

Food & Farming

Risk of a Halloween horror story for lamb

Meat Promotion Wales has warned of a ‘Halloween horror story’ for the sheep industry if there is a no-deal Brexit on 31 October. A study, published jointly with the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board and Quality Meat Scotland, calculates that Welsh farmers could see market prices fall by 24% because of a “near wipe out” of exports if the UK leaves the EU without a deal, whilst combined beef and sheep meat exports to the EU could decline by 92.5%. There was some positive news: the study also found that customers the world over admired the “Welsh way” of low-intensity livestock farming. Chair of Meat Promotion Wales, Kevin Roberts, said “it’s one of the most sustainable ways to farm in the world” but the industry still had to “fight fake news” around climate change consequences.

Alun Cairns, Secretary of State for Wales, attempted to allay concerns by pointing out that a new market just opened to Welsh and British sheep in Japan. He said it was a “significant market for which we haven’t scratched the surface yet”. Whilst true, the future potential of that market will be far smaller than current EU exports. Japanese exports are expected to be worth around £10.4 million annually, which would account for less than 3% of current exports to the EU.

Boris Johnson was told to stop “playing Russian roulette” with the farming industry on his recent visit to Wales but Mr Johnson insisted the no-deal issue was “up to the EU”. Ahead of the visit he said “I will always back Britain’s great farmers and... we need to make sure that Brexit works for them”. He added “We will make sure that farmers get a better deal”. It is understood that the Government is planning a £500 million no-deal Brexit support scheme under which it would buy slaughtered beef and lamb at set prices to prop up market prices. However the Cold Chain Federation, which represents frozen and chilled food stores, has warned that storage is already full to capacity.

Environment Secretary's first speech

The new Environment Secretary, Theresa Villier’s made her first speech at Countryfile Live 2019, in which she confirmed that the new government’s plans for farming and the environment are unchanged. The Government will press ahead with a new system of support which rewards farmers for environmental stewardship and improving the health and welfare of animals. It will help them become more productive, more competitive and more successful. The system will be based on the principle of public money for public goods and underpinned by a reformed and proportionate approach to regulation and enforcement. A core aim is to “provide a stable platform from which producers can seize the opportunities provided by Brexit to sell our fantastic food into new global markets”.

Scottish Affairs Committee calls for more support in Less Favoured Areas

The House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee has called for the distribution of agricultural funding within the UK to be based on objective criteria which reflect each country’s conditions and situation. The criteria should reflect the much higher proportion of Less Favoured Area (LFA) land in Scotland, and the number of LFA categories should be increased to better reflect the diversity of LFA land across the UK. It would also like to see the UK Government set agricultural budgets on a seven-year basis.

Road safety: no to trailer MOTs

Following an investigation into the safety of trailers over 750kg, the Government has decided that mandatory testing and registration is not required. However, road users must ensure their vehicles are roadworthy and the Government found that improvement is needed in agriculture. Of the 53 agricultural trailers inspected, only a third were fully compliant with all relevant laws. Inspections will continue, with the Government also announcing a ban on the use of tyres which are 10 or more years old on tractors and trailers driven at speeds over 25mph.

Food out of thin air

Food made from thin air could soon be available in a supermarket near you. Solar Foods, a Finnish science company, has developed a technique to turn renewable energy, carbon dioxide, water, nutrients and vitamins into a flour-like ingredient which they call Solein. The process may sound a lot like natural photosynthesis, but it is said

to avoid the vagaries of agricultural production and is derived from NASA technology seeking to produce food in space. It has been reported that Solein looks and tastes a lot like wheat flour and contains 50% protein, 5-10% fat and 20-25% carbohydrates. The company hopes it will be rolled out globally in 2021 and sees protein shakes and yogurts as likely first uses.

Policy

Climate change and land

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that better land management can contribute to tackling climate change, but is not the only solution. Agriculture, forestry and other types of land use account for 23% of human greenhouse gas emissions. The IPCC's [Climate Change and Land report](#) acknowledges that land must remain productive to maintain food security as the population increases and the negative impacts of climate change on vegetation increase. This means there are limits to the contribution to addressing climate change which land can make through the cultivation of energy crops and afforestation. Although the report has been presented as a ringing endorsement for plant based diets, the IPCC's statements are more pragmatic: "balanced diets featuring plant-based foods, such as coarse grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables, and animal-sourced food produced sustainably in low greenhouse gas emission systems, present major opportunities for adaptation to and limiting climate change", highlighting that the carbon emissions linked to meat production vary between production methods. The impact of our diets can also be reduced by cutting food waste, as presently about a third is wasted, generating unnecessary emissions and undermining food security. In combination, sustainable land use, reducing over-consumption and waste of food offer real potential to help tackle land related climate change issues.

