area was a public playground and that farmers were paid/supported by the Park Authority. On the other hand, many farmers modified their criticisms by informing us that only a few visitors actually caused problems. And odd farmers espoused the stewardship principle whole-heartedly, appreciating their land as a 'public' asset for all to enjoy:

“This country is for everybody. I’m glad I live here ... I live in an area of outstanding natural beauty and I didn’t realise until I went to spend a fortnight in London. Then I come back home here, and I got off the train at Lancaster, and I was coming through Hornby, and I could see Ingleborough - and I knew I was home... Like I said, if I had to live in London or had to live in Manchester, back streets of Leeds, then, my God, I would like to come out here and walk. And it’s like I said, we own it and it’s there for the British public. They pay my subsidies”.

Yet to a great extent living and working in a National Park was accepted by farmers with resignation, or as something "we’ve grown up with". The general strategy regarding the National Park Authority itself was one of avoidance.
ensuing agreements and finance available, may create distortions, with higher land of little economic significance agriculturally becoming as or more valuable, than productive bottom land. This made no sense in the farming frame of reference.

2.1.4 Summary

The majority of farmers were largely satisfied with their management agreements with English Nature though opinions were not strong. Interpersonal relations with English Nature were felt to have improved and were considered to be fairly successful though contact was infrequent. In many cases a congruence of interests presently exists between the farm management interests of farmers and the conservation aims of English Nature. However, farmers’ acceptance of schemes was tempered by a number of concerns: for example, rising costs vis-à-vis agreement payments, incertitude over the continuity of conservation schemes generally and possible ‘knock on’ effects and unintended consequences of schemes. Non-agreement farmers felt schemes were creating unfair competition in the farming community (as with the increasing costs of away-wintering for example). Additionally, farmers were suspicious about attempts of English Nature to buy and control land. There exists a minority pro-active group of farmers who have embraced management as their future role though concern still exists over the continuity of schemes. Alternatively there is a further small minority which is anti English Nature due, in the main, to disagreements.

2.2 What Do Farmers Think of Other Agencies Operating in the Dales?

During our discussions with farmers frequent mention was made of the other agencies operating in the conservation sphere in the National Park. Farmers volunteered information about their experiences and opinions of the National Park Authority, the National Trust and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

2.2.1 The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority

The National Park Authority provoked a measure of adverse comment, though this was more the case in Ribblesdale and reflected beyond the confines of the farming community into the local community as a whole. There were two areas of complaint for farmers: the planning process and access problems. Officers operating the Farm and Countryside Service, however, were singled out and looked upon favourably, largely due to their interpersonal skills and knowledge of farming.

Regarding the planning permission process and the Farm Grant Notification procedure, a number of farmers had encountered difficulties in regard to farm improvements, with the aesthetic aims of the Park Authority conflicting with farm functional needs; for example, the siting of a building, the shape of a shelter belt and the species of trees. Conversion of barns and buildings for farm diversification purposes (seen by farmers to be encouraged by the MAFF), as well as for residence, raised adverse comment over Park stipulations concerning, for example, size of windows, materials used and the colour of paintwork.

Gaining planning permission, reapplying where permission had initially been denied, was deemed to be a costly process, with the employment of architects and solicitors acting on behalf of the farmer. Those who had encountered little or no difficulties tended to have farms beyond public preview, whilst others in that category were located on the periphery of the Park boundary again suggesting the Park’s concern with aesthetics.
nature. Hence, regarding the success of implementing voluntary agreements and their continuity, the nature of the interaction between farmers and English Nature officers takes on high salience.

With only a few exceptions relations with English Nature officers were considered relatively unproblematic, though visits to farms were infrequent (once, twice, possible three times a year) as this comment suggests: "Pretty good, good to get on with. They come out once a year and discuss it with you, see how it's going". This consensus view was qualified by some farmers as these remarks illustrate: "You can talk to them, but they do come with a set of ideas of what they want and you know in your own mind that it will never work, but it is very difficult to sometimes make them change their mind". This gives rise to the question of local knowledge and farmers' own 'definition of the situation', in section 2.5. Nevertheless, certain farmers had also noted a shift in the approach of English Nature, particularly an increased willingness to listen as this comment suggests: "They are coming asking more now than ever they did before. They used to kind of tell you".

