



**Nature
Friendly
Farming
Network**

Field of view

A roadmap to a better food
and farming future



Introduction

The coming years will be crucial in building the resilient and secure food and farming systems society desperately needs. We need urgent, transformative action to fix systems which have become synonymous with declining food security, economic precarity, and ecological fragility. It's time to finally recognise the importance of farming and land use in underpinning a healthy, prosperous society. This means viewing land through a wider lens, harnessing its potential to produce the food we need to live healthy lives while restoring nature, meeting net zero and driving sustainable economic growth.

Recent challenges have highlighted the fragility of our current food system and its inability to cope with shocks and crises. Farmers have been hit with colossal input rises, increasingly extreme and volatile weather patterns and minuscule returns from the market. A reliance on extractive practices has led to an alarming loss of nature, declining soil health and flatlining water quality. As the costs of food production continue to escalate, the public struggles to foot the bill.

Although the need for ambitious action is clear, no political party or government has set out a pathway that's capable

of securing a food system that feeds people well or pays farmers fairly while replenishing the natural systems we all depend on. This is despite the rampant costs of continuing with business as usual and widespread public support for a new approach to farming and land use.

If we invest sufficiently in a clear and ambitious vision we can secure a food system that delivers all we need from our land in ways which benefit everyone. Crucially, this means recognising that ambitious action for nature and climate is key in supporting farming and food production, rural vitality and long-term economic progress. This must be built on recognition that healthy landscapes are integral to supporting healthy people, and without fair and transparent supply chains, net zero and nature recovery will be impossible.

A better reality for farming is possible. But it requires ambitious commitments and bold action from all political parties to deliver a broader view of food system success, taking into account the vital contribution it can make to human well being, economic progress and a thriving natural environment.



Our roadmap is based on the delivery of the 7 key actions:



1

A decent return for nature-friendly farming - To secure ambitious farm system change



2

A fair and transparent supply chain - For a better farming deal



3

Core trade standards - Which uphold UK standards



4

Supporting healthier choices - To improve public health



5

Ambitious farm level schemes - Making nature-friendly actions the easy choice



6

A new farming baseline - That protect the environment and deter bad practice



7

Investment in people and place - Enabling a widespread farming transition



1 A decent return for nature-friendly farming

Supporting a transition to farm payments that properly reward nature-friendly farming is imperative in supporting a transition to a future where nature is integrated into all farm business decision-making. Despite some positive steps, the current offer will be insufficient in driving a widespread transition to more resilient, profitable farming practices that help meet our nature and climate commitments.

To harness the benefits that nature-friendly farming and land management can offer, the agriculture budget should be increased to £6 billion as a minimum. The majority of this funding should focus on the delivery of environmental public goods, with payments at the farm-level better reflecting the value of the environmental benefits being provided. Although this represents a large increase compared to business as usual, it represents a sound return on investment in the pathway to securing healthier people and more resilient landscapes.

Three in five UK adults agree that the next UK Government should increase financial support for nature-friendly farming

2 A fair and transparent supply chain

Farm system change will be impossible for many without a fair return from the market. Healthy, sustainable food needs to be better valued throughout the supply chain, supporting farmers to adopt new and more sustainable business practices. Many farmers cannot afford to make a transition to nature-friendly farming in a system typified by unfair practices and low returns. A better-regulated supply chain is needed to help increase transparency and fair play, ensuring that farmers are fairly rewarded by the market.

3 Core trade standards

Efforts to increase environmental ambition at home must be underpinned by a progressive trade policy that helps to raise global standards. The next Government should implement clear trade standards to safeguard UK farmers and the environment, ensuring that the domestic market is not competing with products that have been produced to lower environmental and animal welfare standards.



4 Supporting healthier choices

A national diet high in salt, trans fatty acids, processed meats and sugar is the leading cause of avoidable harm to public health, as well as contributing to the nature and climate emergency. Supporting a shift to more sustainable, healthier diets can help tackle much of the burden of dietary-related ill health, while supporting changes in farming and land use that are critical in securing net zero and nature's recovery.

This shift can be supported by a new approach to public procurement, which helps support the increased production and consumption of nature-friendly food. The introduction of environmental and animal health and welfare food labelling on all food products and a strategy which supports the transition away from high intensity, low margin and low welfare industrial livestock production and consumption.

