

**NEWS RELEASE:**

6 December 2013

**Appeal for land to benefit from biodiversity offsetting funds**

Landowners interested in managing land for the benefit of wildlife are being asked to come forward and potentially benefit from £20 million of new 'biodiversity offsetting' funding.

The news follows the proposals made by Defra in September that could see farmers offered payments in exchange for the creation or restoration of wildlife habitats, and a landmark partnership between farming and food supply chain group, AB Agri, and biodiversity offsetting brokers, the Environment Bank.

Under the proposal, the new funding would be derived from the sale of 'conservation credits' to developers who need to offset their environmental impact.

"Through the new partnership, we are aiming to create or restore 1,000 hectares of valuable wildlife habitats delivered through £20 million of new offset funding," says David Langlands, of AB Agri's AB Sustain division.

Biodiversity offsetting is a tool available to developers who have already followed the normal on-site steps to 'avoid and mitigate' their environmental impact; offsetting can then be deployed to compensate for any residual loss of wildlife habitat. This residual impact is quantified by the Environment Bank using government metrics and compensated for through investment in biodiversity restoration and long-term management on nearby sites. The overall result will be a gain in the quantity and quality of UK biodiversity.

Professor David Hill, Chair of the Environment Bank, said: "A commitment to biodiversity conservation of this type and scale has never been seen before from within the UK food and farming industry and it is an indicator of how the private sector is recognising and responding to UK biodiversity decline. Historically, development and agriculture have had the biggest impact on our natural environment, so this new agreement demonstrates a major turning point in how these two sectors are now working together to prevent biodiversity loss in a practical and tangible way".

Dr Tom Tew, Chief Executive of the Environment Bank, said: "This is an unprecedented chance to create a robust network of wildlife habitats on hundreds of farms across the UK. Until now, residual impact to biodiversity from development has been ignored or inadequately compensated for – leading to biodiversity loss. Biodiversity offsetting provides a comprehensive habitat impact assessment for developers, resulting in fair and objective compensation that will deliver a new funding stream for habitat restoration and long-term conservation management of UK biodiversity."

David Yiend, Chief Executive of AB Agri, said: "This is a tremendously exciting opportunity for UK landowners. Biodiversity offsetting offers our farmers the opportunity for long-term income in return for conservation-based land management. The price of the conservation activities is set by the landowner and is dependent on the amount of activity being

undertaken. Perhaps most importantly the landowner maintains control over the long-term management of the land and the offset does not affect their access and ownership. ”

Farmers interested in becoming involved in the biodiversity offsetting proposals should contact Ruth Williams, AB Sustain, 01452 317770.

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**For further information and interviews, please contact:**

**Environment Bank:** Tom Tew at [tomtew.environmentbank.com](mailto:tomtew.environmentbank.com) or 07919 044936

**AB Agri (AB Sustain division):** David Langlands at [david.langlands@abagri.com](mailto:david.langlands@abagri.com)

**Notes to editors:**

**Biodiversity Offsetting** is a way to measure the impacts of development in one place and then clearly compensate for them elsewhere. Offsetting identifies the wildlife ‘value’ of land that is impacted by development and then creates another area with the same or better environmental value at a new site, which goes under conservation management. National government metrics are used to measure the value at both sites and ensure overall environmental gain.

- Biodiversity offsetting complies with the ‘mitigation hierarchy’ (first avoid, then minimise, then mitigate on-site, then offset) and only applies to sites that have already been identified as appropriate for development. Offset receptor sites – sites where there are plans for long-term habitat creation or restoration – can be put forward by anyone; landowners, farmers, or conservation bodies.
- Some habitats cannot be re-created; therefore biodiversity offsetting does not apply to irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland. Neither does it apply to protected sites, such as SSSIs, which are safeguarded from development by law.
- Offsetting is supported by government (<https://www.gov.uk/biodiversity-offsetting>) - it was a key policy initiative in the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper and six government pilots are testing how it will work. Offsetting is not, however, restricted to the six pilots – planning authorities in England and Wales already have the power within the planning system to require offsetting as a planning condition or obligation.

**Agricultural land** in England (including common rough grazing) at 1<sup>st</sup> June 2013 was 9,485,000 hectares (source DEFRA)

**The Environment Bank** is a private company set up to deliver biodiversity gain through ‘biodiversity offsetting’. They work with Local Planning Authorities to incorporate offsetting into their planning process, with developers to calculate environmental impacts and with landowners who have conservation sites that can deliver biodiversity gain from the sale of conservation credits.

For more information visit: [www.environmentbank.com](http://www.environmentbank.com)

**AB Agri** is the agricultural division of Associated British Foods plc, and operates at the heart of the agri food and drink industry with activities that stretch from ‘plough to plate’. The business’ unique breadth and experience enables it to add value and drive profit for organisations all along the food, drink and biofuel industry supply chain.

For more information visit: [www.abagri.com](http://www.abagri.com)

**AB Sustain** provides on-farm and supply chain services, to major brand owners, that help them make their agricultural supply chains more sustainable.

For more information visit: [www.absustain.com](http://www.absustain.com)