

# COMMON LAND AND AGRICULTURE



The grazing of domestic stock on common land, especially in the uplands, remains fundamental to many farm businesses. In this working landscape, hill farmers and crofters use their rights to graze hardy breeds, which are well suited to the local terrain, and often named after the areas where they are found. Traditional farming practices, developed over the centuries, continue to provide naturally-reared products from marginal land.





Common grazing generally forms one component of wider, integrated farming schemes. In many areas farmers manage a three-tiered system that links the productive and fertile fields in the valley floor, the slopes of rougher pasture, and the open hills where communal sheep and cattle grazing takes place.

In the case of sheep, each flock has its own established area of the common (often known as heft, lear or sheep walk) and generations of lambs learn from their mothers the bounds of territories. Flocks are linked to particular farms, providing a continuity of management and shepherding that is rare elsewhere. The open nature of common land requires farmers to

work collaboratively to manage shared resources. Farming communities still engage in cultural traditions such as pony drifts, sheepdog trials and shepherds' gatherings that help underpin communal working. Hill commons also play a part in the wider sheepmeat industry, contributing to crossbred 'mules', which are important in the production of fat lambs.





- There are an estimated 8,000 active commoners in England, Scotland and Wales.
- Common grazings account for over 12% of Scotland’s actively farmed land.
- Around 650,000 breeding ewes and 85,000 cattle and calves are kept on farms with common land in Wales.



- There are 24,157 entries in the Commons Register in England, most of which concern grazing rights for sheep and cattle.
- The estimated total output for upland farms with common land in England, Scotland and Wales is £840 million per year.



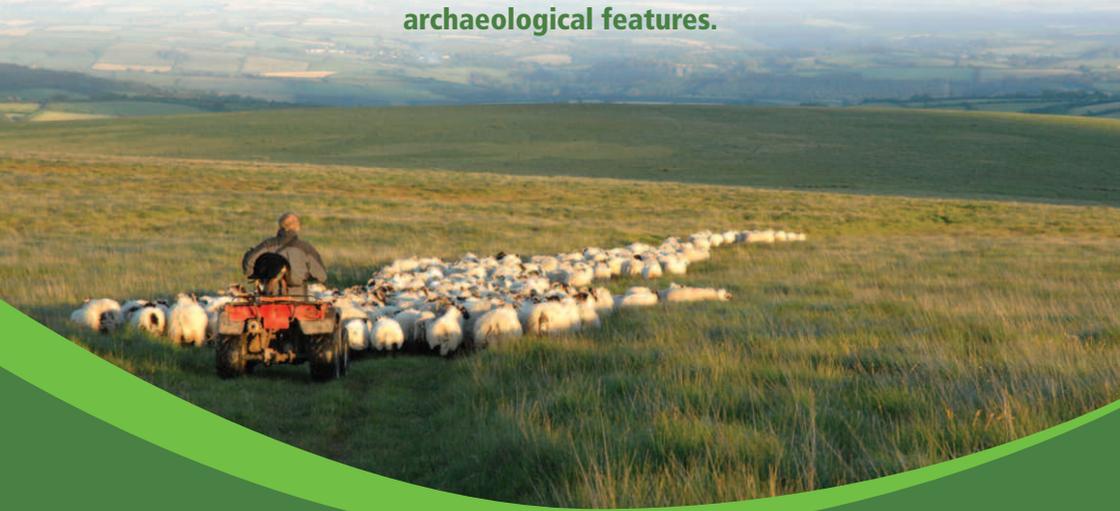
- Many commons have been grazed communally for hundreds of years, and in some cases over a millennium.
- Three million, or 45%, of England’s total breeding ewes are based in the uplands or their fringes, where the majority of common land is concentrated.



- In England around 210,000 ha of common land is managed through Environmental Stewardship, which generates an estimated £19 million per year
- Nearly all Scottish and 75% of the English and Welsh common land is found in the uplands.



The production of food from common land is dependent on communal working, maintaining traditional hefting techniques, and retention of local infrastructure and expertise. Once lost, these can be very difficult and expensive to re-establish. The farming enterprises of commoners and crofters also underpin many other rural businesses, such as hauliers, agricultural suppliers, markets and the food and catering industry. Hence commoning plays a significant role in keeping local communities and traditions alive, whilst also managing the landscape for the wider public benefits of access, tourism and the conservation of wildlife and archaeological features.



*Keeping commons alive by active grazing*

[www.foundationforcommonland.org.uk](http://www.foundationforcommonland.org.uk)

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**Our vision is of thriving commoning communities across Great Britain and beyond making real contributions to economic, cultural and environmental wellbeing**

