

Introduction

In our country 80% of the land is shaped by farming. Yet the farming industry, already in crisis before the foot and mouth epidemic, faces an uncertain future. A crucial national debate on the future of farming and its role within the wider economy, environment and society has therefore begun.

This is the National Trust's contribution: setting out our long term vision for sustainable farming and proposing ten steps to help take farming forward in this country.

These proposals are rooted in our experience of owning 245,000 hectares of countryside, working with over 2000 tenant farmers and implementing our Agriculture Policy 2000.

We believe strongly that progress can be made by strengthening existing and developing new partnerships. We already enjoy strong links with our tenants, local communities, the public, government and its agencies, other charities and businesses.

We know we have much to contribute: but equally we cannot present the whole solution. We give examples where we believe we have made a start and set out our challenges to achieve more.

Beyond these steps, there are daunting obstacles to overcome if we are to achieve truly sustainable farming. International negotiation and agreement and changes in attitudes and behaviour will be required. For example:

- Facilitating a worldwide move towards sustainable farming, to enable all countries to benefit from better environmental and animal welfare standards, while ensuring that progress is not undermined by 'artificially' cheap imports produced by unsustainable methods.
- Reducing the use of and reliance on fossil fuels, especially in the intensive production and long distance transportation of food and agricultural products.
- Developing a land use planning system that provides a strategic framework for promoting sustainable land use, guiding farming change and discouraging damaging operations.

Our 2020 Vision for Sustainable Farming is in...

Land stewardship that:

- Contributes to quality of life for everyone.
- Produces healthy food that is widely accessible and is of benefit to the grower, processor and consumer alike, and is produced to high environmental and animal welfare standards.
- Produces a wide range of goods and services such as nature conservation, access and recreation, flood protection, fibre, timber, renewable energy etc. that yield income to reinvest in the land and support the people who manage it.
- Protects the country's most valuable natural and historic assets – healthy soil, clean water and air, a rich and diverse landscape – to ensure the wealth and health of current and future generations.
- Is guided positively by a strategic land use planning framework that encourages an integrated approach to land use management and adaption to change.
- Is integrated fully into the wider economy and society.

Farmers and other land managers who:

- Are able to make a living from their management of the land.
- Understand the importance of their role in safeguarding the nation's assets.
- Receive public recognition for the contribution they make to the whole economy and society, and earn public support for investment not only in quality food but also in their guardianship of the nation's assets.
- Are able to connect with local and regional markets, with added value from processing, marketing and retailing etc. accruing to local and regional economies.
- Are a diverse and evolving range of people and organisations, bringing different ideas, skills, techniques and jobs to their communities.
- Are included in decision-making processes, especially at a local and regional level.

Farming Forward



For further details contact

The National Trust
36 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AS

Telephone 020 7222 9251

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Towards Sustainable Farming

Ten steps forward

Private enterprise, public service

To move towards sustainable farming, we need to view farming as both a private enterprise and a public service. The market is expected to reward good business skills, but society should be prepared to reward the provision of public 'goods' and services such as access to high-quality landscapes, wildlife protection and water management. This will mean continuing to fund a part of the work of our farmers from the public purse. Public appreciation of the multiple benefits of farming will be critical in sustaining ongoing support, as will a clear understanding of how and why public money is being spent.

We are calling for:

- 1 Radical reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), so that by 2010 agricultural production subsidies are reallocated to a system based on positive incentives that reward the environmental, social and economic outputs of land management.
- 2 The expansion and integration of free environmental and business advice to farmers.

Our challenge is to:

- Pilot a series of partnership projects that explore alternative models for sustainable farming, to help set a new direction for a reformed CAP.
- Research the economic impacts, at farm scale, of public investment in sustainable land management, to contribute to a wider understanding of the 'public service' farming provides.

Sustainable farming systems

It is vital that we adopt more sustainable systems of farming that respect our fundamental resources: soil, water, air, bio-diversity, natural and historic landscape quality. Organic farming will continue to be an important component of sustainable farming and the sector's growth should be supported. However, conventional farms are likely to remain the major farming system in much of the UK and their environmental standards can and must be greatly improved. Conversion to Integrated Farming Systems (IFS), using best practice from conventional and organic systems, would offer every farmer opportunities to improve environmental and business performance across the whole farm. This shift would be given real momentum if the market rewarded high environmental standards with a price premium to farmers.

- 3 The development of a 'Green Farming Standard' and accreditation system, based on IFS, to be placed in the market between the minimum legal production standards and organic standards.
- 4 The development of a global standard and accreditation system for sustainable farming through, for example, a Land Stewardship Council as exists for forest and marine products.

