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INTRODUCTION

Agricultural land is under pressure as never before. Increasing concerns about food security, driven by the need to feed a growing population, are balanced by the need to conserve our environment and maintain the ecosystem services it provides. These issues are recognised by policy makers, and two of the key ambitions presented in the recent Natural Environment White Paper produced by the UK Government were “protecting and improving our natural environment” and “growing a green economy”. To date, the main vehicle for environmental conservation on farmland has been agri-environment schemes underpinned by cross-compliance, but voluntary approaches such as the ‘Campaign for the Farmed Environment’ in England have also played a part. This volume contains papers presented at a three day conference held in April 2013, following on from a previous conference on agri-environment schemes held in 2010. The conference was held at a time when the next phase of CAP reform was under discussion, including proposals for the ‘greening’ of the CAP. Papers in this volume report on evidence gathered from research and monitoring programmes, and how this informs the potential roles of existing and novel approaches to environmental management in the agricultural landscape of the future. In addition to results from ecological studies, the role of the farmer is also considered. Methods of engaging the farming community in environmental management and the provision and effectiveness of advice and support are highlighted. Papers were offered by authors from across Europe, and the collection presented here provides a snapshot of the state of play with regard to environmental management on farmland in the early part of the second decade of the twenty-first century.

The information contained in this volume will be of interest to all who are concerned with the future of the agricultural countryside of Europe, including policy makers, researchers, advisers, agricultural land managers, students.

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