

Food & Farming

Scotland: Split of future farm funding confirmed

At the NFU Scotland's AGM, Scotland's first minister Humza Yousaf confirmed that at least 70% of future farm support funding will be allocated to tiers one and two of its future agricultural policy from 2027. These are the 'Base' and 'Enhanced' payments that are targeted at farming, crofting and land management and most closely reflect activities required by the current basic payment scheme and greening. A more detailed description of the planned tiers can be found in our Agricultural Reform Route Map [briefing note](#) from last year.

Labour will 'steamroll' junk firms

Labour will "steamroll" the food industry into promoting healthier options to tackle the obesity crisis if it is elected. Shadow health secretary Wes Streeting said he is committed to banning the advertising of junk food to children online and on TV and could also push for stricter restrictions on food packaging. He intends to build a coalition within the food industry which recognises the need to tackle obesity, adding "you either get on board the steamroller or you're going under it". He made the comments at the Times Health Commission summit. The commission also presented a 10-point plan, which recommended tackling obesity by expanding the sugar tax, taxing salt, implementing a pre-watershed ban on junk food advertising and reducing cartoons on packaging. It also recommended digital health accounts for patients and the establishment of a National Care System.

New livestock worrying legislation

New legislation could give the police more powers to seize dogs after serious incidents of livestock worrying as well as the power to take evidence samples from livestock and dogs to help investigate these crimes. The proposals are within the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill which is a Private Members' Bill sponsored by former environment secretary Dr Thérèse Coffey. Ordinarily, the chance of a Private Members' Bill becoming law is slim but in this instance the government has announced its backing. The Bill would also extend the definition of livestock to include alpacas and llamas and widen locations where enforcement action can be taken to include roads and paths. Since the original 1953 Act was brought in, the number of livestock in England and Wales has doubled.

Agri-climate report 2023

Are greenhouse gases from UK farms decreasing? The [Agri-climate report 2023](#) from Defra outlines key findings on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as well as farmers' attitudes towards emissions reduction. The Farm Practices Survey 2023 found 62% of farmers thought it was important to consider GHG emissions when making business decisions, with 83% of those taking actions to reduce emissions on their farms. Such attitudes appear to be reflected in changes to levels of emissions. Since the 2000s, overall agricultural emissions have decreased due to factors like a decline in animal numbers and reduced synthetic fertiliser usage. More recently emissions levels have plateaued. The report also examines emissions intensity (kg of CO₂ per kg of output) across different agricultural industries. Despite fluctuations, there has been an overall decrease in emissions intensity for cattle, dairy and pigs since 1990. According to the research, the reasons some farmers are not taking steps to reduce emissions include conflicting views on the issue, lack of information and financial constraints.

Policy

Labour drops green investment pledges

The Labour Party has dropped its commitment to spend £28 billion a year on green investment. Instead, Labour will decide how much to spend on environmental programmes once in government, depending on the state of the economy and the "case-by-case business cases" for each individual scheme. First unveiled in 2021, Labour has been steadily backtracking on the commitment ever since. Last year, Labour said the £28 billion-a-year spending target would likely be met in the second half of a first parliament, rather than immediately. The party has since insisted the pledge is subject to its fiscal rules. For more information on the pledges of political parties for land and farming, consult our Spotlight on the [Farmland Market](#).

Environment & Natural Capital

Forest for the Nation competition launched

Organisations across England are being invited to put forward their local areas to become the new Forest for the Nation. The winner of the competition will be announced in the autumn and receive £10 million to help fund the project. Stage one of the competition will close on 18 March 2024. To win, applicants are being encouraged to demonstrate how the new forest will benefit local communities but also have a national impact for people, nature and the environment. Those showing innovation in woodland and forest creation and other forms of tree planting, or demonstrating a transformational impact for nature recovery in the area or boosting community engagement with woodlands will also be viewed more favourably.

