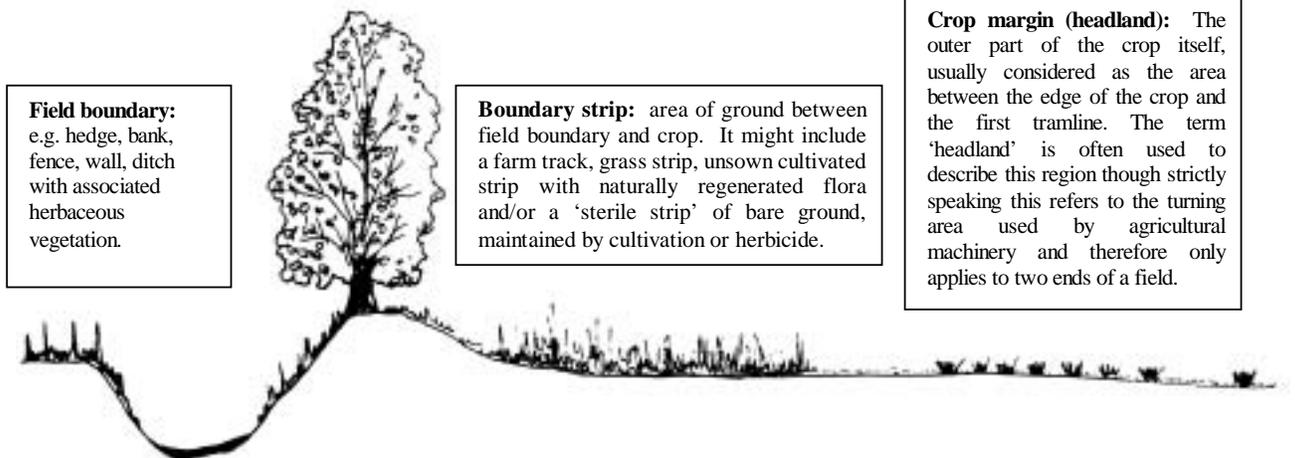


FIELD MARGIN MANAGEMENT



Although every farm is different, one thing they all have in common is the presence of field margins. With suitable management, these can provide valuable habitats for wildlife. There are three distinct areas making up the field margin:



Introduction

Intensification of agriculture has led to a decrease in quality, or loss of many of the wildlife habitats previously found in field margins: many plant species have been lost and so animals which depend on them for food or shelter cannot survive. This has been exacerbated by a reduction in boundary strip width, spray and fertiliser drift and deliberate use of herbicides to control weeds. There are now, however, **alternative methods** of management which benefit both agriculture and the environment.

Field boundaries

By altering the management of field boundaries, for example the cutting date of hedges, their value for wildlife can often be improved. For more details, ask your FWAG adviser.

Boundary Strips

Establishing well managed boundary strips can give effective control of annual weeds such as cleavers, barren brome and blackgrass and can provide substantial habitats for wildlife.

Some general points

- Each management option can be tailored to fit the needs of the individual farm

or field, to give the maximum benefits.

- There is no set width for a boundary strip, although it is usually recommended that they are at least 1m. The width depends on the size of machinery which the farmer intends to use in the margin's management and will therefore vary from farm to farm.
- It is important that the strip is not subjected to spray or fertiliser drift. Spray can harm wanted species, while fertiliser benefits a few species which then dominate the margin. These prevent the establishment of other species.

Establishing boundary strips

There are three basic alternatives:

- Retain the existing boundary strip but alter the management to increase the benefit to wildlife.
- Sow a strip, 1 - 2m wide, of either grasses or grasses with a wild flower mixture.
- Manage the natural regeneration of a fallowed boundary strip.

In each case, the field is then cropped fully to the edge of the strip.

Once established, the management will vary according to the objectives of the farmer, but will usually involve cutting at least once a year and might involve the selective use of herbicides.

The benefits

The management, because it is selected for that farm, generally requires no new equipment.

Managing boundary strips as described above develops a dense perennial understorey with few patches of bare earth. Gaps allow weeds to establish and encroach on the crop and so by eliminating them, weeds can be controlled. This type of management also provides valuable habitats for wildlife, the exact management will depend on the particular interests and objectives of the

farmer. Grass swards provide cover for insects and small mammals, which in turn supply food for other animals such as owls, while the addition of wild flowers is not only visually attractive but provides pollen and nectar, which attract insects such as hoverflies.

Although many farmers are concerned that this type of management will increase the populations of insect pests, many of the beetles and hoverflies that are supported by boundary strips are natural predators. They can move into the crop and help to keep pest numbers below threshold levels, removing the need for insecticide use.

Further information

For details of your local FWAG group, please contact FWAG at the National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2RX.

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Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy in this information sheet. However, FWAG cannot accept liability for any errors or omissions.