

Landowners' attitudes to woodland creation and management. A review of evidence in the UK

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SUMMARY of a study funded by the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust. See end for availability of full report.

Background and objectives

1. -To deliver on strategic objectives to increase woodland area and quality, organisations such as the Forestry Commission (FC) and Woodland Trust (WT) need to engage with woodland owners and/or their agents. They therefore need to understand the values, attitudes and perceptions that owners bring to woodland management and creation.
2. **This is a summary of a review of existing evidence**, to assess its contribution to current information needs for policy implementation.
3. -We applied the following criteria for inclusion in the review: work that is:
 - a. - based on empirical data, not author's opinion or literature review;
 - b. focused on values, attitudes, beliefs, or actions of owners and their representatives, not on description or economic assessment of woodland management options;
 - c. published from 1990 onwards, after woodland grants replaced tax incentives as the principal policy delivery mechanism.

Extent of evidence

4. An extensive search¹ has produced 34 studies which satisfy the criteria given above. Of these the bulk are **quantitative surveys**; ten are qualitative of which four include **group discussions**. Only 11 are published in peer reviewed journals.
5. -Often respondents are both farmers and woodland owners, but this is not always the case and **farmers feature most prominently** in the evidence. Some studies focus on specific groups (grant recipients, non-recipients, new owners without a history of farming, etc.) and a few include tenant farmers. One study highlights the **importance of agents** in land-use decision making but we found no data on their values and attitudes. -
6. Several studies refer to **changing structure of landownership** with a small but - potentially significant shift to new owners, from non-farming backgrounds.

Objectives, motivations, values and attitudes

7. -The studies reviewed fall into two groups which contrast in terms of their explanations of landowner behaviour and behaviour change. One group focuses on the **psychology and culture of landowners**, including their social standing and relations. The other sees this as largely irrelevant and considers that for most farmers it is simply a question of **finding the right price**. -

¹ Coordinated by Julie Urquhart, co-author of the main report

8. There is a clear pattern amongst the studies that provide evidence on owners' **reasons for having and planting woodland**. Landscape and conservation (wildlife and shelterbelt) are ranked highest, with shooting also often high; production and profit come low in the list of priorities, and provision of public recreation even lower.
9. Many studies report a sense of custodianship or **responsibility** for the land and landscape. This is closely linked to a concern for control over land use. In addition the studies of farmers' attitudes highlight a shared culture which seeks **peer respect** based on 'good' or 'correct' land use. Using the land for its appropriate productive purpose is an important value and can undermine attempts to encourage tree planting.
10. Compared with traditional owners, several studies report that new **(non-traditional) owners** appear to hold more environmental values and to be less interested in profit from their land. However no study apparently tests this.

Delivery mechanisms

11. There is mixed and inconclusive evidence about the relationship between grant availability and decisions to plant. Availability of **grants** does appear to influence those who are already interested in woodland, but not to affect the choices of those who are not interested. Expert opinion suggests that higher grants reach a 'tipping point' and can change behaviour, but this has not been tested in the evidence reviewed.
12. Studies link grant uptake (and lack of uptake) to (i) landowner's awareness of / interest in grants; (ii) knowledge; and (iii) availability of, or particularly lack of, suitable land.
13. The evidence reviewed by this study highlight four primary aspects of landowners' **perceptions of grants and grant schemes**. These relate to (i) bureaucracy and administration, (ii) economic adequacy, (iii) control and property rights, and (iv) restrictiveness and flexibility.
14. The **complexity and bureaucracy** involved in grant application is reported only in recent literature and appears to have increased considerably in the last few years.
15. The perceived relevance and importance of grants varies in relation to the purpose of the grant. Owners expect grants for the provision of **non-market benefits** such as public access, but not necessarily for land-uses with potential economic benefits. For example, one study showed that landowners expect 'the market' to pay for woodfuel production and see little role for grants to pay for this.
16. The provision of **free expert advice** is particularly appreciated and likely to influence outcomes. The Forestry Commission's Woodland Officers are highly regarded in this role.
17. The review found no direct existing evidence of owners' perceptions, understanding and response to **regulation** (felling licenses etc.) Several studies report as a disincentive, the widespread understanding that tree planting is an irreversible 'one-way street'.

Differences between stakeholders

18. The studies reveal fewer differences than might have been expected between owners of **existing woodland** and those landowners asked about **creating new woods**. All apparently rated conservation highly, and showed little interest in the economic potential.

However studies of woodland owners often showed strong emotional and cultural connections with their woodlands that were not apparent among farmers, whose values favoured production and 'appropriateness'. Furthermore, the role of grants in changing behaviour seems stronger in relation to woodland creation.

19. Personal contact with an **advisor** affects grant uptake for woodland creation, whereas advice alone may be effective in influencing management of neglected woodland.
20. A few studies draw out differences of attitudes and / or behaviour between different subgroups of those surveyed, and two studies construct **typologies** of different kinds of owners. The question of whether such segmentation is more widely valid, and helps to target support and incentives, is not addressed in the existing evidence. One particular challenge will be to test indicators which help to assess which 'type' an owner falls into, if indeed such types are widely applicable.
21. Few studies indicated or accounted for the variation in stakeholders resulting from differences in **land use context**. For example, the differences between arable, dairy and upland sheep farmers need to be drawn out more explicitly in any further work. -

Research gaps

22. Whilst the combined evidence provides wide geographical coverage, it consists of location specific studies which are patchy and unsystematic.. The great majority are located in counties in England, particularly the well-wooded southern counties. Studies in Scotland focus predominantly on farmers' attitudes to woodland planting and grants, in the 1990s. Wales and Northern Ireland are poorly represented over the whole period.
23. There is a clear need to relate what is known, to environmental and social / cultural context; and for a national study to explore **regional differences**.
24. There is a lack of **qualitative research** in this area. The predominantly structured quantitative surveys provide no opportunity to enhance understanding of the ways in which cultures and social networks shape values and decision-making processes, and how those may change in response to information and experience.
25. Most of the existing studies focus on trees and forests, but landowner's make decisions about a range of resources, and in response to an array of incentives and regulations including agricultural and environmental grants and programmes. A study is needed to put decisions about woodland in the **landowner's complete context**.
26. Various sets of **stakeholders** are neglected in the existing evidence: new landowners, agents and managers, community woodland groups, local authorities, and corporations. It would also be helpful to gain a better understanding of tenant farmers' attitudes. -

Full report:

Lawrence, A., N. Dandy and J. Urquhart (2010) Landowners' attitudes to woodland creation and management. A review of evidence in the UK. www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/ownerattitudes

Further information

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