

The Farm Business Survey (FBS)

What is the FBS?

Your questions answered.

The FBS is widely recognised as the most authoritative survey of the financial position and performance of the businesses of farmers and growers in England and Wales. It is paid for by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the National Assembly for Wales and is supported by the farming unions, the Country Land and Business Association and the Tenant Farmers' Association.

Q. HOW WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART?

- A. You will receive a complimentary management account and information, which will help you to assess the state of your business and compare it with similar businesses in your region.

Valuable management information produced by your local Centre will allow you to measure the performance of your business against the regional standards for specific farm types. The regional reports are well regarded by agricultural and horticultural advisors, bankers and accountants as being an authoritative source of farm management information.

Q. WHAT SORT OF INFORMATION DOES IT COLLECT?

- A. The FBS collects a range of management accounting information on all aspects of farmers' and growers' businesses.

This includes information on the revenue and costs of the farm or horticultural business; assets and liabilities; how the land is used; areas and sales of crops; sales and purchases of livestock; and the amount of labour used. It also collects more simplified information on the overall revenues and costs of farm-related businesses and on other sources of income.

Q. WHAT ARE THE RESULTS USED FOR?

- A. The results inform farmers and growers, the agricultural and horticultural industries, government and the general public about the economic state of farmers' and growers' businesses. The results are also used for academic research and benchmarking purposes.

The FBS is highly respected and the results are accepted as representing the economic state of farming and horticulture as it really is. The results are only published in the form of group averages for sample sizes sufficiently robust to ensure anonymity. FBS results can be compared with the state of your business by using "Farm Business Benchmarking Online" (www.farmbusinessbenchmark.defra.gov.uk).

The press, the farmers' unions, the Country Land and Business Association and the Tenant Farmers' Association often quote figures from the FBS when representing the industry, as do MPs representing rural constituencies and many others. Government ministers use the information to monitor, develop and evaluate national and international agricultural policy and to test how effective government support is for environmental schemes. The European Commission also use the results to develop policy.

Q. WILL I HAVE TO PAY TO TAKE PART?

- A. No, the Government pays for the FBS as a public service.

Q. HOW MUCH OF MY TIME WILL IT TAKE UP?

- A. The FBS will not take very much time because the information will come from your existing financial records and documents.

You do not need to keep any extra records. Your local Centre will tell you about the way it collects information. Once you have agreed to take part in the FBS, the way in which information is collected will be for you and your local Centre to agree. This typically takes the form of one or two on-farm interviews each year together with access to your existing financial records and documents.

Q. WHO ELSE WILL SEE MY RESULTS?

- A. Only your local Centre will be able to identify the information you provide. Your local Centre will not reveal to anyone else that you are taking part in the FBS.

Your local Centre will ensure that any information which can be identified with your farm will be held in **strict confidence**. Before any information is passed to the Government, each farm is coded so that the name and address of the farm is known only to your local Centre. Even the anonymous data that are passed to the Government are subject to strict controls and are handled by only a small number of people. The confidentiality policy for the Farm Business Survey is available from your Centre on request and can be found on the Internet (www.defra.gov.uk/esg/default.htm search for 'confidentiality').

Results of the FBS are published only as grouped information or as averages, from which it is impossible to identify data from any individual farm business. With this protection, the results

are published as widely as possible. FBS data are also used for academic research, but again the same rules apply.

Q. HOW WAS I CHOSEN?

A. You were chosen **at random** from the agricultural census.

The address of your farm was drawn at random, from lists provided by the Census Branch of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We recruit new farms every year to replace those farms that no longer take part in the FBS. You do not have to take part in the FBS.

Q. HOW MANY OTHER FARMERS TAKE PART?

A. Over 2,300 individual farm businesses in England and Wales take part in the FBS.

These cover all the main types of agricultural and horticultural businesses. Around 500 businesses take part in each of two similar surveys carried out in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Q. WHY SHOULD I TAKE PART?

A. The reputation of the FBS depends largely on the sample being balanced to represent all types and sizes of farm in all areas of the country.

Your farm has been chosen, along with others, to provide a varied and balanced representative sample. However, if you decide not to take part, we will try to substitute another farm of similar size and type so as to maintain this balance.

Q. HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO STAY IN THE FBS?

A. You are free to leave at any time.

Most farmers and growers who join the FBS decide to stay in the sample for many years, some up to 15 years - the maximum under current rules. This allows for continuity in the relationship between farmers and researchers from the Centres. This is important as the process of collecting information, **in strict confidence**, depends largely on the goodwill that develops between farmers and growers and local Centres.

Q. WHO CARRIES OUT THE FBS?

A. The FBS is conducted in England by a consortium of seven FBS Research Centres, led by the University of Nottingham, which are located regionally at universities and colleges. In Wales the FBS is conducted by the University of Wales at Aberystwyth. The Centres employ qualified and experienced researchers to carry out the FBS.

Q. WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE FBS?

A. Visit the FBS web site at www.statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/asd/fbs/default.htm.

Alternatively contact your local FBS Centre:

Charles Scott
Farm Business Survey
School of Agriculture, Food & Rural Development
University of Newcastle
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
NE1 7RU
Telephone: 0191 222 6657
E-mail: charles.scott@ncl.ac.uk

Mervyn Lewis
Rural Business Research Unit
Askham Bryan College Co. Ltd
Askham Bryan
York
YO23 3FR
Telephone: 01904 772218
E-mail: ml@askham-bryan.ac.uk

Philip Robertson
Rural Business Research Unit
University of Nottingham
Sutton Bonington Campus
Loughborough
LE12 5RD
Telephone: 0115 951 6071
E-mail: philip.robertson@nottingham.ac.uk

Ben Lang
Rural Business Unit
Department of Land Economy
University of Cambridge
19 Silver Street
Cambridge
CB3 9EP
Telephone: 01223 337169
E-mail: bgal2@cam.ac.uk

Alison Tanton
Farm Surveys Section
Wye Campus
Wye
Ashford
TN25 5AH
Telephone: 020 7594 2950
E-mail: a.tanton@imperial.ac.uk

Rod Vaughan

Agriculture and Food Investigation Team
Department of Agricultural & Food Economics
School of Agriculture, Policy and Development
The University of Reading
PO Box 237
Reading
RG6 6AR
Telephone: 0118 378 8960
E-mail: r.l.vaughan@reading.ac.uk

Keith I Robbins
Rural Business School, Duchy College
c/o University of Exeter
Lafrowda House
St German's Road
Exeter
EX4 6TL
Telephone: 01392 263849
E-mail: k.i.robbins@exeter.ac.uk

Tony O'Regan
Institute of Rural Sciences
University of Wales
Llanbadarn Campus
Aberystwyth
SY23 3AL
Telephone: 01970 622253
E-mail: farmsurv@aber.ac.uk