



The
countryside
charity

CPRE's Policy on Farming – Guidance Paper

This paper explores in more detail the position and principles set out in summary in the main Farming policy position paper. Note that an explanation of key terms can be found in an accompanying Glossary.

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 the wider rural economy, community and environment.

1.1 A thriving farming sector

Farming should be enabled to be financially viable by farmers receiving a fair share of profit from the marketplace for their farm produce alongside fair reward for the delivery of environmental public goods. Farmers at all scales and forms of tenure should be able to thrive.

What we want to see:

Farmers should be recognised as the key stewards of the countryside and they should be properly valued for their key role in: maintaining and enhancing the natural assets that are needed to produce our food, reversing the decline of nature and helping to tackle the climate crisis as well as delivering other public benefits.

Farming is a business and should be economically viable by deriving a fair profit margin for its product from the market. Supply chain practices should be regulated and monitored proactively to ensure farmers are treated fairly.

We want farming to remain diverse with working farms retained and operating successfully at all scales and types of tenure – from estates private and institutional and their tenants, family farms, contractors and corporations to community enterprises. Farming should be attractive and accessible to people and talent from a wide range of backgrounds. We will support initiatives to make farming more diverse including supporting the rights of tenant farmers.

Proper strategic consideration should be given to the impact of trade agreements on the competitiveness of domestic food production, the economic viability of UK farming and the implications for a secure domestic supply of food. High standards of animal welfare and sustainability should be required for UK food production and all food imports. UK production should not be unfairly undercut by lower standard imports leading to the export of production and of environmental and welfare harms and increased dependency on imports.

We will call for:

- farmers to be properly rewarded for adding value to natural capital and for the full range of public goods they deliver by environmental land management (ELM) payments and, when they mature and are well-regulated, by private markets for public goods;

- the encouragement of new entrants into farming from a wider range of backgrounds and their career progression through maintenance and expansion of the existing county farm estates;
- support for a fair transition which does not penalise sitting tenants and those farmers with less capital where structural or land use changes are required and farming stops.

1.2 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.

What we want to see:

Farmers should be supported across the farming spectrum to apply nature friendly approaches at whole farm scale that are systems based to harness synergies between different practices to underpin sustainable production. We believe that, despite potential yield penalties in early years, these are the best ways to sustain production of nutritious affordable food and are consistent with maintaining and (re)building healthy soils and other fundamental ecosystems and ecological processes for the long term. There is good evidence this can reduce resource use and associated input costs so improving the economics of farming. We also want to see farmers supported to successfully adapt to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change and to drive down the sector's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.

We want to see farmers supported and strongly encouraged by policy with relevant packages of advice, loans, grants and incentives to move towards farming approaches which:

- minimise damage from loss of soil, animal manures and other nutrients and agrochemicals to water courses and bodies including aquifers;
- prevent air pollution caused by loss of ammonia and nitrous oxides from fertilisers, manures and slurry;
- minimise the use of pesticides through their targeted and precision use and harness non-chemical pest control methods (such as broader rotations, predation, grazing, use of companion and of sacrificial crops).
- carefully conserve and manage water resources including via rainwater capture from farmyards, storage in farm ponds, wetlands and reservoirs, 'slowing the flow' through catchments and aiding infiltration by soil; these support water quality, groundwater recharge, flood peak management as well as improve resilience and reduce farm water abstraction affecting sensitive water bodies (such as chalk streams).

We want to see farmers well supported by relevant properly financed government agencies with the resources needed to efficiently reward, advise on and monitor ELM schemes. We want relevant government departments and agencies to carry out proper monitoring, evaluation and transparent reporting of delivery, to proportionately enforce regulations and effectively punish breaches by persistent offenders.

We will call for:

- the application of nature friendly farming practices, in particular, increased diversity in crop rotation and in-field; regenerative soil management and optimal use of livestock and pasture to match the natural carrying capacity of the land;
- the development and expansion of sustainable wet farming (or paludiculture) to conserve particularly lowland peat soils.

1.3 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.

What we want to see:

‘Local’ – defined at the level of region, sub-region and below - sustainable food production, distribution, public procurement and use should be championed by all levels of government: to maintain and build the diversity and resilience of food supply networks (from farm producers, processors to retailers); to increase routes to market; to strengthen public connections to and support for farming and food production; and to reduce systemic inefficiencies in the supply chain (e.g. food transport, packaging and waste). Regulatory oversight and cost need to be proportionate to the scale of the operation to ensure smaller-scale processing can remain viable. We support scaling up of specialty food production via building of cooperative networks of smaller specialty producers – such as achieved by Yeo Valley with its network of dairy farms or Lakeland Eggs supplied by small-scale farm-based woodland egg producers.

Building local food supply should assist the adoption of nature friendly approaches which may use crops and livestock - more diverse, heritage, landrace or novel crops and native or unusual breeds - not well catered for by mainstream food production.

