

Food & Farming

Supply chain synergies - Savills sponsors report launched at Oxford Farming Conference

A report launched at the 2023 Oxford Farming Conference (OFC) calls for fairness, net zero cost-sharing and the recalibration of value sharing throughout the UK's food supply chain. It was authored by the Forum for the Future in partnership with the OFC, Savills and WWF. In preparation of the [report](#) 30 interviews were conducted across the food production landscape to explore the barriers to supply chain transformation, identify pathways to change and how voluntary and policy action can enable these ambitions.

Policy recommendations included ensuring the political strategy across food and farming governance is integrated and recognises and prioritises the environmental and social dimensions of food and farming, alongside economics. It also highlighted the delivery of environmental and social outcomes alongside food production will be compromised if farmers are undercut by imports that are not produced to the same attributes. Emily Norton, OFC 2023 Chair and Head of Savills Rural Research says 'the challenge is immense, but I hope the recommendations of this report are an inspiration to all. Doing better has already started and we all have a part to play'.

Seasonal working visas and funding for automation and robotics to support labour shortages

The government has committed to making 45,000 seasonal worker visas available for horticultural businesses this year. The allocation will allow businesses to recruit overseas workers to come to the UK for up to six months and is 15,000 higher than the allocation offered at the start of 2022. As a longer term strategy to address the labour challenges the UK agri-food sector faces, the government is working to boost automation and robotic technologies on farm, it has recently announced £12.5 million to boost the development of these technologies. Defra is also expected to respond to the recommendations of a review of automation in horticulture, which was published last year.

Policy

Environmental enhancement payments increased in England

Speaking at the Oxford Farming Conference, Farming Minister Mark Spencer announced increased payment rates for farmers and landowners through Countryside Stewardship (CS), the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO). He also confirmed an expanded range of actions under each scheme will be published soon. Within the SFI a new annual Management Payment of £20 per hectare will be made for the first 50 hectares of a farm within an SFI agreement. This payment is intended to cover the administrative costs of participation and to attract smaller businesses, specifically tenant farmers. Defra figures show 1,829 applications were made for SFI last year, with 1,662 offers accepted; by comparison there were nearly 84,000 Basic Payment Scheme recipients in 2021.

Farmers with a CS agreement will benefit from an average increase of 10% to their revenue payment rates (backdated to January 2023), whilst capital payment rates will be increased by 48% on average. The payment rate for hedgerow creation will nearly double. Capital and annual maintenance payments for EWCO and the Tree Health Pilot will also be updated this year. Through the government's Future Farming Resilience Fund, Savills Food and Farming team is able to offer farmers free business advice to help them understand the changes to agricultural support, the potential impact on their business and to identify options to adapt their business models. Please click [here](#) to find out more and register your interest.

Developing a Land Use Framework

The House of Lord's Land Use in England Committee has published its report 'Making the most out of England's land'. The committee recommends that the government should establish a land use commission to prepare the land use framework which Defra has already committed to publish in 2023. The Lords see the commission as a statutory arms-length body under the cabinet office, with commissioners representing all relevant government departments. It would enable development and help decision makers, as a supporter and a facilitator but without powers of direction. For a summary of the report read our latest Rural Research Briefing Note.

The concept of multifunctionality or 'land sharing' is also a core theme running throughout the report - the idea that multiple benefits can be achieved on the same piece of land, intertwining different functions. There are competing views on principles such as land sharing and land sparing that any land use framework will need to reconcile. See the Business & Economy section for a summary of a recent academic study.

Basic Payment Scheme stability in Wales

The Welsh government has confirmed that in 2023 the same level of Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) support will be provided to farmers as in 2020 to 2022. Subject to budget availability this rate will continue into 2024 also. The minister was critical of the "continued failure of the UK Government to adjust funding levels to deal with rising costs which exacerbates the impact of their economic mismanagement on Welsh farmers". In 2025 Wales will launch its Sustainable Farming Scheme which the Welsh government says will be a new fairer system of farm support.

Environment & Natural Capital

Legally binding Environment Act targets set out

The government has published its legally binding environmental targets, as required by the Environment Act. The publication of these targets follows three years of detailed consideration of scientific and economic evidence to inform draft targets. A consultation on these targets received over 180,000 responses from a range of individuals and businesses. The targets require the UK government to:

- Halt the decline in species populations by 2030, and then increase populations by at least 10% to exceed current levels by 2042
- Restore precious water bodies to their natural state by cracking down on harmful pollution from sewers and abandoned mines and improving water usage in households
- An 80% cut in total phosphorus pollution from wastewater treatment works by 2038
- Deliver our net zero ambitions and boost nature recovery by increasing tree and woodland cover to 16.5% of total land area in England by 2050
- Halve the waste per person that is sent to residual treatment by 2042
- Cut exposure to the most harmful air pollutant to human health PM2.5 (fine particulate matter)
- Restore 70% of designated features in our Marine Protected Areas to a favourable condition by 2042, with the rest in a recovering condition
- Restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat, which will also help the UK to meet its international commitment to protect 30% of its land and ocean by 2030.