2.1.3 ‘Knock-on’ Effects and Unintended Consequences of English Nature Schemes

Possibly due in part to the financial attractiveness of the subsidy system farmers have not generally reduced their stock of sheep.\(^4\) Also, incertitude over the continuity and longevity of agreements have, according to farmers, encouraged the maintenance of stock numbers. Indeed, the uncertainty of the continuity of conservation schemes with the long-term effort involved in breeding quality stock was contrasted:

"... you can’t just sell it off on whim of these people keeping these schemes going because politicians can overnight chop that off and that’s end of it. So nobody's selling stock, everybody's sending it away".

On entering into English Nature agreements with destocking requirements, farmers have effectively protected their stock levels by, as noted above, away-wintering. However, commented upon frequently was the increasing costs of, and difficulty in, acquiring wintering. Indeed, English Nature schemes are perceived as being one significant factor in the rising costs of away-wintering. From the perspective of farmers who have no SSSIs on their land, or, if they have, have no agreement, there was the belief that English Nature monies, as well as payments gained from other conservation schemes, were creating unfair competition, as this comment expresses:

"... it's the same with trying to winter sheep away, these men that are getting 60 or 70 pence, maybe a pound a week, they're getting paid for de-stocking it. They can go out and give a pound for better land, you see, whereas we're still trying to find somewhere at old prices".

With the increase in numbers of sheep leaving the dales for kinder climes, there is also the possibility of a displacement of overgrazing and habitat loss elsewhere, beyond the Dales. Further, it was felt by some farmers that returning flocks placed undue pressure on their home ground. Also with longer periods spent away, there existed the likelihood of fell flocks loosing their 'heaving' abilities, a characteristic peculiar to hardy hill breeds.

Though generally applicable to other conservation schemes as well (the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) scheme of MAFF for example), a further possible unintended consequence is the inflation of land values on top land. Land carrying a designation, with

\(^4\) There appears to be a growing demand for acquiring land. It was suggested that this was possibly a means of reducing overall stocking levels so as to qualify for enhanced HLCAs. It was further suggested that prior to the imposition of sheep quota there was a tendency for farmers to increase their stock numbers.
this more fully, highlighting again a congruence between the aims of English Nature and farmers’ interests:

“Everybody I have spoken to, or my associates, are suited with the job. (Interviewer: Why do you say that?). Well, because for years, these moors, a lot of these top lands are getting overeaten, there’s no doubt about that, and economics has forced you into keeping more sheep than what you should. These farms, all around here, are keeping nearly twice the sheep they were keeping 20 years since, and economics are forcing them to do that, not greed, economics. And now somebody come along and offered you money to take them off and to pay you to ship them out down south, and everybody jumped on the band wagon. It’s been a good idea. These top sheep haven’t been doing right well on these tops these last few years, because they’re overeaten”.

Considering overgrazing, a more complicated scenario emerged with common grazings. One problem that had surfaced in certain areas, according to our respondents, was abuse of the system where sheep rights (known as “gates” in the area) were exceeded by odd individuals resulting in overgrazing. Clearly difficulties arise for English Nature in trying to reach agreement with all, or the majority of, graziers, to reduce and control stock numbers. Seemingly, to circumvent this problem English Nature has sought to exert a degree of control by buying rights themselves (off retiring farmers) and not using them (so as to reduce stocking pressures). Nevertheless, ill-feeling prevailed in particular areas due to the involvement of the MAFF, their threat of withholding Hill Lifestock Compensatory Allowances (HLCA) to all graziers, and the expectation that graziers themselves must resolve this problem. The latter, it was informed, could only lead to conflict in, what are, small highly personalised and delicately balanced farming communities. It would put “neighbour against neighbour” in an occupational community which values, and needs, mechanisms of mutual aid.

