

PRESS RELEASE



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Joint press release issued by the Campaign to Protect Rural England on behalf of Wildlife and Countryside Link for the following organisations: Buglife, Butterfly Conservation, CPRE, Council for British Archaeology, Friends of the Earth, The Herpetological Conservation Trust, RSPB and the Woodland Trust

Farming policies need a radical 'Health Check' say green groups

A coalition of leading environmental groups today (Sunday 18 November) set out their own radical proposals for future reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), ahead of a CAP reform document ¹ from the European Commission being published later this week.

Wildlife and Countryside Link's (Link) ² policy statement, *Beyond the Pillars* ³ proposes a revolutionary shift of purpose for the CAP budget.

Link proposes replacing the CAP with a single European Sustainable Land Management Policy. Existing farm support payments would be phased out and replaced with support for positive land management with environmental objectives which could underpin profitable farm businesses and prosperous rural communities.

Link fears that unless the CAP is transformed, money for farmers and land managers to enhance our landscapes, wildlife, woodlands and historic environment will slowly dry up. Despite a shift away from supporting 'production at any cost', farmers who want to look after wildlife and the environment are not given sufficient financial incentives, and money that could have been used to put life back into the countryside is being spent on space exploration. Underspend on this year's CAP budget has already been redirected away from farming and the environment to the Galileo space programme⁴.

Link seeks a radical re-orientation of European land management away from the previous confusing concept of financial support for different purposes to a unified approach that will:

- protect and restore our wildlife and habitats;
- protect and enhance our historic environment, landscapes and woodlands;
- ensure the sustainable use of our limited water and soil resources;
- help mitigate and adapt to the challenges arising from climate change; and,
- ensure the secure and sustainable production of animal welfare friendly food and other commodities.

On the eve of a major Government conference ⁵ on the future of farming and days before the publication of the European Commission's CAP 'Health Check,' Link's Farming and Rural Development Group chair, Ian Woodhurst said:

'We are at a crossroads for the Common Agricultural Policy. Payments to farmers have already been separated from production support which damages the environment. Now funds should be dedicated to managing the countryside for a wide range of public benefits.'

Further changes are imminent and the review of the EU's budget means we will face great changes to the way we pay for the management of our environment.'

Ian continued:

'As we await publication of the European Commission's Health Check document we call upon the Government to set out how it intends to use the Health Check and the review of the EU's budget to address the challenges we have identified. Climate change and globalisation mean that land managers should now be given realistic incentives to continue to deliver and manage our environmental assets. There is a great need to protect our environment and a great opportunity to do this through a new system of land management payments. We urge the Government to make this a reality.'

Gareth Morgan, Head of Agriculture Policy for the RSPB said: 'We want the government to use the Healthcheck to make sure the CAP starts to tackle the crucial issues of biodiversity loss, water conservation and soil and peat degradation. This means more money shifted into environmental schemes, a replacement for set-aside, an end to new biofuel subsidies and targets and robust environmental standards for farmers across the whole of Europe''.

Dr Mike Heyworth, Director of The Council for British Archaeology said: 'There is enormous value for society and the economy in the unique character of our countryside - its historic landscape, distinctive vernacular buildings and irreplaceable archaeological sites. Set-aside and incentive schemes for farming have played a key role in protecting this vulnerable and finite environmental resource for future generations. Government must use the CAP Health Check to look hard at how we can sustain the value of the countryside for everyone in the face of the challenges we face from global warming and a rapidly changing agricultural economy.'

Nick Collinson, Head of Conservation Policy for the Woodland Trust said: 'As the reality of climate change and the need for serious action to enable wildlife to adapt to it becomes clear, the outcomes of the CAP Health Check in 2008 are increasingly important. Wildlife needs space to survive and adapt to the massive challenges it faces and ensuring that we have landscapes across England that allows species to disperse, survive and evolve must be one of nature conservation's greatest challenges for the 21st century. The future of the CAP is critical to this and the sustainable land policy we propose would ensure the necessary enhancements to our countryside for wildlife and for people.'

Ends

Notes to editors

For an advance copy of *Beyond the Pillars: Wildlife and Countryside Link's Policy Perspective on the Future of the CAP* contact the CPRE Press Office: Tel: 020 981 2880/07739 332 796

¹ The European Commission is expected to publish its initial proposals for the 'CAP Health Check' on Tuesday 20 November, after which a debate will begin with the proposals being discussed and concluded over the course of 2008. The Health Check will examine how the reforms of the CAP that were introduced in 2003 are being implemented. Key issues that are expected to be contained in the CAP reform review document include: making the Single Payment more effective, efficient and simple, including the requirements of cross compliance (see footnote 3 below); further separation of payments to farmers from the need to produce certain crops and commodities; the ending of the set-aside scheme which has an important role in maintaining wildlife habitats; the roles of Pillar I and Pillar II and transferring of funds between the two funding streams; climate change challenges; the growth in biofuels and management of water resources.

² Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation, enjoyment and protection of wildlife, countryside and the marine environment. Our members practice and advocate environmentally sensitive land management and food production practices and encourage respect for and enjoyment of natural landscapes and features, the historic environment and biodiversity. Taken together, our members have the support of over eight million people in the UK and manage over 476,000 hectares of land. Please visit www.wcl.org.uk for further information.

³ The Common Agricultural Policy is divided into two pillars. These are effectively two different funding streams. The 'first pillar' is made up of direct payments to farmers, which in the UK is known as the Single Payment. Farmers who receive the Single Payment must ensure they adhere to a set of EU Directives and other legislation and environmental management requirements known as cross compliance. The 'second pillar' is made up of funding for rural development measures, known in England as the Rural Development Programme for England. It includes green farming schemes and funding for economic and social measures that contribute to rural development objectives. As well as the RDPE having some core funding money is also transferred, or in technical terms 'modulated,' from Pillar I of the CAP to Pillar II for rural development measures. The amount of money transferred is set by the EU at a certain percentage. The UK Government voluntarily transfers extra funding from Pillar I to Pillar II to fund rural development measures including important green farming schemes. Please visit <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/singlepay/index.htm> for further information on the Single Payment Scheme.

⁴ In September the European Commission proposed transferring some Common Agricultural Policy funds to the European Galileo Space Programme which is facing a £1.7bn funding shortfall in funding. For further information please visit <http://www.rspb.org.uk/news/details.asp?id=tcm:9-170592> and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/7087941.stm>

⁵ Defra will be holding a high level 'Farming for the Future' conference on Monday 19 November. The aim of the conference is to give stakeholders the opportunity to contribute to forming a consensus on how best to develop and deliver a vision of English farming in 2020. The High Level Conference was announced by the Defra Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Rt. Hon Hilary Benn MP at the Royal Show in Stoneleigh on 2 July 2007.

For Further Information

Ian Woodhurst (CPRE Senior Rural Policy Officer and Chair of Link's Farming and Rural Development Group)

Tel: 020 7981 2839 (direct)
0793 954 2690 (mobile)

Nicola S. Frank (Press Officer)
Tel: 020 981 2880 (press office)
07739 332 796 (mobile)

An ISDN audio line is available – contact the press office for more details