

Food & Farming

208,000 jobs at risk following IHT changes

Hundreds of thousands of jobs could be lost within the UK's agricultural and family business sectors due to Labour's planned inheritance tax reforms. Research by CBI-Economics projects that these reforms will result in over 208,000 job losses by the end of this Parliament. The changes, which include limiting 100% relief from inheritance tax to the first £1 million of combined agricultural and business property, followed by 50% relief on the value over this amount, are expected to result in substantial financial uncertainty for many family-owned enterprises.

British farmers have initiated the UK's first-ever farming strike. On 1 April some farmers began refusing to supply milling wheat to draw attention to food security and the nation's dependence on imports. The strike coincides with increased demand for bakery products due to Easter celebrations and is anticipated to affect the availability of flour and bread immediately. Organisers hope the strike will prompt a broader discussion about Britain's food security and the financial challenges faced by UK farmers.

First case of bird flu in sheep confirmed

The UK's Chief Veterinary Officer has confirmed the first case of bird flu (H5N1) infecting a sheep. Following an outbreak of avian influenza in dairy cows in the US, Defra introduced livestock surveillance procedures on premises where the disease had been detected. Subsequent tests of the sheep flock in Yorkshire found no further cases of infection. Defra assures that there is no evidence to suggest an increased risk to UK livestock. This case will be reported to international health organisations, and strict biosecurity measures have been implemented to prevent further spread.

Growers raise “serious concerns” that the producer organisations scheme is ending

Defra has announced an end to the producer organisations scheme, sparking significant uncertainty among fresh produce growers. The scheme is scheduled to close on 31 December 2025. Food Security Minister Daniel Zeichner confirmed the closure in Parliament, stating the government is considering the best way to support farming sectors in the future, including horticulture. The producer organisations scheme encouraged collaboration between growers to increase their market power in negotiations with supermarkets and drove productivity improvements by match funding the growers' investment. The Agriculture Act broadened the sectors that could form producer organisations; however, Defra has not implemented this, nor has a successor scheme for the fruit and vegetable sector been announced.

The industry body British Berry Growers warned the move could mean fewer UK-grown berries at a time when the industry is already facing challenges, with the share of British berries shrinking by 2.5% in the last year while the volume of imported berries increased by over 15%. Nick Marston, chair of the trade organisation, expressed concerns about the absence of a successor to the scheme. He stated, “any new scheme will need to not only sustain the progress achieved under the outgoing model but also equip growers to continue competing effectively on a global scale”.

More investment in biosecurity

The NFU wants to see a cross-government biosecurity plan and sufficient investment to counter the biosecurity risks the UK faces. It says such an approach is needed to prevent potentially crippling costs down the line and to protect domestic food production at a time when food security is already under threat. During one week in January, 10 tonnes of illegal meat were removed from the UK's food chain. In the same month, Germany reported an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, with several additional confirmed cases in Hungary and Slovakia. UK farmers are already facing significant pressure from avian influenza and bluetongue.

At the media briefing alongside Labour Peer Lord Rooker, the NFU requested sufficient investment for:

- Import controls for plant production material.
- Sufficient veterinary capacity in the Animal and Plant Health Agency.
- A vaccine fund to cover emergency vaccination costs.

- A £1.5 million Virus Yellow fever resilience fund.
- A fully funded Bovine TB strategy.

Policy

The Corry Review: Defra response

The Corry Review, a review of Defra and its regulators, has been published. It started last year to examine whether the regulatory landscape of Defra was fit for purpose and has developed recommendations to ensure regulation across Defra simultaneously safeguards the environment and promotes economic growth.

The review sets out 29 recommendations across five themes:

- Regulation should focus on outcomes, scale and proportionality.
- “Green tape” should be untangled and tidied.
- Regulators should take a more consistent approach to compliance.
- There should be a better flow of private finance for nature restoration and better-targeted public finance.
- Regulators should be brought up to date to be digital, more real-time and more innovative.

The recommendations are supporting actions aimed at implementing the necessary change identified by the five themes. Defra has responded to the review, saying that many of its comments to the review team have been picked up in the report and included as recommendations. Examples include the need for nature regulation that drives positive action, not just simply stopping negative ones. Defra also highlighted regulation at “the scale of ecosystems” is needed to tackle root causes, not just multiple small cases.