5 Ambitious farm level schemes

A successful agriculture transition is dependent upon schemes that secure sufficient uptake amongst farmers while delivering the right mix of ambitious actions to secure tangible benefits for farm businesses and the environment. The current approach focuses heavily on securing high levels of uptake but is falling short in supporting the right actions at the farm and landscape scale. We need a variety of schemes to help put nature-friendly farming into the heart of farm payments.

Broad and shallow

A broad and shallow scheme is needed to support the majority of farmers to deliver a joined up suite of actions that help build environmental and economic resilience. This whole farm approach is required to harness the potential of environmental land management. It focuses on combining mutually reinforcing actions across the farm to ensure that a range of different benefits are delivered simultaneously.

Narrow and deep

Targeted, tailored schemes that deliver more complex environmental outcomes are critical in delivering for nature and climate. These schemes provide a vital support mechanism for farm businesses that usually secure low returns from food production, but which have a wealth of natural assets at their disposal. Despite the fact that around 40% of farmers will need to be in these types of schemes to meet biodiversity targets, many farmers who want to do more for nature and climate are being turned away.

The next government should make ambitious land management a priority by setting a target to process at least 3000 of these higher tier agreements per year.

Over half of UK adults agree that action to help farming address climate change is required by the next Government

6 A new farming baseline

Alongside payment schemes, we need robust, well-enforced regulatory standards to raise farming's environmental game and deliver a fair and level playing field. These steps will be crucial in protecting our soils, cleaning up our waterways, improving air quality and maintaining food integrity. Despite regulations' important role in supporting an ambitious agriculture transition, it has been overlooked. Given that up to 30% of farmers will not be participating in land management schemes, there is a key role for improved regulation to play in maintaining standards and providing a minimum level of protection across the farmed landscape.

A new set of enhanced farm standards should be introduced to provide a minimum level of protection for the environment, health and animal welfare. These should apply to all farm businesses. Where possible, these should consolidate existing standards so that the application of agriculture regulation is more easily understood and effective. In certain circumstances and over time, this baseline should evolve to underpin more ambitious environmental action as standard.

Improved standards will only work if they are enforced by well-resourced regulators. The next Government should commit to resourcing regulatory agencies to pre austerity levels to provide the level of protection that society demands and our environment needs.

58% of UK adults agree that tackling river pollution from agriculture should be a priority for the next Government

7 Investment in people and place

For a large number of farm businesses the scale of change required will be significant, encompassing a shift in mindset as much as change in farm practice. Delivering multifunctional land use at the farm level will represent a new concept for many, which may be challenging. A successful transition is dependent on widespread buy in, improved knowledge, understanding and trust in change. Clearly there is a need for increased focus in building the skills, knowledge and supporting infrastructure needed to help farmers adopt a range of new practices with enthusiasm and confidence.

A strategic programme of farmer to farmer knowledge exchange

Farmers often learn best from other farmers who have already adopted changes within their own business. Peer to peer learning, such as farm walks, training events and mentoring can play an important role in stimulating new ideas, in overcoming barriers and demonstrating what the benefits are for farm businesses and the environment. Defra should develop a strategic programme of knowledge exchange and peer to peer learning. This could be incorporated within Countryside Stewardship, providing financial return for farmers who share their skills and knowledge with their peers in a coordinated way.

Increased access to quality advice

Expert land management advice is another crucial component in delivering the right environmental actions at the right scale, whether at a farm level or across the wider landscape. It's proven to help secure higher quality environmental outcomes, greater farmer buy in and better value for money. A more joined up advisory offer could be achieved with little additional cost by better connecting existing advisory providers.

Targeted Rural Development

Well targeted place based investment can play a valuable role in a transition to nature friendly farming and land use. This should provide investment to help create shorter, more sustainable supply chains, improve communication networks and build skills. Each of these are integral in helping rural communities avail of new opportunities that sustainable land management can provide. These should be introduced as part of a strategic rural investment fund.

Using public land well

The management of county farms and other publicly owned land should be transformed to deliver multifunctional land use, encompassing food production (where appropriate) alongside ambitious action for climate and nature. Land should be properly recognised as an important, strategic national asset, with the public estate being used effectively to demonstrate the art of the possible and as a key tool in delivering knowledge exchange.





On behalf of the Nature Friendly Farming Network and Sustain Savanta surveyed 2,185 UK adults aged 18+ online between 25-27 August 2023. Data were weighted to be representative by age, gender, region, and social grade.

The full results are available on request by email info@nffn.org.uk

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