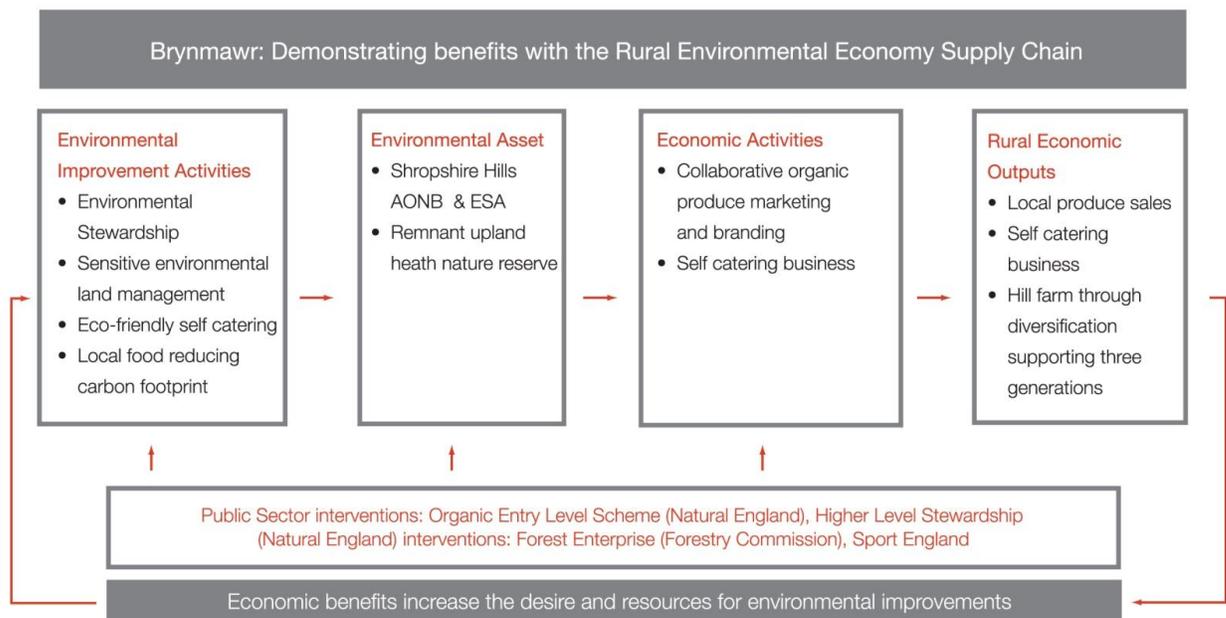


Case Study 6 – Brynmawr, Clun Forest, Shropshire

Brynmawr: Using and enhancing high quality environmental assets to make a living out of a hill farm

- Organic approach to hill farm livestock rearing
- Organic vegetable business
- Collaborative marketing and selling through local outlets and internet
- Eco-friendly self-catering accommodation
- Farm supports three generations



The project and the people behind it

Brynmawr is a farmstead situated high in Clun Forest in the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It has been in the Wheeler family for a number of generations and is now run by Trevor Wheeler, wife Sue and son Paul, helped out by Trevor's father. It is becoming increasingly difficult to make a decent living as a hill farmer and the Wheelers are diversifying their efforts in order to ensure that the farm pays.

The farm has been fully organic since 2003, starting its conversion in 2001. Trevor's motive for going in the organic direction is clear; he suffered from organo-phosphate poisoning.

All animal feed is organically grown and the farm sells root crops in local farmers markets, in collaboration with other local growers. Potatoes are a Clun speciality, and Brynmawr grows them for organic seed and takes part in trials of new blight-free varieties. Brynmawr has recently developed eco-friendly self catering accommodation.

Public Sector Support Received*:

- Organic Entry Level Scheme (Natural England)
- Higher Level Stewardship (Natural England)

* These funding streams may have changed

The environmental assets of the area

Environmental Asset

- Shropshire Hills AONB & Environmentally Sensitive Area
- Rhos Fiddle: 180 acre nature reserve consisting of unimproved upland heath and bog.
- Traditional hill farming landscape.

Brynmawr is situated in the stunning landscape of the AONB and part of the Environmental Sensitive Area. The way the farm is managed ensures it retains its traditional hill farm appearance.

Rhos Fiddle, a large area of unimproved upland heath and bog lies at 1300 feet on top of the hill above the farmhouse. It is very important both for its landscape and its biodiversity. This 180 acre nature reserve is owned by Shropshire Wildlife Trust and grazed on a business tenancy by the Wheelers’.

Selling food locally at farmers markets results in reduced food miles reducing the carbon footprint.