The government publishes its National Action Plan on pesticides

A National Action Plan (NAP) on pesticides has been published after years of delay. It sets out three core objectives for pesticide use and management: the use of clear targets, increased integrated pest management (IPM) and enhanced compliance and best practice. The NAP also sets a target to reduce pesticide use, which is assessed using the UK Pesticide Load Indicator (UK PLI). The UK PLI must be reduced by at least 10% by 2030 relative to a 2018 baseline. Progress towards UK PLI will be measured through 20 different metrics, focusing on pesticide activity in the environment, toxicity to wildlife, and quantity of use.

The NAP emphasises IPM as a method for reducing pesticide use in the UK, a practice encouraged by the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI). According to NFU Deputy President David Exwood, more than 6,000 IPM plans were implemented across England last year because of the SFI incentivising IPM plan-making. With the recent closure of the 2024 SFI offer, it remains unclear how the government will encourage the adoption of this practice.

National food strategy advisory board appointed

Defra has appointed 13 senior leaders from “across the food system” to advise on the vision and framework for the upcoming food strategy, which will launch later this year and which aims to “make sure [the UK] food system can continue to feed the nation, realise its potential for economic growth, protect the planet and nourish individuals, now and in the future”. The group, chaired by Food Security and Rural Affairs Minister Daniel Zeichner, includes six representatives from food businesses, two from food-related charities, Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer, a Defra representative, an academic and a farmer.

Wales: Agricultural water regulations reviewed

The findings of a review of The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2022 (known as CoAP) have been published. The review evaluated potential revisions that could be made to reduce and prevent water pollution from agricultural sources. The review’s recommendations focus on five key areas:

- Better targeting regulations for polluting activities while reducing burdens on low-risk farming.
- Improving accessibility and clarity of regulations for farmers.
- Exploration of alternative mitigation measures, particularly regarding closed periods and the 170kg of nitrogen per hectare manure limit.
- Supporting innovation in farming practices.
- Addressing regulatory gaps, including soil protection measures and nutrient management planning.

The current CoAP regulations impose a 170kg/ha nitrogen cap for livestock manure and closed periods for spreading manure, which farmers have argued are too restrictive. A NFU Cymru survey in December 2024 found 38% of farmers in Wales were affected by these specific regulations, rising to 69% among dairy farms. Over half

of the farmers surveyed who were affected by the caps and closed periods had to reduce livestock numbers, and 51% had either bought or rented additional land to comply with the regulatory limits. The review has not changed these restrictions but has suggested alternatives should be investigated.

Environment & Natural Capital

New proposals for burning on peatland

A consultation on changes to the Heather and Grass etc. Burning (England) Regulations 2021 has been launched, proposing a blanket ban on burning on peatlands in upland England. This measure would increase the total area of protected peatland in England from 222,000 to 368,000 hectares. Though the proposal would ban burning, prescribed burning would still be permitted under strict licensing from Natural England. The government is proposing to refine the existing licensing system. To receive a licence, applicants would need to explain why alternative vegetation management methods would not be effective and demonstrate how they intend to reduce the need for burning in the future. The expansion of the protected area is due to the alteration of the definition of deep peat, which would include anything over 30cm in depth rather than the current 40cm depth threshold. The [consultation](#) runs until 25 May.

EIP review to reformulate and rationalise targets

Targets in England's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) may be revised. The Chair of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), Dame Glenys Stacey, informed the House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee that the upcoming review would likely lead to a reformulation of the EIP targets. She noted when the targets were first set in 2023, they demonstrated a commendable level of ambition. However, some did not appear to be on the right trajectory. Appearing before the Environmental Audit Committee, Steve Reed seemed to agree with the comments of the OEP chair, saying he wanted to "rationalise the targets" of the EIP to ensure deliverability. According to The Times, several statutory environmental targets are at risk of revision, including the target to halt the decline in species abundance. To learn more about EIP, please see [this blog](#).

The "National Estate for Nature"

The inaugural meeting of the newly established National Estate for Nature took place on 21 March, comprising England's major landowners, who collectively own 10% of the country's land. The group aims to improve collaboration among major landholders (public, private and civil) to work towards nature restoration and drive the delivery of Environment Act targets and objectives like 30by30. Members of the National Estate for Nature include government bodies, water companies, wildlife charities and private estates. Defra will also participate as a member, aiming to "lead by example". The Secretary of State, Steve Reed, has asked members to set "minimum standards" for land management plans, with clear milestones for nature restoration and protections.

