



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
Standing up for your countryside

CPRE's Vision for the future of farming: The future of beef and sheep farming

Beef cattle and sheep are reared to provide us with meat, leather and wool, but they are also essential for maintaining many of our most important wildlife habitats as well as the character of many beautiful landscapes, whether in the lowlands or uplands. These include moorlands, heathlands, wood pastures (grazing areas within open woodlands) and coastal marshes.

Most sheep spend the entire year outdoors, while most beef cattle live outdoors for the majority of the year but (apart from some very hardy breeds) are housed indoors in the winter. Cattle and sheep are often kept on land that has no alternative agricultural use, and so make an important contribution to a sustainable domestic food supply. In England 40% of agricultural land is considered as only being suitable for growing grass.

Beef in the UK is produced to some of the highest standards in the world. No growth-promoting hormones are fed to beef cattle in the UK and antibiotics can only be administered under veterinary direction. Britain's cattle passport system means that each animal can be traced both genetically and to its place of birth. However, until relatively recently low incomes for beef and sheep farmers have meant that many farmers face a struggle to remain economically viable.

There is a strong inter-relationship between the dairy and beef sectors and, because of supplementary feeding of livestock with animal feed, between the arable and livestock sectors. While high prices can be good news for arable farmers this is often the reverse for livestock farmers.

Beef and sheep farmers in the uplands (areas that include some of our most beautiful landscapes such as the Lake

District, the Peak District, the Yorkshire Dales and Moors and Dartmoor) face a distinct set of environmental and economic challenges. The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) believes that while it is important to remember that the uplands and lowlands are interdependent, both environmentally and economically (e.g. the uplands are a source of water for the lowlands while the lowlands bring visitors to the uplands), it is right that there should be Government policies and measures that address the particular economic and environmental circumstances of our upland areas.

Key issues

Environment

Raising beef cattle and sheep has mostly made a positive contribution to the character of our landscapes and beef and lamb are an important part of many local food networks. Keeping animals in fields means that boundary features such as hedgerows and dry stone walls are maintained and habitats continue to be grazed.

In the past overgrazing caused a number of environmental problems, for example soil erosion and the loss of rare plant species. This was largely due to the fact that farming subsidies were paid for each animal so rearing more animals meant more money. Now, in England, agricultural payments from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are paid to farmers according to how much land is being farmed. In some places undergrazing is now an increasing problem. Scrub (bushes and small trees) can start growing on important habitats, replacing rare species, and roots growing down into the ground causing damage to historic sites. The effects of grazing animals on habitats can be complex. In many areas mixed grazing is required, as cattle and sheep are selective in the plants they eat. Grazing produces different outcomes compared to burning or cutting vegetation. Additionally, many insect species rely on dung for reproduction.



**Beef in the UK is produced
to some of the highest
standards in the world**

2 CPRE's Vision for the future of farming: The future of beef and sheep farming

In terms of water pollution, in general, extensive beef and sheep farmers do not face the same problems faced by dairy farmers and intensive beef producers with excessive amounts of nutrients polluting streams and rivers causing algae to grow damaging aquatic wildlife.

There have been a number of research studies that suggest having different mixes of plant species in pastures can help prevent methane emissions from livestock, increase the nutritional content of meat, boost soil fertility and increase the amount of pollen and nectar available to insects helping to boost wildlife.

Climate change

Recently the contribution of livestock to global warming has become a major concern. Methane emissions from livestock have been identified as a significant contributor to global warming. Methane accounts for almost 40% of greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and 85% of that is from intestinal fermentation. Approximately two thirds of total emissions from beef and sheep farming are methane.

In climate change terms there is an environmental dilemma between the sustainability of indoor and outdoor livestock production. It is argued that the diet of the animals can be better managed if they are kept indoors so they produce less methane. Manure and slurry can be collected for bioenergy in indoor production and animals expend less energy than those roaming freely in fields. Raising animals intensively indoors could mean more land is available for other uses, for example carbon-absorbing forests. But in some countries growing animal feed (such as soya) to sustain indoor production has led to forest being converted to arable land. This usually requires the use of fertilisers (producing artificial fertiliser generates considerable amounts of greenhouse gases) to grow animal feed crops without any of the associated benefits for maintaining grazed habitats or landscapes.

Economics

For many years beef and sheep farmers faced falling incomes due to the low prices paid for beef and lamb and there was a decline in the number of beef and sheep farmers.

However, more recently prices have started to increase. Global meat consumption is expected to rise by 3.7 million tonnes by 2020, with some predictions of a 5.5 million tonne shortfall between supply and demand by 2015.

In England, the June 2010 farming census reported that suckler herd numbers (herds of cows used for raising beef cattle) have actually risen slightly, to 756,000, compared to a 27% fall in the English breeding

herd between 1990 and 2009. But the dairy herd, which supplies half of our beef, has fallen to 1,160,000.

The economics of how meat is processed is also important. Local abattoirs are an important part of the livestock supply chain, and mean animals do not have to endure longer journeys than necessary on the way to slaughter. However, the number of local abattoirs has been falling which can make it more difficult and expensive for beef and sheep farmers to slaughter their animals, with additional costs reducing profits.

