



Health and harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit

Nature Friendly Farming Network Response

Summary

Nature Friendly Farming Network

The Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN) is a farmer led independent organisation, established in November 2017 uniting farmers across the UK who are committed to managing their land for wildlife and public service, as well as growing and providing healthy, nutritious food.

The farmers behind the network believe that post-Brexit agriculture policy should:

1. Help all British farmers to produce safe, healthy food at the same time as helping our soil, landscapes, rivers and wildlife to recover and flourish.
2. Maintain and redirect farming payments towards mainstreaming nature friendly farming across the UK.
3. Recognise that the shift towards a more nature friendly approach is not just good for wildlife but is key to the long-term survival and success of British farming, delivering broader benefits to the public, including flood protection, water and air quality, and access to thriving natural landscapes.
4. Make sure future schemes are accessible to more farmers.

The NFFN welcome and very much support the general direction of the Health and harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit Command Paper. Farmer members were surveyed with regard to this consultation and our response reflects the feedback received.

Key Responses

Our NFFN farmer survey showed overwhelming support for a radical overhaul of agricultural policy.

- 89% of UK nature friendly farmers believe that now is the moment for radical change in agricultural policy that rewards the conservation of natural resources alongside sustainable food production.
- Almost half (47%) of those surveyed are pessimistic and don't feel confident that the Government will deliver the farming policy required to create positive environmental change.
- 96% of respondents want high environmental standards to be a key requirement of future trade deals – to combat the threat of cheap imports.
- 79% believe that the governments in each of the UK countries should cooperate to put the environment at the centre of future farming policy, through a common framework.
- 93% say that it is crucial to maintain at least the current level of investment, refocused to deliver better value for money, to ensure a thriving sustainable agriculture sector in the UK.
- Almost all farmers surveyed (98%) called for a greater understanding of the critical role that farming plays in protecting the environment and delivering public goods.

During this consultation period, it is critical that Government listens to British farmers who are calling for a radical change in food and farming policy. Government must work hard to win our trust by resisting the urge to race to the bottom of trade, but actually support farmers with delivering a better farming future. We cannot miss this significant opportunity to transform British agriculture in order to help farms evolve and thrive, whilst restoring and protecting our natural heritage.

NFFN Farmer Feedback

Calling for Change

The landscape in the UK is shaped by farming. Yet not all change in recent times has been desirable; soils have been depleted, water courses degraded and nature has struggled to cope with the pace of change. We have seen declines in over 600 farmland species over the last 50 years. However, many farms are bucking this trend. Soils are being restored, nature is thriving and if more follow this lead we can reverse these declines. With over 70% of the UK being farmland, we need to act now to deliver for wildlife at a landscape scale. 89% of the NFFN UK nature friendly farmers believe that now is the moment for radical change in agricultural policy that rewards the conservation of natural resources alongside sustainable food production.

Environmental Standards

The wrong trade policy could reduce environmental standards and the economic position of UK farmers. The NFFN is committed to ensuring that a new international trade regime does not expose us to the sort of low standards, cut price competition that will drive farmers towards more harmful ways of farming for both land and livestock. 96% of survey respondents agree (12%) or strongly agree (84%) that maintaining high environmental standards, at home and for imports, should be a key requirement of future trade.

Public Support for the Environment

The NFFN strongly believe that we need the public to better understand the relationship between farming and the environment and the benefits that nature friendly farming can bring in protecting and enhancing the environment and wildlife and safeguarding future food production. Almost all farmers surveyed (98%) called for a greater understanding of the critical role that farming plays in protecting the environment and delivering public goods. In addition to our NFFN farmer members we also have public members who support our manifesto and our nature friendly farmers.

