



ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

Agroecology for Sustainable Food and Farming

BRIEFING PAPER

FARMING POST BREXIT

Britain's exit from the EU provides the opportunity to build a strategy for food and farming that is better for people at large, for farmers, and for the environment.



Following the summer's European Union (EU) Referendum, the UK is preparing to venture into a radically different landscape, with every part of society set to be impacted as current EU legislation governing aspects of life in modern Britain are reviewed over the coming months and years.

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Agroecology for Sustainable Food and Farming believes that with this review, we have the potential to create a uniquely fair and sustainable food and farming infrastructure that supports our rich and varied farm sector.

The UK now has the opportunity to take an agenda setting approach to its food and farming legislation and governance. It can adopt policies that would make us more self-reliant – enhance biodiversity; mitigate climate change; support small and family farmers, and encourage much-needed new entrants.

We must make the most of this chance to craft a better framework and be wary of simply reinventing what we know.

The Group recognises that agriculture, land use, food and energy production is a complex and interrelated system. It is not sustainable to single out just one objective – such as maximising crop or herd production for example – without also ensuring that the systems which deliver the increased yields meet society's other needs, such as public and environmental health.

The adoption of agroecological principles, policies and practices across all relevant departments of government will be key to building a 21st century food and farming policy that is economically rich and robust, while operating sustainably in the truest sense of the word.

The APPG — concerned that all should have the opportunity to have their say in the discussions that are taking place within the relevant government departments – asked its constituent farmers for their views: those who operate small farms, many family-run farms, organic and agroecological farms, and the organisations that support them.

The APPG has produced a collection of thoughts and policy recommendations. Some common themes have emerged which, unsurprisingly, reflect some of the greatest issues facing our world today: food security, environmental protection, sustainable production, individual and sector-wide economic resilience, and the call for a beefed-up government department – or a new independent agency – with the expertise and ability to lead as we navigate our new path.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE CAP

In leaving the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Britain has a historic opportunity to square aspects of the public interest that have all too often been at odds.

How would our land and rural economy need to look to deliver all that is expected of it: resilient and healthy production, climate change mitigation, clean water, animal welfare, wildlife, quality jobs, recreation? What mix of investment, public procurement, trade, ongoing incentives and regulation could get us there?

The harm done by huge CAP payments has become more and more obvious.

Large payments give big farmers the wherewithal to buy more land, thus increasing their payments still further; or to buy bigger machines, thus enabling them to employ fewer people. They are a prime factor in the excessive price of land, which makes starting a farm almost impossible.

Taxpayers' money should rather be invested in producing public benefits that the market does not provide including healthy soils, abundant wildlife and beautiful places for people to enjoy. We need to replace the outdated CAP with a system that is fair to taxpayers – and to farmers – and provides value for money.

CARETAKERS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

Farmers need the support of people and government to help protect wildlife and restore habitats. Currently, farmers can use EU funds for work such as wildflower meadow conservation and restoration, creating and maintaining public access, hedgerow restoration, fencing, river restoration, pond creation – and much more.

More farmers should receive more money to do the right things for our countryside to encourage them to do more to reverse the habitat and wildlife declines, for example by reducing their use of pesticides and herbicides, building soil carbon, and reducing soil erosion, ensuring their soil does not run off into the rivers so that future generations have soil to grow food.

LABELLING AND CONSUMER CLARITY

A growing number of farmers are raising their ruminant livestock exclusively on pasture, with the associated benefits to human health, the environment and livestock health and welfare.

However, clarity is needed on the definition of grass-fed. At present the term can be used to describe products that are "predominantly fed grass", i.e. just 51 per cent within the lifetime of the animal.

Even the most intensively reared ruminant livestock – raised largely on grain and imported soya – would satisfy this condition so that customers may believe they are buying grain-free when in fact they are not.

THE COST OF POOR ANIMAL WELFARE

The UK cannot compete in the world market on cost. It must establish itself as a quality producer. High environmental and animal welfare standards must be part of the UK's post Brexit international brand.

Our farmers should be protected from low welfare imports. When negotiating new trade agreements, the UK must insist on the inclusion of a clause that requires imports to meet UK animal welfare standards.

EATING OUR WAY TO A HEALTHIER FUTURE

The task of creating a post-Brexit 'British Agricultural Policy' that support producers, protects the environment and prioritizes access to healthy, nutritious food for all is a complex but essential one.

Policies should encourage the adoption of balanced diets with less and better quality meat and dairy products. This would produce multiple benefits impacting on issues from human health, climate change mitigation, soil health and improved animal welfare standards.

NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY

Leaving the EU puts UK food security at a greater risk. We produce less than 60 per cent of the food we consume, rely on the EU for almost 30 per cent of our food imports and hold only three to five days of food reserves.

Post-Brexit, increases in the price of imports, shortages of farm labour and a more volatile market will make this situation worse.

Food and agricultural policy should focus on reclaiming sovereignty by increasing national self-reliance. Tariffs should be applied to imports to prevent the undercutting of domestically produced food, and a further step could be a ban on food produced to lower labour, environmental, welfare standards than in the UK.

