

Food & Farming

UK public's vision for the future of farmland

A recent research study led by Newcastle University's Centre for Rural Economy has investigated what the UK public wants the UK's farmland to look like. Rural land across the UK is experiencing a seismic post-Brexit policy shift, with rapidly converging demands for food production, climate change mitigation and biodiversity provision. Determining how farmland should be used is no easy task, with different interpretations from different stakeholders. This new piece of research sought to understand how the public – as taxpayers of agri-environmental schemes – want the farmed countryside to look. 2,050 nationally representative participants were surveyed, and the conclusion was that the 'ideal' farmland is a diverse agricultural landscape containing trees and free-ranging livestock. An 'environmentally friendly' farm was conceptualised as having renewable energy technology, trees and no livestock. Interestingly, the kind of landscapes preferred by farmers did not differ significantly from those preferred by the rest of the public. Most of the public wants farms to produce a mixture of food and environmental benefits, but also wants UK food production to increase rather than importing more. These views highlight the challenges and trade-offs that land use decisions need to tackle. This research into public opinion is set to have implications for the design of future agri-environmental policy, particularly as the public has found accessing the countryside and nature even more important in supporting wellbeing since Covid-19. In Natural England's latest People and Nature Survey, 41% of adults said visiting natural spaces has become more important since Covid-19. If public money for public goods is set to be the mantra for the future of farming in England, understanding what the public values in terms of rural land is important. The research also highlights the perceived knowledge gaps around rural land use that the sector may want to address in order to best engage the public with the realities of farming.

Mixed messages for upland farmers

The Foundation for Common Land is concerned at the government's lack of engagement with questions that it raised around the impact that the transition away from direct payments will have on English upland agricultural businesses. The foundation called for more transparency on the number of upland farms that are likely to go bankrupt before Environmental Land Management (ELM) is available to everyone, and what farm incomes might look like under ELM. It also expressed concern at proposed income foregone mechanisms within the Sustainable Farming Incentive pilot. This concern from the Foundation for Common Land comes at the same time as NFU Scotland comments on the significant progress that has been achieved in delivering stability to farming and crofting in Scotland's Less Favourable Areas (LFA). The Hill, Upland and Crofting Group set up by the Scottish government has picked up many of NFU Scotland's proposals for supporting LFA farmers and crofters. The Less Favoured Area Support Scheme is likely to continue into 2023, and the equivalent of 100% of support will be delivered against 2020 claims. These are mixed messages for those affected, indicating that upland farmers in Scotland are perhaps, unsurprisingly, prioritised more than those in England. Whilst Secretary of State George Eustice's response failed to address the foundations specific concerns, he did confirm that a fund will be launched to help farmers in protected landscapes to work with their National Park authority or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty board to grow their businesses, enhance biodiversity and invest in infrastructure to attract a more diverse range of visitors.

Pick for Britain shelved

The government has shelved the Pick for Britain campaign which it was using to try and attract UK workers for seasonal roles harvesting fruit and vegetable crops. Despite attracting high interest relatively few workers were successfully recruited. According to The Grocer magazine it is estimated that UK workers filled between 5% and 10% of the 70,000 seasonal roles. Instead of its campaign the government will now focus on removing barriers to recruitment. Industry recruitment efforts including the British Summer Fruits jobs portal will continue to run.

Agriculture's fatality rate nearly doubles

A Farmers Weekly investigation estimates that more than 50 people have been killed in farm-related accidents during the past 12 months. This suggests that the rate has doubled compared to the previous year despite continued efforts to improve the safety culture within the industry. With at least 14 fatalities related to quadbike accidents or vehicles overturning. The Health and Safety Executive in Great Britain and Northern Ireland will publish its official statistics in July. Guidance and resources on agricultural Health and Safety are available [here](#).

Policy

Scotland's political race to net zero emissions

Scotland's globally ambitious target of 2045 for net zero emissions is proving to be a lynch pin for all parties in the run up to the Scottish parliamentary elections on 6 May 2021. In its drive to promote net zero, the Scottish National Party is intending to focus on developing Scotland's hydrogen sector, aiming to produce 5GW of energy from hydrogen by 2030. Nicola Sturgeon's SNP has plans to increase annual tree planting targets from 12,000 hectares to 18,000 hectares by 2025, as well as investing £250 million into peatland restoration, aiming to restore 250,000 hectares of Scottish peatland by 2030. The SNP has also recently pledged to cut car use by 20% by 2030 in order to reach Scotland's net zero target. The Scottish Conservative party has unveiled its Nature Bill, which proposes the creation of a third national park in Dumfries and Galloway, as well as an increase in annual tree planting to 18,000 hectares by 2024, alongside a national strategy to remove invasive non-native species that damage the environment. The Scottish Greens have set out plans for a 'green economic recovery' with a £7.5 billion investment in public transport and renewables. The party has set a target to build 200 new wind turbines every year for the next decade. Other environmental proposals include the creation of two new national parks, planting 50,000 hectares of publicly owned woodland and introducing a frequent flyer levy on international travel. The Liberal Democrat party is also proposing a tree planting increase, new national parks and a nature recovery law to set legal targets across government to clean up air, soils and water courses. The party also wants to set a national target for 30% of all publicly owned land to be rewilded. It is clear that the environment, and its ability to provide solutions to the net zero challenge that Scotland faces, is at the top of the campaign agenda for all Scotland's political parties.