The issue of control by public organisations created some concern in the farming community. This surfaced again in regard to English Nature buying land from farmers and renting it back on temporary lets with stocking requirements (as on the Ribblesdale side of Ingleborough). With respect to management agreements, farmers were fully aware of the significance of their own private property rights in that owner occupation allowed the farmer a degree of control:

“There’s plenty of flexibility in the scheme if you control the land that they are wanting. If you haven’t got complete control of what they want, there’s no flexibility, but you can do a deal with them ... If you either own it or rent it properly, then they have to negotiate with you”.

Whilst some owner-occupying farmers did not feel any great encroachment and erosion of property rights with SSSI designation per se, others were more critical: “I think they take liberties in some respects. They just designated it as being that; there was never any consultation”. Emphasis on property rights surfaced also in situations of disagreement and with farmers’ feelings of aggrievement where, for example, English Nature hac terminated agreements and payment whilst still insisting on restrictions. But overall the disposition towards English Nature was benign.

2.1.2 Social Interactions between English Nature and the Farming Community

Farmers, working in relative isolation, and as a marginalised and minority group generally, tend to be accustomed to informal personalised social relationships usually of a localised

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2 Historically some areas have had too many sheep rights allocated.
3 In this area the majority of farmers concerned were not “available” for interview.
2 The Research Findings

2.1 What do Farmers Think of English Nature and its Schemes?

Farmers were asked about their experiences with English Nature, and their opinions about its nature conservation schemes and work in the dales more generally.

2.1.1 Farmers’ Responses to English Nature Schemes and Policies

In general terms, areas affected by SSSI designation vary from large hectarages of “gated”, moorland occupied by farmers grazing stock in common, sizable hectarages of solely occupied grazing land, and relatively small areas - meadows, wetlands, woodland for example. Not surprisingly farmers affected by SSSI designation tended to evaluate schemes in economic terms though this was not the sole consideration. In some cases a coincidental congruence existed between the aims of English Nature and the productive capacity of the land under agreement. For various reasons in the farming account, such land may not be worth improving, and farmers in such situations regarded the financial “return” from English Nature to be better than the return from the land.

Where larger areas of land were involved, destocking on the higher grazing areas was often a requirement for certain parts of the year, with complete destocking over the winter months, the majority of farmers away-wintering. In Ribblesdale it was roughly estimated by farmers that 70 per cent of flocks disappeared over winter. Away-wintering, however, is a 'normal' farm management practice for some farmers and has been in operation for ten years at least (and according to some respondents is a traditional practice).

Away-wintering has the advantage of less burdensome work. Because of increased stock numbers generally and the commensurate decline in the numbers of farm families, the pressures of stock management were constantly reiterated. This applied to all age groups, though it was more an obvious concern with older farmers:

"The schemes worked for me well, whereas they might not have worked for somebody else. I’ve turned 60, nobody to follow me on, only me and my wife, so it was an opportunity for us if we wanted to lessen down anyway. (Interviewer: Workload?) That’s right, so to take them off the tops in winter, saves me going around shepherding them, and I have plenty of land in these bottoms to keep them on.”

English Nature schemes, therefore were perceived advantageously in terms of reducing work pressures on farmers’ lives. Nevertheless, whilst initially schemes were considered very fair, rising costs, over time generally disposed some farmers to reconsider their agreements less favourably. Because of the increased cost of away-wintering, some considered themselves, after a period in the scheme, to be only 'breaking even', whilst one or two even considered they were making a loss. In this respect the relatively short length of agreement durations (one or three years for example) instilled a degree of flexibility into arrangements, allowing farmers to reassess their situations with, they believed, the option of withdrawing if payments did not take into account rising costs.