- Work with our tenants to prepare 100 Whole Farm Action Plans a year, to facilitate the adoption of more sustainable farming practices.
- Work in partnership with farmers, consumers, the food industry, environmental and farming experts and government to develop and pilot a 'Green Farming Standard' in the UK.

A local food economy

A much greater focus on producing, processing, marketing and consuming food locally and seasonally is needed to underpin the move towards sustainable farming. This is a growing market sector that could and should receive further backing and encouragement. Most farmers are primary producers, subject to global market insecurity, with little consumer contact and with very low margins. Re-establishing local food economies will give many farmers the potential to gain economically from reduced supply chains, improved traceability and improved consumer confidence. Adding value to produce by exploiting local distinctiveness will also create jobs, stimulate associated industries and ensure more wealth is created and retained in rural areas.

- 5 Significantly increased financial and advisory support for processing, marketing and retailing local foods, especially smaller-scale initiatives, and for developing the supporting infrastructure, eg community cooperatives and an abattoir network.
- 6 The introduction of financial incentives to enterprises - from supermarkets to community and charity schemes - to source products and services locally, eg a 'carbon rebate' mechanism that rewards through lower National Insurance contributions.

- Take part in the Soil Association and Countryside Agency local food programmes that aim to support farmers' involvement in the local food economy.
- Buy a significantly increased proportion of food from our tenants and other local producers to supply our restaurants and cafes.

People and skills

In the business world investing in people is recognised as a key to success. Farming is no different. It needs a skilled pool of land managers to realise the multiple benefits offered by sustainable farming. Yet the industry is facing a recruitment and succession crisis with the average age of farmers in the UK at 58 and rising. Attracting the next generation of land managers will be difficult unless extra public investment is available to reduce the risks facing new entrants. To meet the challenges and opportunities ahead, it is vital that farmers receive quality advice and have access to information and training. Those farmers with experience and expertise could also be encouraged to diversify and become paid advisors.

- 7 The expansion of skills training programmes in sustainable land management, particularly flexible modular courses, distance learning programmes and on-farm workshops.
- 8 A trial 'New Deal for New Farmers' to provide recruits to the industry with training and development so that they are equipped to deliver 'public goods' and able to respond to a changing market.

- Develop our successful careership scheme - a tailored on-the-job training and skills package - to support the career development of potential new farm tenants.
- Help to develop, support and promote examples of best practice in sustainable land management, encouraging our exemplar tenants to join national networks of demonstration farms.

Future consumers

It is critically important for the future of the industry that public confidence in farming is restored. Fostering mutual understanding and support - between town and country and between consumer and producer - lies at the heart of this challenge. Consumer demand has huge potential, through the market, to stimulate and support sustainable farming standards that deliver a wide range of products, from food to water and energy. This informed choice relies on the provision of quality information and education. This must start early - in our schools. Direct investment and support is needed if children and young adults are to receive a learning experience that informs the choices they make throughout their lives.

- 9 A joint government-industry backed voucher scheme offering a free farm visit for every school child and their family.
- 10 A new government scheme to help farm businesses diversify into education provision, eg visitor facilities, interpretation, guided farm walks.

- Take part in school-farm partnership programmes, linking rural and urban schools with our farms, to build long-term mutually beneficial relationships.
- Provide even more opportunities and experiences for children and adults alike to learn about food and farming.

We have made a start:

- Committing over £1 million a year to our Whole Farm Action Plan programme.
- Employing nine Farm and Conservation Officers who provide a free, integrated advisory service to tenants.
- Facilitating, in partnership with our tenants, regular farm open days throughout our estate and supporting hundreds of educational visits to farms every year.
- Working with farmers to restore sustainable river systems, eg the River Ogwen in Gwynedd, which embrace farmland flooding and nature conservation.
- Negotiating with tenants and government, a tailored agri-environment scheme for farmland at Stonehenge to maintain the archaeological and historic landscape character of the area as a key driver in the local tourism economy.
- Providing pump-prime funding to help tenants enter the local food economy, eg at Hindon Farm, Somerset, this investment enabled tenants to set up a butcher's room and farm shop, to run a 'From the Moor to your Door' meat sales business.
- Running workshops for local farmers to improve their marketing skills.
- Providing financial and advisory support to assist tenants in organic conversion: currently at twice the national rate.
- Facilitating rural business diversification, eg enabling redundant milk factory workers to set up the Branscombe Vale Brewery in abandoned farm buildings.
- Developing a National Trust 'brand' for meat reared by our tenants to high animal welfare and environmental standards, to be sold initially in a proposed network of farm shops, eg Wallington, Northumbria.