



The
countryside
charity

CPRE's Policy on Farming

1. Introduction

At a time of immense policy change and growing environmental, social and economic pressures, farmers¹ have to address a range of challenges. These include producing the food we need at an affordable price in a more volatile world; reduce waste and greenhouse gas and other pollution; and manage their land to deliver greater public benefits. These benefits include helping to reverse the decline in biodiversity, broadening access to and engagement with the countryside and improving the landscapes which are valued and enjoyed by millions. One of the real pressures farmers are facing is change to the type of government financial support under the Agricultural Transition: the single farm payment has been cut progressively and well in advance of a significant package of rewards from new environmental schemes coming on stream. Farmers will need to make far-reaching changes to how they farm to address these multiple issues but also to adapt to make their farms resilient to climate change and to earn a living. To enable them to successfully navigate this transition they will need people across government as well as other key actors in the food chain to put the right policies, incentives, and other support in place.

This paper summarises our overall approach and position and is accompanied by [a guidance paper](#) covering the points set out below in further detail and [a glossary of key terms](#).

2. A summary of our approach

Farming is the most widespread land use in the country. As the main steward of rural land, it is central to how the countryside looks, is managed and functions. Farming and farmers play a vital role in ensuring the countryside continues to provide vital public benefits for the nation. CPRE believes that we should properly safeguard farmland, its healthy functioning and the character and beauty of the farmed countryside so that these benefits continue to flow and, indeed, that the countryside delivers greater benefits for our long-term future. This, in particular, means protecting the farmed countryside from potentially damaging or unnecessary developments and other uses which will deplete its natural assets and the long term benefits they provide. The health and vitality of farmers and the sector itself are central to tackling the interconnected crises of securing our food supply, restoring nature and stabilising the climate as well as sustaining the health of the countryside. As such farmers should be properly rewarded by the market for sustainable produce and by public funding to enable them to deliver key goals set publicly.

¹ We refer to 'farming' and 'farmers', to simplify the text; this should be understood to include horticulture and growers working predominantly to produce food. We recognise that those who manage the land are diverse and they do so for many different reasons not only to produce food but also timber and other fibre crops, look after nature and the beauty of their surroundings as well providing recreation and therapeutic, social and well-being benefits.

This document sets out the changes that CPRE believes will make it possible to secure a sustainable future for farming. The principles set out in summary below are expanded upon in the accompanying guidance paper.

2.1 A thriving sustainable farming sector

CPRE wants farming to be a thriving, innovative, sustainable and diverse sector that benefits society as a whole, as well as economic activity and communities in rural areas and the wider environment. Government should play a key role in providing relevant support – in the form of joined-up farming, planning and rural development policy as well as through financial incentives (such as environmental land management payments), packaged and bespoke advice, grants and loans – to achieve:

– **a thriving diverse farming sector** - farming should be enabled to be financially viable by farmers receiving a fair share of profit from the marketplace for sustainable farm produce alongside fair reward for the delivery of environmental public goods. To support this government should apply the same standards strictly to imported farm products as are required of UK producers. We want working farms of all sizes retained with diverse forms of tenure to enable farmers to thrive at all scales and for the sector to be attractive and accessible to talent from a wider range of backgrounds.

– **environmentally sustainable farming** - farmers should be encouraged and supported - to apply integrated whole farm approaches that work with ecosystems, landscape context, and processes to make the best use of the natural productive capacity of their land, reduce inputs and greenhouse gas emissions, waste and costs and to minimize environmental harms.

- **a step change in (re)building local and speciality food supply** - sustainable and distinctive local food should be championed across government with joined up rural policy to help the development of more diverse, direct, resilient and fairer short supply chains. This should open up new routes to market and decent incomes for farmers and enable them to profitably sell produce locally from more diverse cropping and livestock under nature friendly farming.

– **farm diversification** - farmers should be enabled and supported where they wish to diversify their business and this fosters the continuation of sustainable farming and land management; delivers greater public benefits; and is in keeping with or will enhance landscape character and place.

2.2 Adapting farming to a changing world

The bases for our farmed food supply are threatened by degradation of climate, biodiversity and soils. A reductive either/or approach of land sparing or sharing is not the right way for farming to address these crises; we need farming to adapt to the local context of landscape and natural resources. All farming must adapt to become resilient and sustainable – reducing overall resource use and impacts to within environmental limits - to maintain food supply while delivering other critical natural services. Resource intensive farming to produce most of our food at scale will continue for some time alongside low impact forms of farming but it must genuinely be environmentally sustainable, not just more efficient at producing food.

It will be essential to work with nature to drive soil health, fertility, and resilience. Building natural assets to reduce input and other resource costs will also be essential for open field farming. These multiple challenges also mean high quality land with mineral soils must be strongly protected for food production. Expanding horticulture as part of making diets more diverse and reducing the environmental footprint of our food will be particularly important. Farming policies and practices should therefore:

- **address climate change** – farmers should be supported by government initiatives to adapt the ways they manage land, livestock, natural assets and energy use to increase the resilience of their farms and help drive down the carbon footprint of farming towards net zero and beyond.

- **reverse nature's decline** –the decline of nature should be reversed by making more space for biodiversity across current cropped and grazed land, farming in harmony with both ecological processes and landscape character and enhancing natural assets providing food and habitat for wildlife. In particular, we see a central role for restoring and growing our hedgerow network.

- **value high quality soils for farming in land use planning** – government land use policy should be integrated across agriculture, horticulture and planning to better manage multiple pressures on land from a strategic to local level, and to conserve and enhance the multiple critical functions of rural open land; a high priority should be given to protecting the highest quality soils for their strategic importance for food production.

- **promote sustainable horticulture** – government should take a strategic approach to ensuring a secure, sustainable resilient supply of food by supporting the targeted expansion of growing of horticultural food crops where there are deficits in domestic production which increase our reliance on imports.

2.3 Enhancing the character and quality of farmed landscapes

Farming should be supported to maintain and enrich the character, beauty and diversity of local farmed landscapes while adapting to address challenges and embrace new opportunities. We want government particularly to invest in farming which improves the Green Belt and countryside around other large towns and cities and in farming to manage uplands and more economically marginal areas of the lowlands. National character area profiles and evidence should be used to guide environmental improvements which work with local landscape character.

2.4. Building new and stronger connections between the public, farmers and the countryside

Government should implement measures to:

- Support local land use policy frameworks and decisions about funding public goods delivery on farmland, engaging those who own and manage land with local communities;
- improve the connection between local people and farmers and their understanding of the farmed countryside and from where their food comes;
- incentivise farmers to broaden access to the countryside in carefully managed sustainable ways.

CPRE

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