Nevertheless, the majority of agreement farmers agreed that giving rough grazing areas “a rest” during the winter months was sound management, particularly considering the increase in stock numbers grazing these areas. This attitude was shared by those farmers unaffected by SSSI status or not in any formal agreement with English Nature. One agreement farmer explained
and interests (such as environmental NGOs, out-door recreational groups, other users and occupiers of the land) might also participate at later stages of such consultation processes.

(VII) Some Possible Avenues for Further Research

Some further research might usefully better define the above issues.

Recommendation 14:
Further research into the local knowledge and expertise of local farmers and other local residents is important. This could occur through further interviews (including with eco.logists and EN/YDNP officials to help assess the usefulness and accuracy of such knowledge), and accompanying EN/YDNP officials on site visits.

Recommendation 15:
The social science research community needs to develop a more finely-tuned understanding of the farming community in its current context. This should include more comparisons between different types of farming / farmers and with respect to different conservation settings.

Recommendation 16:
Observation of the focus groups recommended above (Recommendation 2) by social scientists, or their employment in such processes as mediators, would be beneficial to the interpretation and analysis of the discussions and their implications.
**Recommendation 8:**

EN/YDNP should be more pro-active in publicising the sorts of support it is providing to the farming community, for example through the local and national media, at its visitors centres, and in its publicity. Such publicity should indicate how public money is being spent on specific conservation projects and in the fulfilment of what objectives.

**Recommendation 9:**

YDNP/EN might want to approach more farmers with the invitation to host farm-visits, to increase contact between members of the public and farmers. The aims of these would be to allow more understanding of farming as a way of life, and to allow the farmer to ‘put their point of view across’. We suspect that this would also allow farmers to better appreciate the diversity in the publics’ knowledge and perceptions of farming.

(V) **How to Involve Farmers More Thoroughly in Conservation**

Farmers frequently do not identify with the aims of conservation policy, or consider that conservation agencies are realising their aims in the most effective way possible.

**Recommendation 10:**

EN/YDNP should continue with its Dales Advisory Group. However, they might also want to initiate further meetings with a wider cross-section of farmers to allow the fuller range of opinions to be put across. This could occur through focus groups (see Recommendation 2), or on-going in-depth discussion groups involving a range of farmers and a facilitator.

**Recommendation 11:**

EN/YDNP should be more pro-active in communicating its notion of ecology and conservation to the farming community, so that understanding of their aims and programmes can be better appreciated over time. From their current experience, many farmers (though by no means all) are unclear or even sceptical about the conservation practices of EN/YDNP and do not appear to have gained much further illumination from their involvement in schemes. There may be a need for EN/YDNP to better explain why it undertakes certain practices which seem to some farmers to have a detrimental effect on the ecology.

(VI) **Benefiting from Local Knowledge and Expertise**

Farmers and other local residents have particular ‘local knowledge’ which could usefully contribute to achieving the aims of conservation policy.

**Recommendation 12:**

EN/YDNP officials should increase their personal contact with farmers, prior to and during voluntary agreements, with the express purpose of finding out more information about the expertise and knowledge of farmers.

**Recommendation 13:**

EN/YDNP should include representatives of the local community in the in-depth, open-ended discussion meetings with farmers proposed above (Recommendation 2). In particular, they should try and involve those who have long-term knowledge of the region or special local knowledge as a consequence of a non-farming occupation or interest (gamekeeper, water bailiff, keen naturalist, and so on). Additionally, it may be useful to involve some of those visitors to the dales who have had a long-term affinity with, and interest in, the area. Other non-governmental bodies with particular expertise
Recommendation 2:

EN/YDNP might consider how to improve the communication and understanding between different definitions of what should be conserved and why. This could be achieved through public or panel meetings. Past experience in the region indicates that such consultation should be kept informal and avoid the adoption of pre-defined positions. A model of potential utility is the use of focus groups. A number of interested parties are invited to participate in an open-ended discussion, the range of different perceptions are presented and some negotiation between those views takes place. Professional facilitators or mediators are frequently important to guarantee the success of such discussion groups. It may be helpful for such a process to be done in collaboration with the regional MAFF offices or another relevant agency so as to utilise well known and successful mediators within the farming community itself. We recognise the potential difficulties of such a proposal in terms of stimulating a discussion, but nevertheless recommend some ‘experimental’ efforts in this direction.