The approach taken to the self-catering cottage is also a low carbon one in terms of materials used in renovation, in running the house and helping guests to travel sustainably.

How the environment is used for economic benefit

Economic Activity

- Collaboration with local farmers to brand local organic produce as 'Clun Valley Organics' and sell wide selection through a local shop.
- Sells organic produce through
 - 4 local farmers markets
 - own Clun Valley Organics website
 - Other outlets
- Eco-friendly self catering accommodation.

The farm is in High Level Stewardship and these payments help make it viable for the Wheelers to manage it in the way they have chosen.

New ventures such as the cottage will eventually make their contribution to keeping the whole business viable.

The farm has diversified into local food, selling mainly root crops through the 'Clun Valley Organics' brand. This is in collaboration with other local growers in order to provide a good variety of types of vegetable. Under the Clun Valley Organics brand sales are made through the four local farmers markets and through an organic shop in Ludlow. In addition they sell to other outlets and through the internet.

Rhos Fiddle, nature reserve is grazed on a business tenancy by the Wheelers' Hebridean sheep and Highland cattle. Lamb and beef from the reserve is sold through the local farmers markets, the farms own Clun Valley Organics website and other outlets. Wool goes to a spinner and knitter in West Wales. The fleeces from the Hebrideans are worth nearly three times as much as those from other types of sheep on the farm.

A recent venture has been the renovation of a traditional stone built cottage on the farm as self-catering accommodation. Inspired by his daughter, Trevor decided that Buckshead Cottage was going to be as eco-friendly as possible and make use of local materials in order to respect landscape character and the historic interest of the traditional farm buildings. It has a wind turbine to generate electricity, solar panels to heat the water, heating is by a wood burning stove using wood from the farm. It is insulated by sheep wool largely from the farm, local green oak is used for window frames etc, ash for the staircase and alder for floorboards. The provenance of most of the actual trees used is known. Kitchen work surfaces are made from recycled plastic coffee cups. A particularly nice feature is the availability to guests of vegetables from

raised beds in the garden. Guests are actually keen to do the weeding as well! Sustainable travel is encouraged by the provision of three bikes that are very popular (despite the hills!), and an offer to meet guests off bus or train.

As part of Stewardship agreements, the farm takes educational visits from local schools, and the Wheelers want to increase these.

The economic benefits

Economic Outputs

- Produce sales through local outlets.
- Income from self-catering accommodation.
- Environmental Stewardship income.

Economic Benefits

- Farm diversification supporting three generations of the family.
- Collaborative produce marketing to improve overall customer offer.
- Sustainable tourism accommodation.

The various elements of the business, organic livestock farming, local food, the seed potatoes and self-catering business combine to enable three generations to make their living from the farm.

Partnerships with other organic growers in marketing and selling of produce under the Clun Valley Organics brand have increased market access through providing a good range of product for customers. Collaborative sales are through the internet and local outlets, such as farmers markets.

The fleeces from the Hebridean sheep are worth nearly three times as much as those from other types of sheep on the farm, providing additional income.

The self catering accommodation provides another income stream for the farm and benefits the local economy through indirect local spend from customers.

How the environment benefits

Environmental Improvements

- Higher Level Stewardship
- Sensitive management of Rhos Fiddle nature reserve through managed grazing.
- Organic farm practices

Environmental Benefits

- Sensitive traditional hill farm management.
- Local food reducing carbon footprint.
- Low carbon build creating, and maintaining, self catering accommodation.

Rhos Fiddle Nature Reserve has a grazing regime to manage it with traditional methods used before agricultural improvements. This is achieved through using breeds of cattle and sheep that allow it to be managed as a remnant of what the Clun Forest would have looked like before agricultural improvement created richer grazing swards. Protecting and reinstating the type of landscape and habitats that would have covered the top of the Clun Forest.

A low carbon approach is taken through selling food locally, reducing the carbon footprint, and through the way the self-catering accommodation has been renovated and is managed.

Future plans

Brynmawr is increasing collaboration with other organic growers in marketing beef and lamb. Meat from Highland cattle and Hebridean sheep grazing a high quality landscape should be attracting a better premium. The farm is developing a partnership with the Wildlife Trust to marketing meat from the nature reserve to members and through the Trust's shop.

The self catering cottage is only into its second season of letting and Trevor's daughter has taken on marketing it through an improved multi lingual website and other means.

Supply chain links between environmental assets and economic activities

The diagram below illustrates how the rural environmental economy model operates in the Brynmawr enterprises, how the farm's high quality environment is being used to

produce economic benefit and keeping the farm viable, and how its environment benefits in its turn from the management regime on the farm.