Ceasefire called over general licences

Wild Justice "does not have time to mount a sensible challenge" on general licences. But it says the 'legal car' is "almost fully fuelled [through crowdfunding]... and ready to set off at a moment's notice". In a letter to Defra and Natural England, it warned of further legal action if new licences fail to address the legal points which it has made. It says "the time-limited nature of the general licences" and "the speed with which the legal system operates" has led to its decision.

Slug pellet ban overturned

The ban on outdoor use of metaldehyde slug pellets has been overturned by the High Court following a successful legal challenge by a molluscicide manufacturer. Michael Gove announced the ban in December 2018, allowing six months until sales were stopped and an 18 month period for the product to be used up on farm. The ban has been declared unlawful due to procedural flaws in the decision making process. Defra says it will retake the decision as swiftly as possible. Chiltern Farm Chemicals, the company that took legal action, said its slug pellets would now return to the market.

Environment & Natural Capital

Can bulrushes and moss be viable crops?

A £1 million project in East Anglia is searching for wetland crops which can be grown viably as an alternative cropping option on peatland soils. Raising the water table would cut wind erosion and carbon emissions linked to the oxidation of the soil's organic matter, but re-wetting prevents conventional cropping. Alternative crops that can be grown on wet peat include bulrushes, which could be used for biomass, animal feed and home insulation boards, and wetland moss, which is a potential substitute for peat in gardening products. Other novel crops in the trial have edible or medicinal uses, including *Glyceria fluitans*, which has grain like seeds suitable for making porridge, and meadowsweet, a possible gin botanical. The Water Works project is being run by a Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire led partnership and is funded by the People's Postcode Lottery Dream Fund.

State of peatland in England inquiry

In other peatland news, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is investigating the current state of England's peatland, its potential contribution towards the UK's net zero greenhouse gas target and the potential cost and socioeconomic benefits of its restoration. [Submissions](#) to its inquiry can be made until 23 September.

New nature reserves for England

A wave of new national nature reserves will improve people's health and help to mitigate the effects of climate change says Tony Juniper of Natural England. The South London Downs and Saltwells Nature Reserve will both be officially declared as national nature reserves, with more to follow this year. Mr Juniper said "improving the health of natural systems can help adapt to global heating" but "it does require quite a lot of joining up". He also said

Natural England was determined to do the “practical work of conservation” despite being “massively depleted” by austerity measures.

How can agriculture achieve net-zero?

An inquiry into how agriculture can achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 whilst maintaining food production has been launched by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. It will also make recommendations on how farming communities can be fairly supported through the transition. Issues the inquiry will consider include:

- How could land be repurposed and what would the impact be?
- Are there other ways to achieve net-zero?
- How important will financial incentives be?
- What support will be needed and how will it be provided?
- How can innovative technology and practices help?
- What impact would diet change have?
- How can reductions be achieved without ‘offshoring’ emissions?

[Submissions](#) can be made until 30 September.

Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund

Landscape or catchment scale environmental work is likely to become more common as the Government’s ‘public money for public goods’ plans are developed. It could therefore be worth getting a head start in England and using the new round of the [Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund](#) to develop an environmental improvement scheme application in collaboration with neighbouring farmers and landowners. £2.5 million is available to support approximately 40 new facilitation groups to deliver large-scale environmental improvements in their area over the next three years. This could involve natural flood prevention, enhancing wildlife habitats or planting more trees. If you would like to discuss the scheme please contact [Jon Dearsley](#); the deadline is 4 October.

Agroforestry Handbook

Written for farmers and advisors the new [agroforestry handbook](#) helps you assess the potential business benefits of agroforestry and to understand the possible benefits to the wider environment. It combines practical advice along with the economic case and explains how the value of trees can be maximised in silvopasture and silvoarable systems. Compared to conventional agriculture, agroforestry can reduce erosion, increase productivity and improve animal welfare, water management and biodiversity. The handbook suggests that leaving the CAP with its restrictive land use codes presents an opportunity to look again at how agroforestry could benefit farms.