A strategy for a nature positive Scotland

The Scottish government has released its draft biodiversity strategy which sets out a long-term ambition and vision for what good looks like for biodiversity in Scotland in 2045. Within the strategy there are 26 priority actions to restore Scotland's natural environment and halt the loss of biodiversity by 2030. The strategy is designed to deliver landscape-scale, transformative change that is backed by evidence and underpinned by statutory targets which will hold future governments to account. Collaboration and inclusivity is seen as key to the success of this [strategy](#), which sets out a nature positive vision for Scotland. Following a period of consultation, a final version of the strategy will be published in 2023 alongside a detailed delivery plan.

Property & Development

Licensing scheme proposed for all visitor accommodation providers in Wales

The Welsh Government has launched a consultation on a statutory licensing scheme for all visitor accommodation providers in Wales. The aim of the scheme is to create a level playing field for all accommodation businesses within the sector and address concerns around compliance with statutory obligations by requiring accommodation providers to obtain a licence to operate. The scheme would also provide a comprehensive database of businesses operating in the industry, and provide a tool to understand the scale and nature of the sector. The [consultation](#) runs until 17th March 2023.

Updates to National Planning Policy Frameworks

The government is consulting on proposed updates to the National Planning Policy Framework in England. This includes exploring whether there is an effective and proportionate way of deploying a broad carbon assessment and how such a tool could be used in plan making and for assessing individual developments. It also covers how development on Best and Most Versatile land should be addressed in policies and applications with a proposal to detail the consideration that should be given to the relative value of agricultural land for food production, where

significant development of higher quality agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, compared to areas of poorer quality land.

In Scotland there are also plans to revise the National Planning Policy Framework to take account of projects emissions reduction credentials and make it easier for windfarms and other renewable energy schemes to obtain consent. The Scottish government's advisor Nature Scot is critical of draft policy because it weakens protection of wildland and landscape.

Business & Economy

What are the impacts of land sharing vs sparing on the tax payer?

A new study led by the universities of Cambridge, Leeds and Glasgow has found incentivising farmers to put aside farmland for nature could cut taxpayer costs in half, whilst also delivering for climate and food production targets. The study suggests this 'land sparing' approach would cost just 48% of the funds required to achieve the same outcomes for biodiversity and the climate through an alternative 'land sharing' approach. The research also says that trying to share land with nature through making farming more wildlife-friendly would see the UK lose 30% more of its food production capacity than if farmers are encouraged to spare portions of land entirely for creation of semi-natural habitats. The researchers hope the study's findings might inform a rethink of Defra's Environmental Land Management scheme.

Other Rural News

Unlimited fines and prison sentences for illegal tree felling

Defra and the Forestry Commission have announced that unlimited fines and prison sentences are to be introduced as part of a crackdown on illegal tree felling in England. Changes to the Forestry Act 1967, delivered through the Environment Act, will mean felling trees without a felling licence, where one is required, will carry the penalty of an unlimited fine – up from the current limit of £2,500 or twice the value of the trees felled. Failure to comply with a Forestry Commission Enforcement Notice and a subsequent court-ordered Restocking Order (meaning any trees felled must be replanted) will put offenders at risk of imprisonment, in addition to an unlimited fine. Finally, Restocking Notices and Enforcement Notices will be listed on the Local Land Charges Register, making them visible to prospective buyers of the land – potentially reducing the land's value. The largest fine issued in recent years following a report of illegal tree felling to the Forestry Commission took place in Hailsham, East Sussex, in January 2020. Hastings Magistrates Court issued a fine of almost £15,000 for the felling of 12 oak trees, all approximately 150 years old. The hope is this new legislation will curb illegal felling and strengthen forestry enforcement administration, in order to protect trees across England.

And finally...

A 2,360 mile trail to link all of Britain's national parks

Dan Raven-Ellison, an explorer and founder of Slows Ways, a movement seeking to build an online network of walks linking all the towns and villages in the UK, is driving a new initiative to create one of the longest hiking trails in the world by linking all the national parks of Great Britain in one single route. The national parks trail would be equivalent in length to the Appalachian Trail in the United States. The Slows Ways network relies on volunteers mapping routes, which are graded for difficulty and suitability. Once at least three people have walked and reviewed a Slow Way positively, it is considered verified. Currently, the longest verified Slow Ways routes enable you to walk from Brighton to Cardiff in one go and from Sheffield to Ledbury, Herefordshire.

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