

## A future Sustainable Farming and Land Management Policy for England: Frequently Asked Questions

### What's wrong with the current system of agricultural support?

The current system under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is dominated by 'direct payments' that are based on how much land someone farms, rather than the public benefits they create through farming. This means that farmers and land managers are not paid for the produce they grow or the benefits their efforts provide.

This has long been inefficient, ineffective and inequitable, not just for the environment but also for farm business viability - and it does little to address concerns about the UK's overall food security and resilience in the face of climate change and other risks. It also does far too little to support the kind of countryside, or food production, we really need. In the future, there will need to be more evidence of the effective use of taxpayer money if farming payments are to continue.

As the UK leaves the EU, we will need a new system of support for land managers and farmers in each nation; we support the Government's review of the system and want to help create a new, sustainable and effective system that works for everyone for the long term.

### What are your ideas for how a future system is designed?

Our solution means repurposing the current system of farm subsidies so that farmers and land managers are paid to deliver public benefits instead of simply being paid for the amount of land they own or farm.

Any new system should build from a strong legislative baseline, with payments provided for actions above and beyond this. This will help to set the standards by which this system is run, and enshrine the principle of ensuring no harm to the environment.

### Why do you think this is the best option?

What we are suggesting is a positive move towards a sustainable future for nature, food and people. We believe that a thriving environment is the basis of our country's prosperity. This means clean air, water and soil, and healthy harvests for food, fuel and building materials. Sustainable land management is essential to ecosystem services such as crop pollination, and the wider rural economy, for example in underpinning tourism.

Producing high quality food will continue to be central to most farmers, but they also have a crucial part to play in improving biodiversity, protecting vulnerable natural resources (such as soil) upon which our economy depends, as well as caring for our landscape and heritage, looking after the welfare of livestock, and helping address growing challenges like climate change and flooding. As farmland covers over two-thirds of the UK, farmers and land managers have a critical role to play and should be properly remunerated for it.

### What do you consider 'public benefits'?

Public benefits are goods and services that would not otherwise be provided by markets. For example:

- Protecting, restoring and enhancing biodiversity
- protecting vulnerable natural resources such as soil upon which our economy depends
- providing clean water
- caring for our landscape and heritage
- delivering high levels of farm animal welfare
- helping address growing challenges like climate change and flooding

### What's the difference between a farmer and a land manager?

Around 70% of land in England is farmed, and many farmers, who's primary activities may be focused on the production of food and other products, have a critical role to play in securing a range of public benefits as land managers. We therefore believe that we need to think much more broadly about the role of farmers and farming in society, and whilst we recognise that they have a critical role to play as food producers, we also need them to deliver a whole range of other benefits and services from land.

In other cases, the primary purpose of an organisation or individual will be associated with land management, such as foresters and other woodland managers, or organisations and companies that manage land specifically to secure environmental benefits.

In the future, we need to think beyond the narrow idea of 'farm support', and instead think more generally about the outcomes that we want from land. In some cases, this may be to support farmers to produce food more sustainably by embracing their role as land managers, in other case it will involve policy securing sustainable land management, regardless of whether food production is taking place.

### How does farming, land management and the environment fit together under your proposed system?

The farming, land management and the environment are inextricably interconnected: the wellbeing of species such as birds and pollinators shows us what is happening to the less easily understood ecological processes like those taking place in soil or water. If nature is doing badly, then food production – which relies on healthy soils and clean water will soon start suffering too.

### Doesn't this simply undervalue agriculture compared to the environment?

Not at all: not least because the benefits agriculture and land management provides us all with should not solely be limited to food, fuel and timber. We strongly believe that farming can also provide beautiful landscapes which provide vital food and shelter to wildlife, and which at the same time can reduce flooding, store carbon in soils and improve water quality.