Tree planting grants available

Grants of up to £4,000 are available in 10 English counties to create small areas of native woodland. The Woodland Trust has launched the [Trustwoods pilot scheme](#) on a first-come, first-served basis. Proposed woodland should meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Extending existing woodland
- Increase ecological connectivity
- Engage the public or increase public access
- Enhance the ecological, cultural and visual value of the landscape.

Decisions on funding will be made in time to allow planting this winter.

Property & Development

Councils cannot delay prior approval barn conversion decisions

The High Court has ruled in favour of a developer which sought prior approval from the local planning authority for its proposed conversion of agricultural buildings to residential use under permitted development rights. Decisions on prior approval must be made within 56 days, however the local planning authority requested more time to consider the application and subsequently refused it. The High Court ruled that planning law makes no provision for an extension, so in the absence of the Council refusing prior approval during the 56 days allowed, prior approval would be deemed to be granted at the end of that period. The Council therefore had no power to refuse prior approval after the 56 day window had elapsed.

Support onshore wind

An economy-wide coalition of companies and organisations have urged the new Energy Minister Kwasi Kwarteng to support the development of new onshore wind farms to help achieve the UK’s net-zero emissions target at the lowest cost. Backers from outside the industry included the RSPB which said “analysis conducted for the RSPB’s

Energy Vision suggests that onshore wind with an annual output of up to 140TWh could be developed with low ecological risk. We support the increased use of onshore wind in appropriate sites as part of the wider UK renewables strategy needed to tackle the climate emergency and to deliver net-zero greenhouse gas emissions”.

Business & Economy

Waitrose stops sale of birds shot with lead

Britain’s largest retailer of game is to ban the sale of birds shot with lead as experts renew calls on the Government to ban its use. In 2015 the Lead Ammunition Group, the Government’s independent expert group, said there is no way to reduce the risks associated with lead shot other than using alternative, non-toxic ammunition. Fragmentation of shot can leave small lead fragments dispersed throughout the flesh which are later consumed. After five years of research, the group concluded 10,000 children were eating sufficient amounts of game shot with lead to cause “neurodevelopmental harm and other impairments”. It also cited studies that estimate as many as 100,000 wildfowl die by ingesting spent gunshot.

Rethinking economics for the age of environmental breakdown

In [Facing the crisis](#), the first of six reports, the Institute for Public Policy Research argues that in order to drive rapid and transformative action to ensure societies become more sustainable, a full sustainability constraint needs to be placed on economies. This is because production based upon unsustainable resource use tends to be cheaper and therefore undermines efforts to introduce less environmentally damaging products. In the UK, it argues that the Government should adopt a Sustainable Economy Act that mandates statutory targets for the rapid reduction of a full range of environmental impacts. Crucially this should apply to goods and services imported into the UK as well, so that UK producers are not placed at a competitive disadvantage.

Other Rural News

Lincolnshire king prawns

A farm near Lincoln is home to the UK’s first warm water king prawn producer. FloGro can produce fresh prawns which are more sustainable than the imports that dominate the market. It uses a biomass boiler to heat its 12 large tanks, solar and wind power to meet its electricity requirements, and fertilises the surrounding farmland with the waste that is filtered from the tanks.

Rural crime up in every region

Last year rural crime cost the UK £49.9 million, 12.1% more than in 2017. Statistics from the NFU Mutual show that damages caused by almost every type of rural crime increased in almost every region. Agricultural vehicle theft increased the most - by 26% to £7.4 million. The NFU Mutual observes that crimes such as vehicle theft, livestock theft and fly-tipping, which historically were opportunistic, are increasingly being linked to organised crime.

And finally...

Tech talk takes over

Let’s play a word association game. Stream? Cloud? Tweet? If you’re picturing a tranquil countryside scene, you are one of a dying breed. According to research, the language of the natural world is being taken over by technology. A stream only refers to a small river in 36% of cases. Modern use of ‘tweet’ refers to social media 99% of the time. In the 1990s, clouds were always associated with nature. Now their “non-nature usage” is up by 23%. Web, branch, net, fibre and field have all taken on similar non-natural meanings. Researchers from the University of Leeds used transcribed, informal conversations among members of the public in the 1990s and compared them to conversations in the 2010s.

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

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Landscape | Issues shaping the future of rural estates, agriculture and land management

The Savills logo, consisting of the word "savills" in a lowercase, sans-serif font, with the 's' and 'a' in a darker shade of yellow and the remaining letters in a lighter shade of yellow.

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