In Scotland, the Cairngorms National Park Authority has received nearly £11 million to create more than 1,000 hectares of new woodland, as well as restore 6,500 hectares of peatland. It also plans to pioneer nature-friendly farming to help it reduce emissions and sequester carbon dioxide. It is all part of the park authority's ambition to make the Cairngorms the UK's first net zero national park by 2030. The project aims to raise a further £42 million of funding within five years to cover the cost of woodland and restoration projects, in addition to the £12 million awarded in 2021. As well as achieving net zero, the park hopes to collaborate with the NHS to promote health and wellbeing. That will include building an outdoor dementia activity resource centre and the improvement of walking and cycling routes.

Wales: Nitrogen limit exemption scheme announced

The Welsh government introduced a blanket approach to nitrogen application limits in Wales in 2021 despite criticism from farmers. The imposition of a universal 170kg/ha/yr nitrogen limit was due to come into effect on 30 April 2023, but a consultation on a licensing scheme to give farmers some flexibility delayed enforcement. This will take the form of an Enhanced Nutrient Management (ENM) scheme which will allow farmers to apply up to 250kg/ha/yr under certain circumstances.

The exemption is defined quite tightly: only farms that were not previously in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone and where 80% or more of the holding is sown with grass during the 2024 calendar year can apply. Grass with more than 50% clover does not qualify. Qualifying farmers need to notify Natural Resources Wales by 31 March 2024 of their intention to participate in the ENM approach and submit detailed records to Natural Resources Wales. They must also follow rules relating to soil sampling, manure testing and precision application. For more information on this and other rural policy matters in Wales see our latest [Welsh Rural Policy Update](#).

Scotland: tackling the effects of climate change

How can Scotland protect and restore nature, improve green spaces in local areas and prepare for the risks and opportunities presented by climate change? A new consultation is hoping to find out. It focuses on the draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024-2029 (SNAP3). As well as noting the negative impacts of climate change, such as the increased frequency of extreme weather, the plan also outlines potential economic opportunities for Scotland, such as the development of new, innovative products and services which support climate change resilience. Those opportunities range from battery storage to new insurance products or expertise in heritage restoration. The [consultation](#) will be open until 24 April 2024.

Property & Development

Biodiversity Net Gain is live

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) became mandatory for major developments in England on Monday 12 February. From April, smaller sites will also be subject to the requirements and from November 2025 it will apply to nationally significant infrastructure projects too. The new planning condition requires developers to submit biodiversity gain plans as part of their planning application. Developments will need to demonstrate at least a 10% increase in biodiversity and maintain this for 30 years or more, either on-site, off-site or both. Demand for BNG units from biodiversity offsetting projects will now increase.

Despite the positive environmental intentions of BNG, a last-minute rule change could lead to more development in areas earmarked for nature recovery. Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are meant to form part of the 'strategic significance multiplier' within the biodiversity metric which will measure the amount and type of biodiversity before and after development. This multiplier was understood to be applied at the 'baseline' calculation stage, where it penalises development in LNRS areas, and at the 'post-intervention' stage, where it rewards the creation of habitats in LNRS areas. However, a last-minute tweak could remove the multiplier from the baseline calculation and therefore remove the penalty for building in these areas. It would however remain the case that biodiversity projects in LNRS areas are incentivised. If you would like to discuss BNG projects and units please contact [Julia Pound](#).

New water regulations in 16 areas

Environment secretary Steve Barclay has designated specific zones where water companies will be tied to stricter standards. Within these areas, water companies must ensure wastewater treatment works serving a population of over 2,000 people meet specific nutrient removal standards by 1 April 2030, as specified in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023. The designation is intended to unlock housebuilding that is being held up by nutrient neutrality requirements. However, stakeholders have said the 2030 timeframe does not provide developers with any immediate confidence that they can get on with building. A full list of the zones designated as sensitive catchment areas can be found [here](#). Natural England is now expected to update its nutrient budget calculator, which will lead to a change in the short and long-term nutrient mitigation requirements for some developments.

