



## Nature Friendly Farming Network

### Agriculture Bill Second Reading, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2020

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 goods at the same time as growing and providing safe, healthy and nutritious food.

The NFFN believes the Agriculture Bill must help farmers to produce safe, healthy food at the same time as helping our soil, landscapes, rivers and wildlife to recover and flourish, providing:

1. **Public money for public goods**, not undermined by additional clauses on food production
2. **High environmental standards for trade deals in law**, so UK farmers are not undercut by cheap imports and our footprint is not exported
3. **Strong baseline environmental regulations** to raise current nature and climate standards on all farms
4. **Long-term funding and certainty** so farmers are properly rewarded for environmental goods into the future.

### Key points

The NFFN welcomes the **public money for public goods** approach in the Agriculture Bill, with a more sustainable balance between nature and food production. Hundreds of farmers are already leading the way on sustainable farming, and NFFN tackles the perception of 'farmers vs environment'. The shift towards a nature friendly approach is not just good for wildlife but is key to the long-term survival of farming, delivering broader benefits to the public, including flood protection, climate change mitigation, water and air quality, and access to thriving natural landscapes. Public money for public goods will support farmers to deliver all these benefits and produce food into the future.

We are also pleased to welcome additions to the Bill to include **soil health** as a public good, as well as payments for **regenerative and agroecological approaches**, measures that are essential to nature and climate friendly farming practices.

We remain concerned that future trade deals could undercut the high standards set by UK farmers. NFFN would strongly support additions to the Bill to ensure that **trade deals promote high standards for environment and food** and protect farmers and the public from products which do not meet the high standards of UK agriculture.<sup>1</sup> Agreeing trade deals with high standards will mean UK farmers who manage their land in a sustainable way, sequestering carbon and providing a countryside bursting with wildlife will be championed and supported, rather than undermined by cheap, damaging imports.

The NFFN believes that productivity and environmental goals are not mutually exclusive but go hand in hand. The **environmental goals in the Bill must not be undermined** by additional clauses on food production – we would like any productivity payments to be conditional on meeting environmental

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<sup>1</sup> 96% of respondents to our NFFN farmer survey want high environmental standards to be a key requirement of future trade deals to combat the threat of cheap imports.



goals. This will ensure that long-term food security is not undermined by short-term productivity goals which harm the land and environment.

To achieve long term food security, the Agriculture Bill should also set a **robust baseline of environmental standards** for land management for all, even those who choose not to engage with any environmental land management schemes to receive financial support. This baseline should aim to raise current standards and keep land in 'good heart' for future generations. **A strong regulator** is needed to enforce these standards.

The NFFN supports calls for greater certainty about **long-term funding** under the Bill. We welcome additions to the Bill that require Ministers to establish a multi-annual financial assistance plan, but we would like to see these plans strengthened.

Government should demonstrate leadership and make real commitments to support sustainable, nature friendly and climate-friendly UK agriculture. All government departments should ensure that their **procurement processes prioritise buying local food** direct from UK farmers where possible, giving preference to those with high standards of environmental sustainability and animal welfare.

#### **Additional points**

The Agriculture Bill sets a new vision for balancing food production in our landscape with conservation. To achieve this change, farmers and especially **new entrants to the sector must be supported** through the change. It is important that farmers can influence the design of new Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) to ensure that it works in practice.

ELMS should adopt a **whole farm approach** which balances the demands of food production, environmental sustainability and farm business viability. They must be flexible enough to allow variation appropriate to different landscapes, regions and types of farm.

**Profit and productivity can be increased by an environmentally sustainable approach.** Profit margins are increased by turning over less productive areas of land to nature and encouraging pollinators. Likewise reducing livestock numbers on less productive areas of land improves the yield from the land and ensures long term productivity.

The NFFN welcomes the provisions in the Bill to increase **fairness and transparency in the supply chain**. These will allow farmers to be more active in managing their land and producing according to need and demand in order to secure a fair reward from the marketplace. Society should support farmers to create a better system by encouraging them to use the best technology and providing more information to allow them to make targeted improvements to their land management plans.

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