THE GREAT POTENTIAL OF AGROFORESTRY

Agroforestry, one of the most successful agroecological approaches, is a powerful example of how a natural resource should be an integral part of an innovative, leading and sustainable food and farming sector.

The artificial separation of forestry and farming administration due to the difference in competencies at an EU level has led to confusion and complications on the

ground and reduced the ability to deliver a sustainable land policy.

Integrated into farming systems trees contribute by the provision of: shade, shelter, water and pollution management, soil protection (preventing erosion), soil sustainability (through support of microorganisms and addition of valuable nutrients), pollination, integrated pest management and product diversification.

PROMOTING ALL FORMS OF FARMING EXPERTISE

Nature's principal strategies are those of diversity – which in agriculture means mixed farms, with heterogeneous crops and livestock; and low-inputs – which in farming terms means as organic as possible.

Diverse, low-input farms are necessarily complex, which means they must be skills intensive, with plenty of skilled farmers. In general, complex, skills intensive enterprises of all kinds are most efficient when small to medium-sized.

Britain's farmers are ageing and the overall farm force is dwindling we need a concerted strategy to train and recruit a new generation of farmers.

BRINGING DEFRA UP TO DATE

Given the importance of food and farming, Defra is a vital part of government. However it needs strengthening and bringing up to date. At present it has little actual contact with farmers and a proper two-way communication is essential so that farmers can contact Defra for advice and information.

Defra should listen to the problems of all farmers, not just the largest ones, and consider how farms can be prosperous — contributing to the community and countryside in many ways, while producing good food in appropriate quantities.

A radical alternative that should certainly be considered would be to establish a new, independent agency for food and farming to represent all groups with a serious stake: farmers, both large and small, organic and "conventional"; agriculturalists; ecologists; cooks and nutritionists; educationists; and representatives of other professions, trades, and people at large.

The APPG would like to thank the following stakeholders for their contribution to this paper



www.pastureforlife.org



www.campaignforrealfarming.org



www.woodlandtrust.org.uk



www.soilassociation.org



www.innovativefarmers.org



www.wildlifetrusts.org



www.landworkersalliance.org.uk



www.rspb.org.uk



www.ciwf.org.uk

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Public opinion and civil society must have a more significant weight in agricultural policy with mechanisms created for structured and regular dialogue between all organisations representing farmers and agricultural workers.

Agroecological systems have a vital part to play in shaping our future. Nobody has all the answers, or ever can, but the more that well-informed people are allowed to contribute to the discussion, the closer we should get to something resembling wisdom. We need:

- A new policy for our countryside to replace the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that delivers high environmental standards for land management and support farmers and others to do this.
- The principal role for public funding should be to provide financial support for public goods that the market cannot – or can only partially – deliver such as high environmental and animal welfare standards.
- The establishment of an independent Policy Commission to examine future policy for the environment, farming and rural development.
- All agri-environment schemes to be kept open to new and existing applicants until a replacement scheme is fully operational.
- A joined up 25 Year Plan for the environment. In England, farming and rural development must be a key part of the Government's 25 Year plan for the Environment. Since agriculture now occupies most of the most fertile land on Earth, any plan for the biosphere that does not put farming at the centre is dead in the water from the word go.
- There should be a new UK-wide land use policy embracing environmental security and sustainable food production, with agri/environment schemes that incentivise tree planting and reward landowners for good environmental practice.
- In 2009, in response to a consultation by the Food Standards Agency, Natural England recommended that "the FSA should develop, in close consultation with Natural England and Defra, guidance on the use of the terms 'grass-fed...'. With the extensive use of the term grass-fed this is long overdue and we would like a clear set of agreed definitions, including those relating to the statutory regulations on labelling and advertising, to ensure that consumers are able to make an informed decision.
- The UK should transition from industrial grain-based livestock production towards pasture and land-based farming of animals to high animal welfare and environmental standards.
- The role of livestock should be redefined. Their function should be to convert materials that we cannot consume – grass, crop residues, by-products, unavoidable food waste – into food we can eat. From this viewpoint, appropriate systems for rearing livestock include pasture and rotational integrated crop/livestock production.
- In the short term, it is vital to give farmers some certainty and to protect what is working well. This includes organic farming, which has forged the path for agroecology and provides proven public benefits. We would like confirmation that farmers who wish to convert to organic farming between now and the introduction of any post-EU scheme will continue to be eligible for the automatic elements of Pillar 2, and that automatic organic maintenance payments continue as for the Basic (Pillar 1) Payment.
- A subsidy ceiling of £150,000, because the harm done by huge CAP payments becomes more and more obvious.
- A new-entrants and young farmers scheme including top up payments and capital grants to address barriers including access to land, capital, markets and education.
- Mandatory labelling of meat and dairy produce describing the farming method should be introduced. This would enable consumers to drive the market for higher welfare meat and dairy.
- A robust plan to reduce dependence on antibiotics, and on pesticides such as the neonicotinoids and herbicides such as glyphosate.



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