We will call for:

- better join up of rural development policy and investment with wider farming policy and strategies to support local and speciality food production, processing, marketing and retail (including farm shops, farmers markets, local procurement) ;
- government support for maintaining and developing local processing facilities (e.g. packhouses, dairies, abattoirs, food hubs) to underpin more diverse and locally distinctive production and with proportionate regulation.

1.4 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.

What we want to see:

All forms of farm diversification should be sustainably located and are most appropriate where they support the continuation of land management practices that maintain or enhance the setting and character of the countryside, conserve local built and natural assets and a sustained transition to carbon neutral farming and beyond. Excessive or badly planned development, which damages the character and qualities of landscape that are central to its appeal to visitors, should be avoided.

National and local rural policy should foster sustainable tourism by managing economic development arising from diversification to avoid over-concentration and harm to the environment

and the quality and character of the landscape- particularly from infrastructure and traffic congestion.¹

We will call for:

- prioritisation of the sensitive reuse of traditional farm buildings first then, if necessary, more modern buildings where it can be demonstrated that such buildings are no longer suitable to meet the agricultural needs of the business;
- prioritisation of diversification to sympathetic land-based activities such as local food processing, camping/glamping accommodation; providing educational access; farm-based therapeutic and educational breaks and contact with animals; social prescribing and health walks.

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:

2.1 Address climate change²

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.

What we want to see:

We want to see farmers adapt and improve their energy use, land management and stock of natural assets to work on a whole farm basis towards production which is carbon neutral then carbon negative. This should include: retaining and building stored carbon through effective management of existing natural assets (grassland, trees, hedgerows, wetlands and soils); expansion of native woodlands and wetlands in suitable locations (without significantly compromising food production); and use of alternative approaches and technologies to reduce existing use of fossil fuels and overall energy demand for farming. This could include using feeds and breeding to reduce animal methane emissions and capturing methane from slurry. Farms should be enabled to sell genuine verifiable and long-term carbon storage in natural sinks as carbon credits into well-regulated private markets once they consistently generate surplus carbon storage, over and above any offsetting of farm emissions.

¹ See CPRE [Rural economy policy guidance note](#) Principle 15

² Note - these measures are set out in more detail in CPRE's [policy position on the climate emergency](#)

We will call for:

- restoration of upland peatlands and full or partial rewetting of lowland peatland and other wetland soils;
- reintegration of trees into farming via expansion of orchards and agroforestry, including hedgerows and hedgerow trees;
- maintenance and restoration of soil health including soil organic matter and biology through approaches such as regenerative soil management;
- roll out of a standardised on-farm carbon assessment and baseline to feed into a national agriculture target and reduction pathway.

2.2 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.

What we want to see:

We believe nature will need to be (re)integrated into most forms of farming to make the best use of natural assets including healthy soils to sustain food production and deliver other key natural services such as storing carbon, managing water flows and quality as well as restoring abundant and diverse wildlife and a healthy countryside. Equally some land will need to be given over predominantly to carbon storage and nature conservation and we support the use of lower quality, less or unprofitable land at the margins to provide dedicated space for nature including along hedgerows and other boundaries, water courses and bodies. We also want farming to continue in many areas where nature has co-evolved with it and where biodiversity as well as the protection of heritage and cultural landscapes depend upon retaining traditional forms of husbandry.

We will call for:

- the identification of environmental opportunities that work with landscape character and through landscape-scale collaboration and targeted habitat creation to improve connectivity across farmed landscapes, including restoration of and creation of new hedgerows, ponds, wetlands, semi-natural grasslands, and natural regeneration of scrub and woodland;
- the expansion of hedgerows as 'key ecological building blocks' in farmed landscapes in ways that are complementary to good stewardship – especially in intensively farmed areas where such networks have diminished or gone – by planting new hedgerows restoring lost hedgerows, repairing hedgerow gaps and rejuvenating under-, over- and unmanaged hedgerows;
- farmers to have the incentives to better manage all hedges and other boundaries to achieve good health and condition, to increase their value for wildlife and to connect nature across landscapes as well for multiple other benefits (such as carbon storage, landscape character and beauty, water management, soil and crop protection).

2.3 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.

What we want to see:

The government should attach much greater value to the multiple functions and services supplied by rural open land in all policy frameworks to reflect and respond to the urgency of tackling climate change, reversing decline of nature and securing food supply in a context where significant changes in land use will be necessary.

We will call for:

The government should develop a spatially explicit national land use strategy with a governance framework and policies and which is supported by up-to-date data of land and its ecosystem functions and services. This should enable science-based identification of areas of agricultural land classified by their intrinsic quality for agricultural potential (especially for vegetables, salads and other horticultural crops) and ensure they are protected as a strategic priority to maintain a secure domestic food supply.³ This should be future-proofed to address the potential loss of high-quality land due to increasing flood risk and the urgent need to rewet lowland organic soils. It should coordinate development planning – for transport, housing, energy, water and other infrastructure needs – to maintain the multiple ecosystem services of rural open land.

2.4 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.