Nature-based solutions for sustainable cooling

UK heat-related deaths could rise to 10,000 per year without concerted action to adapt to the warming climate. They are already believed to have exceeded 4,500 in 2022, the year when the UK Health Security Agency issued its first-ever Level 4 heat-health alert as temperature records were broken and 40°C was recorded in the UK for the first time. As the climate warms, demand for cooling technologies will rise. A report by the Environmental Audit Committee has suggested that nature-based solutions will play a key role in mitigating the urban heat island (UHI) effect. This is where human activity and structures in an urban environment cause it to be hotter than in rural areas.

Nature-based solutions could include green walls, which can reduce the UHI effect by up to 5°C. Similarly, making just 5% of a city's area green roofs could lower city-wide temperature by an estimated 1.5–2°C. Any kind of green or blue space correlates to benefits. A recent paper in The Lancet concluded that a 20% increase in green space had been demonstrated to lower heat-related mortality by 9%. There are co-benefits too, such as flood alleviation, air quality improvements and enhanced biodiversity. Faced with these benefits, the Environmental Audit Committee recommended:

- Introducing a statutory requirement on local authorities to protect green space
- Mandating local authorities in urban areas to use the Green Infrastructure Framework
- Introducing measures to incentivise the installation of green roofs.

Business & Economy

Biosecurity: one step forwards, two steps back?

New border controls have come into effect for animals, plants and plant products imported to Great Britain from the EU. Products which present a 'medium risk' to biosecurity will now require export health certificates and phytosanitary certificates, where they could previously enter the UK without them. The controls are part of a Border Target Operating Model (BTOM), which also seeks to digitise and simplify health certificates. Controls are being applied to goods from Ireland for the first time - the Windsor Framework means Northern Ireland goods will have unfettered access regardless of whether they move indirectly via Ireland. Two further sets of controls will be introduced this year. From 30 April, documentary, physical and identity checks will be introduced for medium-risk products imported from the EU, except goods that enter Great Britain via West Coast ports. From 31 October, safety and security declarations will be required for all goods moving from the EU to Great Britain.

The chair of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee has written to the environment secretary expressing concerns about the effectiveness of the measures for protecting biosecurity. While the committee remains supportive of BTOM, the letter raises two issues: Defra's planned funding cuts for spot checks for products of animal origin at the Port of Dover; and the location of the new facility for physical checks at the Dover border crossing, some 22 miles away from the point of entry. Since September 2022, 60 tonnes of illegal pork alone have been seized. Dover Port Health Authority says this is a time to bolster controls, not reduce funding by the planned 70%.

The importance of rural shops

Of the 49,399 convenience stores in the UK, more than a third (36%) are rural and half of those are the only business in the local area. The 2024 Rural Shop Report from the Association of Convenience Stores highlights how these rural shops play a key role in isolated rural communities. For example, 83% of independent rural retailers engaged in some form of community activity in the past year. Many also offer key services such as bill payment services (72%), free-to-use cash machines (49%) and community notice boards (48%). Savills forthcoming Spotlight on Social Value in the rural sector will explore the importance of community and social value in generating sustainable economic growth.

Other Rural News

And finally...

They ate the plate as well!

Some meals are so delicious, they make you want to lick the plate. So what would happen if the plates were edible? For livestock, that could soon be the case. Fibrestar Drums has developed Nestub, a tub made from recycled and virgin kraft paper meaning they are a fully biodegradable and edible packaging solution for animal feed. The firm has found that not only do the tubs tackle plastic waste but using the packaging to store feed means it becomes even tastier too.

If you have queries regarding any of the articles, please contact us.

Contacts



Andrew Teanby
Associate Director
ateanby@savills.com
+44 (0) 7835 445 458



Joe Lloyd
Associate
joe.lloyd@savills.com
+44 (0) 7790 824 970

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