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## Why do farmers participate in agri-environment schemes?

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Agri-environment schemes (AES) that pay farmers to modify their farming practice have been implemented in Europe for forty years but there has been little understanding about what motivates farmers to participate. A new review of research in this area brings together some useful insights.

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### What are the research findings?

Research has shown some key factors that influence farmers:

- Payment levels and the associated disruption to farming practices are major drivers.
- Farmers who are most dependent on farm income and who use a high proportion of family labour are less likely to join AES.
- In general larger farms find it easier to adopt less intensive measures and this may influence their participation in AES.
- Lower productivity of the land makes it more likely that farmers will join AES to compensate for lower returns.
- Presence of a successor generally makes a farmer less willing to embark on a long term contract that they may be unable to complete.
- Previous personal involvement in schemes seems to make farmers more willing to adopt an AES.
- Being able to benefit from neighbours' experience is a positive driver for uptake.

### How could policy improve uptake?

To improve uptake policymakers could:

- Involve farmers and land managers in designing schemes that appeal more to practitioners.
- Use effective knowledge exchange brokers eg land advisers to promote schemes and a wider understanding of ecosystem service approaches, and provide them with training.
- Ensure influential social and agricultural organisations receive information and training about AES.
- Involve successful users as advocates and encourage farmers to work together to implement schemes at a landscape scale.
- Consider a more flexible approach, allowing incremental adoption of changes to farming systems, with phases of increasing intensity and associated increases in payment.
- Encourage greater involvement of successors in decision-making on AES, or introduce new policies where contracts could be modified or withdrawn in the event of changes in management.

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