Heritage and rare breeds can provide added value for extensive livestock farmers. These breeds have often been bred to optimise meat production for particular geographic or climatic conditions. In addition rare breeds contribute to the cultural heritage of our countryside by providing distinctiveness and variation. They also provide an important 'genetic bank' that may provide genes to help tackle disease.

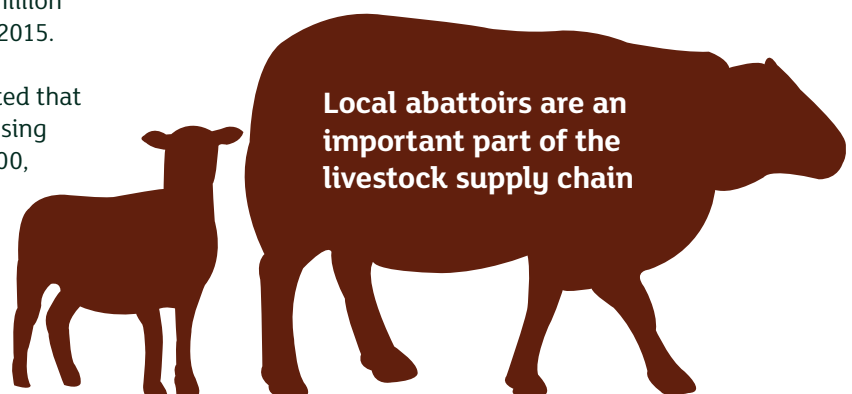
The future of beef and sheep farming?

Extensive production: wild beef

Hill Head Farm in Dartmoor produces beef from native breeds of cattle, chiefly Welsh Blacks and South Devons which are reared and finished on the farm. The animals are only fed on uncultivated grassland. The meat is sold via mail order and at local markets.

The idea behind wild beef is that, as all food originates in the soil, it should follow that the soil with the greatest fertility (minerals and trace elements) should produce food of the highest nutritional content. Raising cattle on nutrient-rich unimproved pastures ensures that minerals and trace elements are retained in the beef.

Grazing land that has not been intensively farmed supports a well-established sward of grasses, herbs and other plants. Undisturbed by ploughing, such vegetation roots deeply to reach those minerals and trace elements which the cattle can convert into meat that is of a high nutritional value. Perennial plants on permanent grasslands help regenerate the structure and goodness in the soil.



3 CPRE's Vision for the future of farming: The future of beef and sheep farming

The future of beef and sheep farming – CPRE's vision

CPRE believes that the Government should do more to support the production of environmentally sustainable beef and sheep meat products. While changes to European farming payments and world trade rules mean that direct support connected to the numbers of livestock raised is no longer possible, there are other ways of helping livestock farmers to remain economically viable and environmentally sustainable.

CPRE would like to see the Rural Development Programme for England administered by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Natural England prioritise economic and social funding streams toward supporting sustainable beef and sheep farming. This includes support for local abattoirs and meat processing facilities and developing green farming schemes so they support extensive grazing systems which are important for landscape character and wildlife. These use large areas of land which allow livestock to graze on grass that doesn't need its growth boosted with fertilisers which can pollute waterways.

We have supported a number of campaigns that have highlighted the importance of livestock to maintaining the character of the countryside and that have called for more support for sustainable, extensive grazing. It formed a key part of our Mapping Local Food Webs campaign. We also supported the National Farmers' Union Why Beef and Sheep Farming Matters campaign and in 2010 we participated in a campaign with a number of other organisations to lobby for a Sustainable Livestock Bill.

CPRE believes it is important that in the future green farming scheme payments for the environmental management of the uplands should be expanded to encompass activities that are currently undervalued by society. These include paying farmers to look after their soils (such as peat) so the carbon and other greenhouse gases stored within them doesn't escape which can happen if it is drained to make it better for grazing. Upland soils

can also absorb large quantities of water allowing it to flow more slowly which can help avoid floods downstream and can provide a source of water during droughts.

In many cases the continued provision of these environmental public goods (also known as ecosystem services) will depend on the continuation of livestock farming systems.

CPRE believes that upland beef and sheep farming should be profitable, but not at the expense of the environment. It is understandable that after enduring many years of low incomes and losses, upland farmers are keen to capitalise on any rise in prices for their produce by increasing numbers of livestock. However, we should avoid a rush to re-stock the hills to the levels that in the past led to serious problems with overgrazing which caused soil erosion in some areas, and could potentially even risk a return to low prices as a result of over-supply. CPRE believes adding value by improving the quality of the meat produced and shortening the supply chain between farmer and consumer can provide longer term returns rather than focusing on quantity alone.

What you can do

- Support British beef and sheep farmers by buying meat that carries the Red Tractor logo, LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) marque or the EBLEX (English Beef and Lamb Executive) Quality Standard Mark.
- Wherever possible buy local beef and lamb. Find out more, visit: www.cpre.org.uk
- Ask staff in butchers and restaurants about who supplies their meat, and ask managers of supermarkets what steps the company is taking to ensure a sustainable future for Britain's beef and sheep farmers.

CPRE believes adding value by improving the quality of the meat produced and shortening the supply chain can provide longer term returns



Campaign to Protect Rural England

5-11 Lavington Street
London SE1 0NZ

T 020 7981 2800
E info@cpre.org.uk
www.cpre.org.uk

CPRE is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England, number 4302973
Registered charity number 1089685