National forest coming soon to the South West

'The Western Forest' will be a new 2,500-hectare national forest that stretches from the Cotswolds to the Mendips, the first to be planted in 30 years. The Labour manifesto committed to creating three national forests as part of efforts to plant 20 million trees and achieve England's target of achieving 16.5% tree cover by 2050. The project will be led by the Forest of Avon and supported by £7.5 million of government funding over the next five years, working alongside the National Forest Company and Defra.

Property & Development

Parliament told to get Britain building again

MPs voted 330 to 74 to approve the Planning and Infrastructure Bill at its second reading. Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner called on MPs to support the vote, saying the Bill would speed up the planning system, help achieve the target of building 1.5 million houses by 2029, allow for an expansion of Britain's energy network and give greater environmental protections.

Key measures in the Bill include:

- Establishing a Nature Restoration Fund.
- A new 'first ready, first connected' system for clean energy projects.
- Reducing the consultation process when seeking approval for major infrastructure projects.
- Limiting the number of times government decisions on infrastructure projects can be challenged.
- Reforming the compulsory purchase process.

For more information about the Bill, see [this blog](#).

£16 million allocated for rural flood protection

An additional £16 million has been announced for internal drainage boards (IDBs), bringing the total IDB fund to £91 million. It aims to improve flood resilience across more than 400,000 hectares of agricultural land in England and will benefit 91,000 homes and businesses. The investment is intended to help manage water levels, repair flood risk management assets, and modernise infrastructure following the devastating winter storms of 2023/24. The Environment Agency will distribute grants to IDBs by the end of April 2025.

Business & Economy

Trump's tariffs

President Donald Trump has announced a 10% tariff on all goods imported into the United States from the United Kingdom with effect from 5 April. The US has stated Britain must start selling chlorinated US chickens if it wants lower tariffs. The White House released a statement saying, "the UK maintains non-science-based standards that severely restrict US exports of safe, high-quality beef and poultry products". The government has repeatedly reiterated its commitment to high food standards. However, according to The Times, ministers are considering reducing or eliminating the tariffs on imports of some US agricultural goods in a "ready to sign" economic deal with the US.

Further clarification is required regarding the complete extent of tariffs. For instance, Britain benefits from the US rest of the world quota for beef exports, which was fully utilised by 17 January 2025. After this date, any additional beef exports will be subject to tariffs of 26.4%. There is uncertainty about whether the new 10% tariff will be added to the existing 26.4% tariff. Additionally, it remains unclear if the 10% tariff will apply to countries that already have established Free Trade Agreements.

Government-backed nature standard launches

The British Standards Institution (BSI) launched the Overarching Principles Standard (BSI Flex 701), the first in a suite known as the Nature Investment Standards, which will each focus on specific nature markets. They are designed to bring greater confidence and consistency to nature markets, prevent greenwashing and ensure investments genuinely benefit the environment. The BSI is currently developing a Natural Carbon Standard to enhance nature-based carbon credit markets.

Red tractor reaches "turning point"

Red Tractor has responded in full to the Farm Assurance Review. It has responded to each of the nine strategic recommendations provided by the review's commissioners and outlined the actions it will take to deliver the 56 detailed recommendations. Red Tractor faced significant backlash after planning to introduce the Greener Farms Commitment. The controversy led to the publication of the Review in January, which called on all farm assurance schemes to deliver better outcomes for farmers. Red Tractor has now promised "significant improvements" and welcomed the review as "an opportunity to reset relationships with farmers".

Other Rural News

And finally... World's largest wildlife bridge

The first layers of soil have been added to the world's largest wildlife crossing. The \$92 million Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing will span approximately 61 metres across the 10-lane 101 Freeway in the Santa Monica Mountains, Los Angeles. Its purpose is to protect the local mountain lions by minimising disruptions to their habitat. The 50-metre-wide structure will hold 4,600 cubic metres of soil 6.4 metres above the highway. The idea for the crossing was first proposed three decades ago, with construction beginning in 2022 and expected to be completed by 2026. Before then, coastal sage, buckwheat, wild grape, wildflowers, milkweed and other native plants will be planted. Oaks and other trees and plants will also be planted on both sides of the wildlife crossing.

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