Payment for Public Goods

The NFFN is committed to securing farming policies that support wildlife, sustainable agriculture and fairness for farmers. The NFFN agree that improved soil health, water quality, air quality, increased biodiversity and climate change mitigation are all incredibly important and interlinked public goods making them difficult to rank. We want the government to support all of these public goods going forward. The NFFN farmer members voted for their top 3 options as to which other public goods they believe need to be prioritised in agricultural policy post-Brexit and they were ranked in the following order with % responses shown:

1. Protection of crops, tree, plant and pollinator health (74.77%)
2. Preserving rural resilience and traditional farming and landscapes in the uplands (57.01%)
3. High animal health standards (53.27%)
4. Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment (53.27%)
5. World-class animal welfare (51.40%)
6. Flood prevention (39.25%)
7. Improved productivity and competitiveness (27.10%)
8. Public access to the countryside (16.82%)

Furthermore the importance of farming to rural economies and communities should not be underestimated.

Profitable and Sustainable Businesses

The NFFN are committed to securing farming policies that support wildlife, sustainable agriculture and fairness for farmers. We asked our farmer members which of the following should the government prioritise in order to better support thriving sustainable agriculture in the UK:

1. Facilitating knowledge exchange e.g. farmer to farmer learning (55.56%)
2. Promotion of the need for sustainable and healthy diets to drive demand for healthy food (54.63%)
3. Grants/loans to access specialist equipment to help diversification (47.22%)
4. Measures to support transparency in the supply chain (45.37%)
5. LEADER type approaches e.g. support for local supply chains (42.59%)
6. Better broadband provision (40.47%)
7. Targeted business advice (15.74%)

New Environmental Land Management Scheme

The NFFN firmly believe that farmer input is essential to the development of new environmental land management schemes. The consultation paper states that "From the end of the 'agricultural transition', a new environmental land management system will be the cornerstone of our

agricultural policy in England. The system will help us to deliver our manifesto commitment to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it. Farming is crucial to achieving the goals set out in our recently published 25 Year Environment Plan.” When we asked which factors are most critical in delivering an effective system, our farmer members ranked them as follows:

1. Incentives for farmers and land managers to work together or with third parties to deliver environmental outcomes (79%)
2. A balance of local and national objectives (64%)
3. Outcome based payments (60%)
4. Clear regulatory baseline to ensure high standards across the industry (52%)
5. Landscape scale objectives (49%)
6. Targeted support for upland and marginal areas (44%)
7. Incentives for collaborative working (35%)
8. Greater investment in knowledge exchange (31%)

Funding

The NFFN are concerned that the Command Paper does not make clear what the budget will be for the new system. Work carried out recently has estimated that the total cost of meeting the identified environmental land management priorities in the UK are estimated at £2.2 billion annually. The current annual CAP budget is £3.3bn. In order to meet the ambitious objectives set out by the government and ensure a thriving sustainable agriculture industry in the UK it will be essential that as a minimum they maintain this level of investment but it should be carefully targeted to meet the desired objectives.

Devolution

The CAP currently provides a framework within which all four UK countries operate. This includes significant environmental aspects, including the requirement to have an agri-environment scheme, as well as a range of environmental objectives that the policy is expected to contribute towards. 79% of our NFFN farmer survey respondents believe that the governments in each of the UK countries should cooperate to put the environment at the centre of future farming policy, through a common framework.

In Conclusion

We believe that nature friendly farming is not only better for nature, but is also the most productive and sustainable way of getting food from our land. Many farmers are already playing an incredible role in helping wildlife flourish on their farms – we believe that they should be better supported and rewarded for their good work. In addition we think that food and farming policies should help all UK farmers to farm in a way that ensures that:

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The NFFN strongly support the direction of the Command Paper and hope to see this ambition reflected in the Agriculture Bill. Rewarding farmers and land managers to deliver environmental goods that benefit all, public money for public goods, is not only what we believe is the best way forward but is also the right thing to do to ensure both sustainable farming and environment protection for the future.

Both our UK farmer steering group and many of our farmer members are keen to support and be involved in the development of future policies and schemes. We hope you agree that further farmer input is essential to ensure the best and most practical policies and schemes are developed to ensure viable and sustainable farming businesses, good quality food production and environmental protection going forward.