(III) How to Devise a Good Scheme

EN/YDNP schemes appear to have been developed and implemented with some success.

Recommendation 3:

EN/YDNP should continue to be flexible in its design of schemes, including tailoring them to specific farms and being prepared to change them as experience develops.

Recommendation 4:

Because most farmers usually prefer to be doing some work for the support they receive (rather than receiving support for not doing something) schemes should attempt to actively involve farmers not only in terms of canvassing their opinions, but also with respect to their everyday working practices (contra set-aside schemes).

Recommendation 5:

In assessing the success, or otherwise, of particular agreements the agencies might want to further improve the channels of communication between farmers and agency officials, so that on-the-ground knowledge and perceptions can continue to feed into the evaluation process.

Recommendation 6:

EN/YDNP should investigate further the possible unintended environmental effects of their schemes, especially the consequences of increased away-wintering.

(IV) How to Bridge the Gap between Farmers, the Public and Conservation Agencies

Farmers, conservation agencies, local residents and other members of the public all have different experiences and perceptions of conservation.

Recommendation 7:

YDNP/EN might want to include more information about the present farming community in its publicity and at its visitor centres. This might stress how farming practices have contributed to the character of the present landscape, and also include some historical information to indicate how richly embedded the farming community is within the locality.
farming as an occupation is also a necessary and important attribute. Hence good husbandry and personal commitment are, in many cases, linked as interdependent. Given farmers’ own definition of husbandry, the latter emerges as a result of good husbandry farm practices. Conservation schemes which curtail good husbandry practices (the production of good quality hay, for example) are perceived circumspectly.

Though to a great extent farmers are ‘price-takers’ in regard to their stock, good marketing techniques (and, therefore, higher profits) are thought to be of importance though these attributes, according to farmers, are curtailed and controlled by factors largely beyond their influence. Even so, farmers generally have become more money oriented with increasing material expectations. Whilst the introduction of modern farm practices is deemed to be constrained by the harsh biophysical environment, there is some difference of opinion expressed about how far modern methods should be taken before they became detrimental to the traditional landscape. Conversely, to many farmers, agricultural change is a fact of farming life.

(X) The Non-Farming Population and Conservation Agencies

English Nature has a low profile amongst non-farmers in the dales study areas. Hence, knowledge about its activities is gained from second-hand sources and some confictual opinions are expressed regarding conservation schemes and farmers’ motivations and economic well-being. Conversely, non-farmers have more knowledge about the activities of the National Park Authority and hold strong opinions. Overall the feeling is that outside interests are over-ruling local interests, that the Authority has over-stepped its legitimate bounds and is adversely affecting local economies by suppressing local initiative deemed unsuitable in the Park enclave. Within this context, concern is expressed over the future viability of delicately balanced working communities. Local self-determination is being eroded and local opinions and feelings are, it is felt, being ignored, despite the medium of the parish councils. Yet, in spite of this consolidated local front vis-à-vis the National Park Authority social restructuring has caused new rifts in local communities, particularly the influx of ‘offcomedens’. Non-farming locals also provide useful insights into the character and causes of ecological changes as well as being more critical in their analysis of the fortunes of the farming community.

1.4 Recommendations

(I) The Current Uptake of EN and YDNP Schemes

Current uptake of conservation schemes seems encouraging but is unlikely to indicate a real shift in farmers’ perceptions of their own roles.

Recommendation 1:

EN/YDNP should not assume that the current uptake of schemes and interest in conservation on the part of farmers will continue into the future, given that the primary determinant of their decision-making is the production support structure. Changes in this, or other factors impinging on the economics of farming in this region, may reduce the present congruence between conservation and farming interests.