What we want to see:

Horticulture should be supported by a national strategy to expand and diversify domestic supply of field vegetables, salad crops, soft and orchard fruit, beans, pulses, nuts and seeds produced sustainably. This should increase supply of fresh, nutrient rich foods, strengthen the resilience of the food supply chain, and progressively replace imports of air-freighted goods. Future expansion of food production should be targeted towards tackling areas of significant deficit in domestic production and tracking consumer moves to more diverse, low carbon and less resource-intensive diets. It is essential this includes effectively protecting high-quality mineral soils to accommodate a coordinated shift of such production away from vulnerable lowland peatland soils to rapidly reduce high carbon emissions and associated soil degradation. It will also entail more intensive under-cover horticulture. This must be carefully managed via land use planning and other policies to operate at locations and at a scale appropriate and sensitive to the setting and to minimize resource use including land and energy.

We will call for:

- small-scale sustainable horticulture to be supported on areas of existing farms and parcels of under-used land near to urban centres to increase local supply for catering, procurement and direct sales (markets, box schemes); support for greater integration of trees and bushes into farming via agroforestry to increase fruit and nut production.

³ The current means of identifying the agricultural potential of land is the Government's Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) which is the statutory mechanism for land use planning purposes.

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.

What we want to see:

- joined up policy across land use planning, environmental land management and wider forestry and farming policies to ensure that farmed landscapes, their heritage, character, diversity, quality and beauty are maintained and enhanced over time.
- particular attention to be given to Green Belt and other areas of farmed countryside near to large towns and cities and to upland and marginal lowland landscapes.⁴
- environmental land management funding to explicitly support investment in enhancing landscape character as part of the delivery of public goods. This should build on evidence and statements of environmental opportunity in National Character Areas mapping;⁵
- local partnerships involving farmers, landowners, local authorities, NGOs and experts convened and supported to develop a vision and plan for their marginal lowland and upland farmed landscapes, which addresses the challenges and opportunities by embracing change.

We will call for:

- environmental land management funding to be allocated at least proportionately (in terms of land area as a percentage of national total) to Green Belt and other areas around large towns and cities to enhance the countryside via farming and to improve other forms of land management such as land given over to horses and other equines;
- dedicated support for upland and marginal lowland areas via farming and environmental land management schemes to support sustainable low impact farming, including through a funded independent farm advisory service;
- joined-up rural development policy and application of rural prosperity funding to support farming in upland and economically marginal lowland areas with targeted grants and loans for positive sensitively managed diversification and to develop new income streams (such as via local food processing and selling; product development and marketing; accommodation; on-farm micro-businesses).

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

⁴ See CPRE's Green Belt PPS for more information: [Green Belt: CPRE's policy position - CPRE](#)

⁵ [National Character Area profiles - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

understanding of the farmed countryside and from where their food comes; incentivise farmers to broaden access to the countryside in carefully managed sustainable ways.

What we want to see:

We want farming as a sector to be more visible, better understood by, and more transparent to the public, with new connections, new types of engagement and better understanding formed between farmers and local people. We want models to be developed which foster local democratic engagement in publicly funded land use decisions affecting local people. This would enable better identification of opportunities for joined-up working and integration of different national farming, landscape and nature conservation policies as well as better targeting and synergy of funding across the local farmed landscape; these could also offer new opportunities for green volunteering to engage the public, offer green exercise and reduce the cost of improving the countryside.

There are well-understood health and well-being benefits to improving and broadening public access to the countryside but it needs to be carefully managed to respect nature and the countryside and those who live and work there. We want farmers to be properly rewarded for improving low-impact public access to the countryside.

We also want to increase appreciation of farming actions and outcomes funded by public policy by making them more visible via websites and other media, and, along public access routes, such as via signs and geotagging, to help people understand how and where money is spent well and to foster wider support for sustainable farming and environmental land management.

We will call for:

- Government to introduce measures to support local policies and decisions about funding public goods delivery on farmland through local land use frameworks, engaging those who own and manage land with local stakeholders and communities. Farmers and landowners to be given incentives and facilitation support to collaborate – potentially building on the existing farmer clusters model – with local communities and their representatives to enable better decision making about the future of their local countryside. This should include: developing models to feed into Local Nature Recovery Strategies developed by first tier authorities and to enable join-up between these and ELM schemes; and the allocation of resources proportionately to areas of Green Belt and other areas close to large towns and cities (peri-urban land) to support improved access to better quality countryside for all with particular support for underserved communities.
- Improved public access to be an explicit well-funded part of environmental land management schemes and to include:
 - improving existing rights of way infrastructure (eg stiles, signs, portage routes on water courses for water craft);
 - publicizing accessible routes via the web and other media, in particular to improve accessibility for currently disadvantaged groups;
 - working with farmers and landowners to create new better access routes and careful realignment to join up existing routes;
 - rewarding farmers for providing educational access to working farms;
 - creating opportunities for volunteering on farms including via community supported agriculture; supporting care farming.