

# IF A JOB'S WORTH DOING...

**When faced with a deadline, there are a number of common responses.**

1. Get the job done as quickly as possible without much thought to what you are setting out to achieve.
2. Procrastinate, which often leads to missing the deadline or simply turns into a slower way of arriving at response 1.
3. Give the job the time and effort it deserves, as this should lead to the best results.

DEFRA are being forced into procrastination when it comes to developing and introducing replacement subsidy schemes by the current political turmoil and its fall-out.

The Agriculture Bill published last September sets out a way forward for policy in the UK, but this is one of the many casualties of the car-crash that is British politics. The Bill has effectively missed its deadline for passing through the parliamentary process and will now have to be reintroduced in the new parliamentary session.

This political inertia is contributing to the RPA's decision to offer one-year extensions to those with HLS agreements expiring in 2020.

The big question for those farms receiving these offers is, of course, how should they respond?

Before rushing into signing up for another year, I would suggest it is worth considering that these schemes were designed by the applicants and their advisers to fit with their farm businesses and enterprises 10 years ago. To put that time period into perspective – Gordon Brown was the UK's prime minister at the time!

So rather than simply signing up for another year of a scheme that is familiar, but may or may not be fit for purpose today, it is

worth reviewing the opportunities that are available. Life without agri-environment or a Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) application are the two obvious alternatives.

There are a multitude of reasons why those presented with this scenario will opt for extending their HLS agreement, rather than contemplating the alternatives. Here are just a few:

- CSS has received a huge amount of bad press
- Signing up to a five-year agreement now may mean missing out if and when a shiny new agricultural support scheme is introduced
- A new CSS agreement is unlikely to dovetail with an expiring HLS agreement, leaving a gap for a period of 2020 when the farm will not be accruing agri-environment funding

However, each of these reasons can and should be viewed as an opportunity.

Due to the maligned of CSS in the farming press, there has been little if any competition to date. This means that a farm previously in HLS can often put together a CSS application that improves on the agreement it replaces. An increasingly hands-off approach from Natural

England means a greater flexibility to design an agreement that really fits your farming.

A big reason why signing-up for CSS has to date been rather underwhelming is that there is a tendency to use the promise of a newer, better scheme to delay jumping in to a scheme now, but we have been here before. In 2003/04, there was a concern that signing up to the original CSS and ESA agreements would mean missing out on the benefits of what turned out to be ELS in 2005. However, as some may recall, for many it was possible to actually reap the benefits of both schemes at the same time, meaning that those who took the plunge into CSS and ESA in 2003/04 were actually better off than those who didn't.

There is no reason to think that this time around things will be any different. This administration has been quick to state that they do not want to disadvantage those already committed to existing schemes.

A gap between schemes may mean missing out on payments for a short period, but it does provide time to reorganise your farm to suit a new application.

For example, returning grass to arable cultivation could significantly increase your options under a new scheme. The chance to address any problem areas outside of the restrictions of an agri-environment agreement should not be overlooked.

It's important to consider all the options before making a decision. In other words, option 3 is the way to respond to this particular deadline, if you want to arrive at the best decision for your business.



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