(II) Different Version of What Should be Conserved and Why

There are a variety of perceptions of what should be the objectives of conservation.
(V) What Farmers and Other Local Residents Can Contribute to Conservation

Local knowledge arises from the longevity of lived-experience and intimacy with an area: it is expert knowledge 'on the ground'. However, a number of farmers do not feel that their knowledge has been fully into account in the pursuit of conservation aims. In fact, most farmers could point to instances where conservation practices have 'failed' (according to their own evaluative criteria) and employing their local knowledge could state why (rightly or wrongly). The Dales Advisory Group is a significant positive move in the recognition of local knowledge. However, farmers are not exclusively the possessors of local knowledge. Older members of local communities, with experience in land management, are further sources.

(VI) Farmers’ Perceptions of their Social Roles

Farmers tend to perceive themselves collectively as a misunderstood and maligned minority. The public, many farmers believe, has a negative stereotypical image of the 'farmer' which fails to incorporate the realities and heterogeneity of farming and associated industries, but particularly hill farming in a National Park. They also feel unable to rectify this, a powerlessness reflected in other dimensions such as state/EU policies.

Conversely, farmers realise their own sense of difference vis-à-vis 'society', implicitly at least. Given socio-economic restructuring in rural locales, they have become more marginalised. Yet farmers' own social networks are relatively stable and resilient, which in itself fortifies their sense of difference.

(VII) Representation of Farmers’ Views

The majority of farmers do not feel their views and opinions are adequately represented within the agricultural industry itself, the greater resources and 'clout' of other farming sectors creating an imbalance in power relations to the disadvantage of hill/upland farming interests. A loss in credibility (in the public view) of the major agricultural organisations (MAFF and the NFU) has heightened this feeling of representational impotence. Farmers are particularly concerned about the future uncertainty of the livestock subsidy support system, though to some degree accept possible changes resignedly. Farmers also feel that the media distorts farming issues and is a significant determinant in the negative stereotyping of farmers generally.

(VIII) Changes in Farming and Possible Future Changes

In spite of biophysical constraints, dales farm management has changed in a number of ways in terms of: increased yields from the land, increased fattening of stock, 'improved' buildings and marketing techniques, for example. Farmers explain that this has been in response to economic pressures, including changing market trends. Many farmers seem keenly aware of such trends in the expanded EU and globally. In fact, irrespective of future incertitude over farm policies and support measures, the majority of farmers are confident about the future viability of hill/upland farming. They consider themselves indispensable as producers of stock for lowland units, and also essential environmental managers of the National Park landscape.

(IX) How Farmers Define Good Farming

For the majority of farmers, good husbandry is considered the most important attribute in the definition of good farming, but it is often stressed that a strong personal commitment to
There is some resentment and concern over the National Trust buying farm properties. On the one hand, there is mistrust over the public ownership of land generally. On the other, it is felt to create unfair competition in the land market, disadvantaging potential young entrants into farming. Historically, farmers have identified most with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF). Changes in farm policy directions during the 1980s have partially eroded this identification. Farmers now feel some confusion over their role as producers of food. Strengthening bureaucratic controls by MAFF, in addition to the increased burden of form-filling, is felt by the majority of farmers to be detrimental to good husbandry.

(III) Farmers’ Perceptions of Conservation

Farmers conflate conservation with good husbandry and consider the present National Park landscape to be the creation of the ‘normal’ farming activities of generations of farm families. Thus they could argue that future conservation was ‘safe’ in their hands. They also perceive an aesthetically pleasing landscape as one of order (as with a well maintained walling system) and fertility; and consider areas left to ‘grow wild’ as reprehensible. At this point they diverge with English Nature in that the latter sometimes requires farmers to leave areas of land completely unmanaged. Whilst English Nature pursue a more overtly ecological definition of conservation, many farmers emphasise the importance of conserving the present farming community and its distinctive way of life. Farmers tend not to distinguish between their own land-use and farming practices and the ‘natural’ processes which contribute to producing and maintaining the current ecological landscape.

