

Principles for securing a sustainable future for our countryside

1. A shared countryside

We all have a stake in our countryside. We need an open and inclusive debate about its future to develop policies that reflect society's shared needs.

2. Nature everywhere

We need a healthy, thriving natural environment across the whole of the countryside, not just in protected areas. Public policy is integral to efforts to halt declines in wildlife and the wider environment, and should drive restoration at a landscape scale.

3. For future generations

Policies must ensure that our countryside is managed in a way that addresses the challenges of the future, particularly climate change, so that each generation leaves the environment in a better state than they found it.

4. Value for money

Taxpayers' money should be invested in public benefits that the market does not provide, including healthy soils, abundant wildlife, better animal welfare and beautiful places for people to enjoy. In the long term, the market needs to better complement public funding, making it profitable and rewarding to manage land sustainably for both private and public benefit.

5. Unacceptable to harm nature

We need a strong legislative baseline to safeguard the natural environment, and protect the interests of society. These simple rules should apply everywhere irrespective of payments, with properly resourced and effective enforcement.

6. Easy to help nature

Simple systems for accessing the right financial support, underpinned by trusted advice, will make it easier for farmers, foresters and land managers to restore and integrate the environment into their businesses.

Rewards should be related to outcomes: those that deliver greater public benefit should receive greater public support.

7. Fair to farmers

The government should ensure farmers receive a fair share of the profit generated in the supply chain, creating more resilient farm businesses. We must all contribute toward greater public understanding of where food comes from, and how it is produced.

8. Built on strong evidence and past success

Future policies should build on successful agri-environment schemes, drawing on evidence and experience of how to reverse declines in nature, and secure ecosystem services vital to farming and wider society. A well-resourced programme of research and monitoring will facilitate continuous improvement

9. Coherent with other policy areas

There must be clear and coherent objectives, targets and milestones that are much better aligned with other areas of policy such as trade, food procurement, public health, heritage, tourism and climate change.

10. The right action at the right scale

By using data to understand the environmental, social and cultural value of different places, we can ensure action is targeted in the right way. Coherent action at landscape-scale, for instance a catchment-based approach, would make sure policy was relevant to local needs and contributed towards regional and national environmental objectives.



Our organisations are working together to promote sustainable farming and land use. If you would like further information please contact:

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Agriculture at a crossroads: the need for sustainable farming and land use policies

A briefing for policy
makers following the
EU referendum

A photograph of a brown rabbit in a field of yellow flowers. The rabbit is in the foreground, looking to the right. The field is filled with many yellow flowers, and the background is a soft-focus field of more flowers.

Agriculture, environment and animal welfare policies are largely devolved, but many environmental issues, from biodiversity loss to climate change, are transboundary, and we need to work together if we are to tackle them successfully. Governments across the UK should collaborate to develop common approaches that secure more sustainable agriculture and land management.

Leaving the European Union will be one of the most defining events for farming and our environment in living memory. There are significant risks, but it also provides an unprecedented opportunity to revitalise our countryside in a way that meets the needs of people and the environment, for generations to come.

Our vision is for a thriving, healthy countryside that delivers multiple benefits for society. As well as products such as food and timber, we need the natural environment for services like clean water and healthy soils, and all the well-being benefits that contact with abundant and diverse nature brings. In turn, these play a key role in supporting a prosperous economy.

Fundamentally, the long term future of farming is at risk if the natural systems on which it is based are depleted. This is not a choice between food and the environment; the future of food, farming and nature is inextricably linked. But, as the State of Nature report highlights,¹ we have lost species once common to much of our countryside, a story of environmental degradation mirrored by poor water quality and threats to our historic environment, amongst others. We need to significantly step up our efforts in the years ahead if we are to tackle these threats, and create a countryside rich in nature and culture, alongside vibrant communities and a thriving economy.

It is critical, therefore, that policies developed across the UK for farming, land use and the environment are focused on this urgent challenge. With farmland covering over three quarters of the UK, farmers and land managers are uniquely placed to help restore nature and the wider environment, and to capitalise on the opportunities this brings. We need to replace the outdated Common Agricultural Policy with new and ambitious policies that work for farming and the environment, are fair to farmers and taxpayers, and which provide real value for money. We cannot afford to miss this chance.

A way forward for England

Farming and the environment are at a crossroads. With environmental indicators showing continued degradation of our natural resources, the status quo is not tenable. If we are to avoid a race to the bottom, public policy must take an active role in enabling farmers to do more for the environment, whilst ensuring that a sector that maintains high environmental and animal welfare standards is not put at a competitive disadvantage by UK trade policy. The principles set out in this briefing set a clear way forward.

For England, this will mean a sustainable farming and land use policy that encourages established agro-ecological approaches such as organic farming, and provides the tools for all farmers and land managers to develop more resilient and sustainable businesses, and meet the challenge of restoring the natural environment within a generation. With the natural environment centre stage, there is a strong case for public funding for agriculture and land management, building on a foundation of high standards.

The Westminster government's 25 year plans for the environment, and for food, farming and fisheries, present a critical opportunity to open up debate about the role of farming and land management in securing all that society needs from the countryside. As taxpayers, consumers and citizens, it is essential that the public's voice is heard.

¹ D Hayhow et al, 2016, State of Nature 2016, The State of Nature partnership