



# A clear solution for farmers

CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING

## Farmer engagement in water sampling

### Tweed, Aln, Coquet and Coastal Streams Catchment (25)

CSFO: *Stuart Moss*

The Hetton Burn is a small sub-catchment of the River Till. Historically the burn has had problems with water quality and it has had several marginal water quality failures against River Quality Objectives (RQO), attributed to nutrients, prior to the commencement of CSF in 2006. The Burn drains a small catchment of approximately 3440ha.

The land is divided between 21 holdings. These holdings are generally mixed units with large areas covered by grass and stock dominating in the upper reaches that drain from North Moor and Kemping Moss. Arable takes over down stream from Hetton Hall. The Environment Agency (EA) samples close to Hetton House where the Hetton Burn joins the River Till.

### Pollution Problems

The Hetton Burn was targeted based on data from a single EA water sampling point. Work was needed to determine where there were real problems.



View across Hetton Burn to Cheviots



The first phase of CSF aimed to achieve engagement with 75% of the holdings within the Hetton Burn sub-catchment; we exceeded - all the holdings had a 1:1 visit. Visits to the catchment and the whole farm appraisals highlighted there is good practice in the catchment, but there were practices that required addressing by CSF, and some of which were beyond CSF remit.

Practices and issues ranged from some stock access to the burn, to an increase in the number of new on farm housing developments and no corresponding improvement in sewage treatment facilities.



Buffer strips

## Pollution Solution

In order to target the second phase of advice delivery it was decided by the local Catchment Steering Group that a more detailed picture of the water quality in the burn was required. We knew that the problem was upstream of the sampling point, but not the tributary or reach that was causing the RQO failures. More detailed sampling was needed. The EA didn't have enough flexible resource to increase sampling, so other ways to sample were discussed.

A solution was proposed by one of the estate farm managers in the catchment - if the EA could provide a simple water testing kit and some local training they would carry out a sampling programme. Stuart Moss obtained a simple dip test kit, trained the estate staff and provided a list of sites that would capture data from the whole lower Hetton Burn.

The first trial period between early May and late June showed no real trends or issues. But the biggest success was that the farm manager was more aware of water quality and wanted to gather more information to target where they were potential problems. There are plans to extend the monitoring to coincide with nutrient spreading and rainfall events.

## Farmer Engagement and Motivation

The involvement of the farming community in the identification of pollution trends in water courses running through their own land has been critical to achieving the levels of engagement and advice uptake that CSF has enjoyed in the north of Northumberland. In the words of the Estate Manager, "if we know where the problems are we can do something about them".

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