Whilst farmers are aware of the public benefits of a well maintained landscape (however defined), some question conserving certain habitats beyond public purview. In addition, they feel that the public knows very little about the natural environment, arriving at the conclusion that conservation as practised by English Nature primarily benefits specialist interests.

Given changing directions in farm policies over the years, a number of farmers consider conservation schemes to be an ephemeral ‘fashion’, one associated with the general ‘greening’ of many issues. However, farmers are also fully cognisant of their dependency on state and EU support and possible changes to the present system. They, therefore, feel that agri-conservation schemes, as a new means of support, may be difficult to resist.

Opinions on conservation schemes as an integral part of farm management are mixed. Whole farm schemes are thought to be suitable for particular farms (upland, less intensive ones for example) and particular farmers (those willing to ‘wind down’ for example); whereas the ‘progressives’ and the ‘autonomists’ would not entertain schemes due to the limitations on farm management practices, income and independence. However, some farmers are of the opinion that conservation schemes would encourage a more calculative approach, becoming part of a ‘package’ of various monies on offer from different organisations.

(IV) Elements of a Good Scheme

Farmers favour flexibility in schemes because of their need to juggle with the many uncertain factors in everyday and longer-term decision-making. This translate into a preference for shorter-term schemes, or ones which can be frequently re-assessed and re-negotiated. In addition, flexibility in the precise specification and implementation of schemes on a particular farm is preferred so that the special circumstances of each can be taken into account. This desired—for flexibility creates some ambivalence, however, because of the difficulty of assessing the equity associated with farm-specific arrangements (compared, for example, with the subsidy system where farmers have a better idea of how each other will fare). This factor is of some importance, given the secretive aspects of farming culture, and the suspicion which can breed if some farmers are seen to be benefiting disproportionately to their status within the community as a good farmer (because they inherited land containing SSSIs for example).
Scientific Interest (SSSIs); in particular extensive areas of Ingleborough (which includes the National Nature Reserves of Colt Park Wood and Scar Close), Whernside and Pen-y-ghent. These SSSIs are significant for their upland vegetation, limestone pavements and cave systems.

The sample was drawn from lists of farmers supplied by English Nature and the Farm and Countryside Service of the YDNP. Thirty-seven farmers were contacted 'cold' by telephone and despite bad weather during the fieldwork duration, twenty-four were eventually interviewed. Most farmers interviewed had had some contact with English Nature though a small number had not. The majority of farmers interviewed in both Chapel-le-cote and Kingsdale had been contacted by the Park's Farm and Countryside Service in regard to their new scheme. Given that the YDNP's Farm Conservation Scheme is still at a relatively early stage of implementation, most of the farmers' experience of conservation agreements was with English Nature, and this fact is reflected in the findings of the report.

Five non-farming residents were interviewed, three of whom were indigenous people, the remaining two being 'offcomedens' (i.e. not 'born and bred' in the area). The semi-structured interviews lasted on average two hours and all those interviewed agreed to be tape recorded. Tape recording allowed a fairly free flowing dialogue and facilitated the eliciting of more intangible and in-depth data.

1.3 Summary of the Report's Main Findings

(I) Perceptions of English Nature and Its Schemes

The majority of farmers are largely satisfied with their management agreements with English Nature though opinions are not strong. Interpersonal relations with English Nature officials are felt to have improved and were considered to be fairly successful though contact has been infrequent. In some cases a congruence of interests exists between the farm management interests of farmers and the conservation aims of English Nature. However, farmers' acceptance of schemes is tempered by a number of concerns: for example, rising costs incurred by the agreement relative to payments received, incertitude over the continuity of conservation schemes generally and possible 'knock on' effects and unintended consequences of schemes. Non-agreement farmers feel that schemes are creating unfair competition in the farming community (as with the increasing costs of away-wintering for example). Additionally, farmers are suspicious about the attempts of English Nature to buy and control land. There exists a minority pro-active group of farmers who have embraced conservation-oriented land management as their future role though concern still exists over the continuity of such a commitment to conservation in the long-term. There is, however, a further small minority which is anti-English Nature due, in the main, to past disagreements.

