

# Ploughing, Crops and Public Rights of Way

Walking and riding in the countryside brings many people into contact with the farming community and its work. The public's view of the farmer and, by implication, the agricultural industry as a whole, can easily be damaged by problems experienced when using public rights of way.

Well maintained paths send out a positive and welcoming message to the public and help to reduce the incidence of trespass and accidental damage caused by people getting lost. They also help to provide people with the opportunity to understand and enjoy the countryside around them.

Failure to properly reinstate public rights of way over cultivated land and to maintain them free of crops, continues to present significant problems to those wishing to use and enjoy our network of footpaths and bridleways.

As a farmer or landowner it is **your** responsibility to ensure that all public rights of way that pass over land which you occupy and cultivate are maintained to the standards required by law.

The aim of this leaflet is to provide practical advice to help you to comply with all legal requirements in relation to cropping and ploughing and to avoid the need for intervention by the County Council.

The information provided is the result of detailed discussions between the NFU, CLA, The Ramblers' Association, the Chiltern Society and Buckinghamshire County Council's Rights of Way Team.

**Please take the time to read it and ensure you make copies available to your employees and contractors.**

## Ploughing and Cultivating

In the first instance you should always consider if it is possible to cultivate the field in such a way as to *avoid* disturbing the path at all. This may save you both time and money in the long run.

The law allows you to plough **cross-field footpaths and bridleways** *only* if it is not convenient to avoid disturbing the path. This may only be done if you are sure, *before* you disturb the path, that you are in a position to clearly indicate the line of the path on the ground, and to reinstate the path's surface to the minimum widths, within the time limits allowed. *Do not disturb the path unless you are able to reinstate it properly and within the time limits.*

Ensure your employees and contractors are made aware of all public rights of way over your land that are likely to be affected by their work, and the minimum widths at which they must be maintained *before* ploughing takes place.

**Field edge or headland paths** should *never* be disturbed and must be left uncultivated to at least the minimum widths required. The maintenance of natural surface vegetation rests with the County Council. *Please let us know if headland paths become overgrown.* It is, however, the landowner's responsibility to ensure that field hedges and adjacent crops do not overhang and obstruct these paths.

## Path Widths

These widths apply only to those paths specified in the Rights of Way Act 1990. They have no other application in law, nor should they be applied in other circumstances. They are not intended to set a standard for all rights of way, nor do they limit the public's established rights of passage in any way.