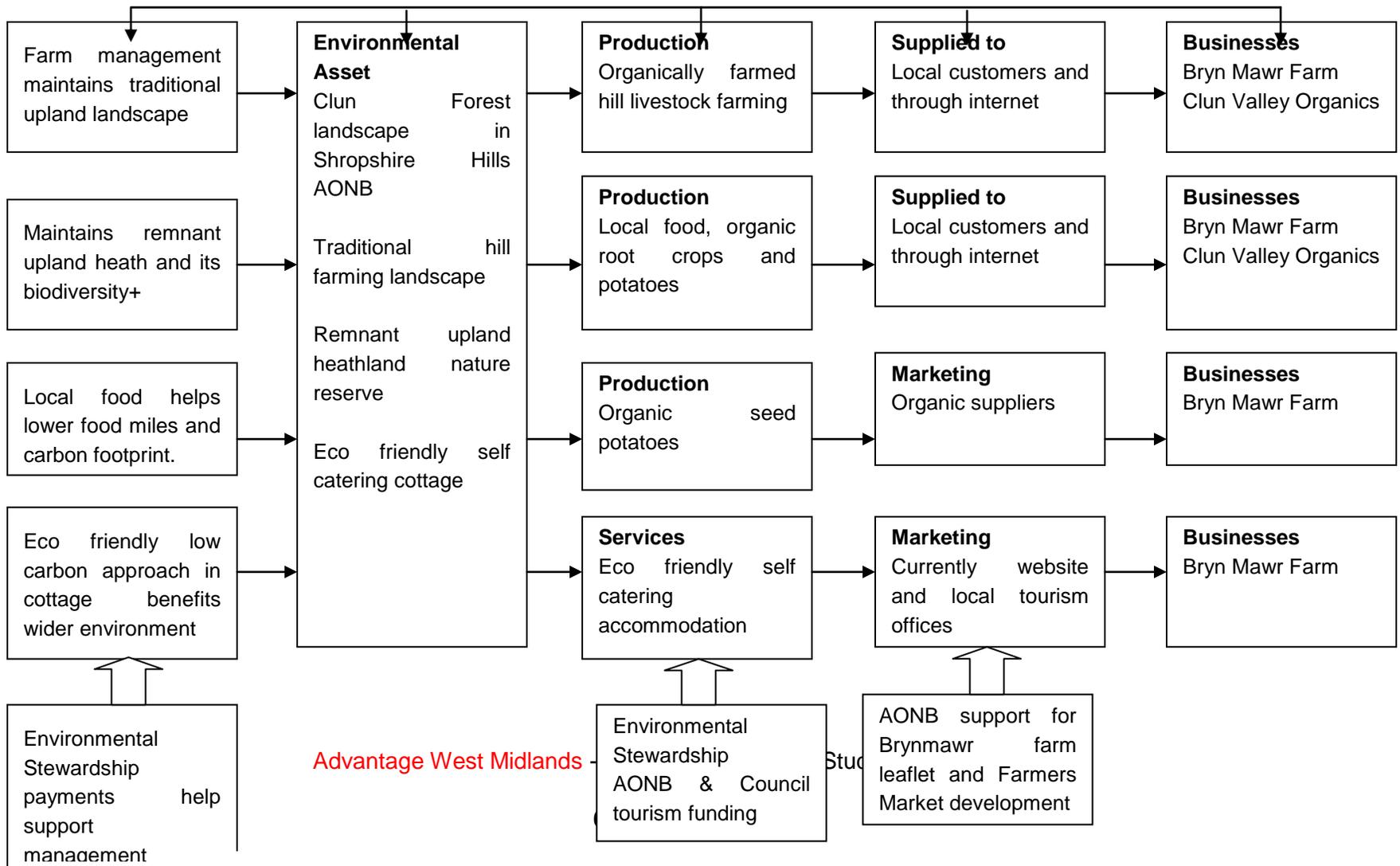
The boxes at the foot of the diagram show where intervention from public agencies in the form of funding and other support has 'oiled the wheels' and made the rural environmental economy model work.

'Supply Chain' links between Environmental Assets and Economic Activities

BRYNMAWR



Economic benefits increase the desire and resources for environmental improvements



Support Needs / Support Providers

Contacts

Mr Trevor Wheeler
Brynmawr Farm
Newcastle
Craven Arms
Shropshire
SY7 8QU

01588 640298

www.clunvalleyorganics.co.uk

www.buckshead-eco-cottage.co.uk

Email: brynmawr@farmersweekly.net