(II) Perceptions of Other Agencies Operating in the Dales

The majority of farmers do not identify with the official aims of the National Park and are critical of the Authority's policies on planning and access. Interpersonal relations between farmers and officials are regarded as cursory and authoritarian and, overall, the Authority is considered to have too much power. Related to farm management, many farmers feel they had experienced disbenefits as a result of the recreational activities of the public. However, a very small minority of farmers positively evaluate living and working in the context of the National Park, perceiving their ownership of land from a conservation oriented 'stewardship' perspective. All farmers who have had contact with the Farm and Countryside Service of the Yorkshire Dales National Park look upon it favourably.
1 Overview, Background and Recommendations

1.1 Background

A variety of agencies are now increasing the resources they devote to supporting and encouraging a shift to conservation land management in the uplands. Whilst some information is available on the economic implications of such policy, little is as yet known about its impacts on, and perceptions by, local communities. Increased understanding in this area is a priority for both English Nature (EN) and the Yorkshire Dales National Park (YDNP) to help guide future delivery of schemes and policies.

English Nature awarded a contract to the Centre for the Study of Environmental Change (CSEC), Lancaster University, to: discover local people’s views on nature conservation objectives, policies and schemes; to assess the impacts of current EN and YDNP conservation policies on the local society and economy; and to advise on how policies and schemes might be improved.¹

Given the scale of the questions and the constraints of the contract, CSEC concentrated on the perceptions of a sample of farmers and (to a lesser extent) those of the more diverse category of non-farming residents of three dales, as detailed below. The 29 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in people’s homes during February and March 1996 and provided a wealth of empirical data on farmers’ and non-farmers’ perceptions of nature conservation, the main agencies involved, the impacts of conservation schemes, the change over time in policies and the implications of such changes, and the main contextual aspects of farming, public perceptions of farming and the dales, and social life and community in the dales.

The report is structured in the following way. The next section briefly describes the study area and research approach. This is followed by the key findings of the report, after which a list of recommendations to EN and YDNP on how schemes and policies might be improved is suggested (based on Section 2). Section 2 is the empirical heart of the report. It poses ten key questions and then answers these through analysis of the interviews, including selected use of quotations from the transcripts. Section 3 makes some brief observations on the report’s key findings and their implications.

1.2 Research Approach and Setting

The study areas of Ribblesdale, Chapel-le-dale and Kingsdale are situated in the Craven district of the county of North Yorkshire. Settlement patterns vary. In Ribblesdale there are two main villages - Horton-in-Ribblesdale and Stainforth, whilst Chapel-le-dale has a more dispersed settlement pattern, with Ingleton at the bottom of the dale and the hamlet of Chapel-le-dale in its higher reaches. Kingsdale is more remote and with only two farms. The specific local economies of both Ribblesdale and Chapel-le-dale are largely based on farming (sheep, beef and, marginally, dairy), quarrying, tourist facilities and associated service industries.

In terms of environmental designation, aside of National Park status, the study dales do not as yet enjoy Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) status, unlike their neighbouring dales. The Park Authority is seeking to rectify this by the introduction of the Farm Conservation Scheme in Kingsdale and Chapel-le-dale; a whole farm scheme in which farmers have been invited to enter into five year management agreements operated by the Park’s Farm and Countryside Service. Nevertheless, across all the dales there are large areas designated as Sites of Special

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Caveat

The authors do not necessarily agree with the opinions and views expressed by the people interviewed in the course of this research. The analysis conducted is based on the authors' interpretations of the interview material. The interviews were all conducted before the 'BSE scare' of mid- to late-March 1996.
Fields Apart?
What Farmers Think of Nature
Conservation in the Yorkshire Dales
March 1996

A Report for English Nature
and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority
Mary Walsh, Simon Shackley and Robin Grove-White