Written Question

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to promote sustainable farming; and what assessment she has made on the effect this will have on (a) Totnes constituency, (b) South Devon and (c) England.

James Paice (Minister of State (Agriculture and Food), Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)

The first priority in DEFRA’s business plan is to support British farming and encourage sustainable food production. Sustainable farming is essential to protect the natural resources on which future food production depends, and to protect biodiversity and the countryside. We are working closely with industry partners to achieve this: by backing the industry led Campaign for the Farmed Environment and Greenhouse Gas Action Plan. Specific support that DEFRA provides to farmers to help them undertake sustainable farming is funding via the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) in the form of agri-environment schemes such as Entry Level Stewardship, Higher Level Stewardship and Uplands Entry Level Stewardship. We also provide advice and guidance on effective nutrient management of land to maximise efficiency whilst minimising environmental impacts.

The Department uses a number of complementary approaches to assess the economic, environmental and social impacts of sustainable farming policies, including on the wider rural economy, but measured principally at a national level. These include specific evaluation projects, such as that of the RDPE, monitoring the uptake of relevant schemes, such as Entry Level Stewardship and the Campaign for the Farmed Environment, and developing comprehensive indicator sets to monitor progress along the economic, environmental and social vectors. Among these a small number of high level impact indicators will be used to track progress with respect to the DEFRA business plan but a much wider range of information is available, in particular, from the Agricultural Change and Environment Observatory indicator set, published at: DEFRA Observatory Programme

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