Research conducted as part of the Demonstration Test Catchment (DTC) project has explored the factors influencing farmer adoption of diffuse water pollution mitigation measures by conducting 58 in-depth farmer interviews in three contrasting DTC catchments: the grassland dominated Eden; the arable dominated Wensum and the mixed and dairy farming of the Tamar. This policy briefing focusses on the farmers’ attitudes towards farm advisors.

**Who would farmers listen to and why?**

During the interviews, farmers were asked whether they would listen to advice from particular advisors about mitigation measures and why. To evaluate response vocabulary, word clouds were chosen as an innovative visualisation method. Word clouds give greater prominence (text size) to words or phrases with a higher frequency of use, providing a clear, visually rich representation of key words from interview transcripts. Fig. 1 below shows the word clouds generated, with red text representing negative reasons as to why farmers wouldn’t listen to the advisor and blue indicating positive factors.

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**Fig. 1.** Word clouds showing farmers’ comments to describe why they would (blue text) or wouldn’t (red text) listen to advice from advisors.
Regional differences in attitudes towards advisors

A previous DTC research which interviewed farm advisors, found that the role of the advisors and organisations changed across the different catchments. In line with such findings, farmer attitudes towards advisors also differed between catchments. Fig. 2 demonstrates the different vocabulary farmers used for Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers (CSFOs) in the three catchments.

![Word clouds representing the vocabulary used to describe CSFOs by farmers in the three catchments.](image)

Farmer and advisor attitudes

During the farm advisor interviews the advisors were asked what they thought influenced why a farmer would take up their advice. These responses were compared with those from farmers to evaluate whether the views align, and therefore whether advisors have been promoting and emphasising the characteristics farmers perceived to be important.

For the majority of cases, views did match up. CSFOs identified **grant** as a key factor, as did farmers in the Eden and Tamar, but CSFOs also stated **cost-saving** and **credibility** as important characteristics, whereas farmers did not. Several other organisations also specified **cost-saving** as an important reason why farmers listened to their advice, however farmers refrained from mentioning this, failing to make the connection between water pollution mitigation and cost savings. A further discrepancy occurred with responses provided by advisors from environmental organisations. Such advisors placed emphasis on **grants** as a key factor, however they failed to appreciate the value of **local evidence** and **knowledge** that farmers perceived in such organisations (see Fig. 1).

Through the use of word clouds, this research has demonstrated a novel and effective visualisation technique for analysing qualitative data. The farmer survey results show:

- The reasons why farmers listen to advisors vary appreciably.
- Important positive reasons for listening to advisors included: grants, knowledge, trust, continuity, clear advice and local evidence.
- The variations in why farmers listen to CSFOs across the three catchments highlights the importance of building a trusting relationship through staff continuity.
- Comparing advisor and farmer perspectives suggests the link between diffuse water pollution mitigation advice and cost-savings needs to be made more explicit.
- Environmental organisations should emphasise their local knowledge and evidence to increase farmer uptake of advice.

To disseminate advice effectively it is essential to appreciate who farmers listen to in each area and why, as farmer attitudes towards advisors varied across catchments, with different attributes being of importance.

Further information: This survey was conducted as part of the Demonstration Test Catchments project which is a collaborative research project funded by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). To find out more, or if you have any comments or queries, please contact Emilie Vrain (e.vrain@uea.ac.uk)