A new approach, supporting agriculture to provide this range of benefits, is urgently needed because, as the 2016 State of Nature report and other evidence highlights:

- Agriculture remains the biggest driver of biodiversity decline across the UK – farmland birds have declined by 54% since 1970
- Soil degradation in England and Wales costs £2.1billion a year
- Agricultural land management is both the single biggest cause of pollution incidents in England, and the sector responsible for the greatest number of water bodies failing to meet Good Ecological Status
- Agriculture accounts for a tenth of all UK greenhouse gas emissions

Too often, public policy has caused and exacerbated environmental harm. We now have the chance to use policy to drive restoration of the environment across the country. Agriculture will need to play a key role in achieving this, and policy should support farmers and land managers in this.

### Why should farmers and land managers continue to be given public money anyway?

Three quarters of the land in the country is used for agriculture and the way this land is managed is important to us all. We all need a countryside that delivers what the conventional market won't pay for - abundant wildlife, clean water, beautiful landscapes, high standards of animal welfare, public access, and land that plays its part in mitigating climate change. All of this is also underpins great quality food production. It is right that society continues investing public money, as long as that money is used effectively to support activities that produce public benefits.

### **Why does a new system need a strong regulatory baseline? Does this just mean more regulation?**

Legislation will set the standards by which this system is run, enshrine the principle of ensuring no harm to the environment, and provide an effective basis for public investment. It will also provide important certainty and a level playing field for producers, be integral to maintaining public trust in UK produce and ensure that those playing by the rules don't lose out. Poor farming methods might save some individual farmers' and land managers' money in the short term, but will result in costs borne by others, by society and the environment overall.

### **Have you spoken to farmers and other land managers about your proposals?**

Yes. We have already consulted with a selection of farmers with whom our member organisations work and we continue to work closely with farming organisations including the CLA, TFA and NFU as our thinking develops.

We also want to drive a conversation about what the nation wants from its land, and are seeking to stimulate debate between the government, farmers and land managers, conservation organisations and the wider community, about how the industry can be supported to deliver what the public want and need from our countryside long-term.

We strongly believe that justifying future public investment against the environmental benefits farmers and land managers can deliver will provide the stable policy that the sector needs, and real added value for the public.

### **Won't new trade agreements prove more important to farmers and land managers anyway?**

As part of the EU, the UK has relatively high food safety and environmental standards. The UK is also a world leader in farm animal welfare. There is a real risk that once we leave the EU, bilateral trade deals with the US and other countries could result in much weaker protections. Farmers and land managers do not want this, and neither does the British public.

Trade agreements will have a big impact, and must include commitments to uphold and improve our environmental and food safety standards. But a land management policy and payment system will continue to be what farmers and land managers use to steer their efforts, as well as set the expectation for what a thriving farming system should look like.

### **Won't these plans lead to higher food prices?**

This is a false choice— we can have a healthy and wildlife-rich environment and good quality, sustainably produced food. In fact, we think the long term sustainability of farming, as well as facing up to new challenges like climate change, will depend on working in balance with nature. The natural environment underpins food production; working to maintain and improve it is vital to the long-term viability of the sector, while not doing so could in itself lead to price volatility in the future.

There are still huge imbalances in the way that the money we as the public pay for our food gets distributed along the supply chain, with farmers often getting a raw deal. More work is needed to ensure that this is rebalanced. We also need the remit of the Groceries Code Adjudicator to be extended to help ensure fair treatment right along the supply chain.

### **Shouldn't a future policy be designed around food security?**

Food security is often taken to mean the need to boost UK food production levels, particularly through more intensive farming methods. However farmers already receive a financial return for producing food; they should be more fairly rewarded through the market, not paid simply to grow more food. This means

food security, in this sense of increasing UK production, should not be the basis for public policy or public payments.

Food security is more than ensuring a plentiful supply. It is also about ensuring that the very systems that farming relies on to produce food are supported and enhanced, including healthy soils, stable climate, thriving biodiversity and clean water - everything advocated in our approach.

Food security is also about maintaining good international relations and trade deals that are fair to facilitate imports of the food we need, whilst ensuring that the way the UK produces and consumes food does not undermine farmers and communities in other countries. The use of large areas of land around the world to grow animal feeds and the production of biofuel crops both mean less land can be used to grow food for direct human consumption. Decreasing both these land uses would help to improve food security.

Our proposals are consistent with promoting food security under this broader definition.

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