Environment & Natural Capital

UK's native woodland at risk

The Woodland Trust has released a [report](#) into the State of the UK's Woods and Trees for 2021, focusing on the reality of the UK's native woodlands. The report concluded that native woodland in the UK is facing a series of threats, from climate change to imported disease, invasive plants and air pollutants. The report found that despite a gradual increase in woodland cover (it has more than doubled in the past 100 years), woodland wildlife is decreasing. The report attributes this to the fact that existing native woodlands are isolated and in poor ecological condition. The Woodland Trust states that woods and trees are vital for a happy, healthy society as they sequester carbon, support wellbeing and education and reduce pollution and flooding. However, the report believes that not enough is being done to create high quality and resilient native woodlands as part of larger ecological networks. The report also laments the loss of individual 'trees outside of woods' and recommends that as well as expanding tree planting, the UK needs to focus on enhancing existing woods and trees.

Controversy over water regulations

NFU Cymru is planning a legal challenge against new water regulations that aim to combat water pollution from agriculture in Wales. The controversial rules introduced on 1 April mean that a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone now covers all of Wales and has tightened restrictions on the use of slurry and fertilisers. It will prevent many farmers from slurry spreading between mid-October and February, in order to reduce the likelihood and impact of nitrate leaching and subsequent eutrophication. Farmers believe the expenditure needed to upgrade slurry stores to meet compliance under the new regulation is substantial, and NFU Cymru argues that there are 'disproportionate regulations which will punish the whole farming sector' and say it is disappointed at the lack of support offered to enable farmers to become compliant.

The Wildlife Trusts 30 by 30 campaign raises £8 million in six months

Six months ago, the Wildlife Trusts launched their 30 by 30 ambition, created with the aim of enabling at least 30% of the UK's land to be connected and protected for nature's recovery by 2030. Since then, the Wildlife Trusts have raised almost £8 million, including £900,000 from the public. The Wildlife Trusts coalition has unveiled 10 new projects which are contributing to the drive to restore nature. These projects include the conversion of a 17 hectare ex-golf course into wildflower rich meadows and wetlands, restoring 38 hectares of arable fields back to heathland in Worcestershire and expanding heathland across 140 acres of arable fields and woodland in Norfolk. The Wildlife Trusts will also use the funding to buy land to enable more joined-up wildlife regeneration.

Property & Development

Covid-19: Commercial rent arrears protection

The government is seeking evidence to inform its decision making on how best to withdraw the temporary Covid-19 induced measures that prevent landlords of commercial properties from being able to evict tenants for not paying rent. The legislation preventing commercial evictions is currently in place until 30 June 2021, and has previously

been extended, but the government recognises it cannot continue indefinitely. Before deciding how to end the measure, the government wants to understand how landlords and tenants are responding to the build-up of rent arrears that has occurred due to the pandemic.

Covid-19: Supporting the economic recovery of hospitality businesses

The Town and Country Planning Order 2021 has introduced a temporary permitted development right to help hospitality businesses and historic visitor attractions use outdoor space for trading as Covid-19 restrictions are eased. Up until January 2022 the [order](#) allows for moveable structures to be used on land within the curtilage of cafes, restaurants, pubs and bars including listed buildings.

Savills launches Property and Carbon Spotlight

The built environment is the source of 40% of the UK's carbon emissions. Tackling these emissions is a key part of the solution to reaching the UK's net zero emissions by 2050 target. Our Spotlight on Property and Carbon, to be launched later this week, identifies the key components of the industry's response to date, as well as the key pieces of national environmental and planning legislation. Net zero is becoming the benchmark for new development, and organisations operating in the sector are setting their own targets to achieve this. Our Spotlight looks at the scale of this challenge and some of the risks associated with striving to obtain it. In addition to identifying the tools and mechanisms being employed, we look at the emerging signs of a 'green premium' for property that has low carbon credentials. If you would like advice on your net zero ambitions please contact [Tanya Broadfield](#).

Business & Economy

UK's first savings account that plants trees

Oxbury Bank has launched a new carbon-mitigating and biodiversity-enhancing savings account. The cleverly named Oxbury Forest Saver is the UK's first personal savings account that directs savers' annual interest to tree planting projects, in order to increase carbon sequestration and biodiversity levels. Rather than earning traditional interest, savers' funds earn a contribution to tree planting projects that is equivalent to a 0.7% annual interest rate. Basing its calculations on a fixed cost of £10 per tonne of carbon offset, the bank calculates that a £15,000 balance generates enough 'interest' to fund the planting of 60-70 trees which will mitigate a savers' carbon footprint for a year. The first trees that are funded will be planted in the Scottish borders by a project-led by Forest Carbon.

Heritage organisations receive significant funding boost

The second round of the Culture Recovery Fund, worth £44 million, has been shared by over 470 heritage organisations across England. In total, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has offered nearly £400 million in grants and loans to over 2,700 organisations to help the culture and heritage sector reopen post Covid-19. A substantial amount of this funding will be delivered in tailor-made loans to cultural landmarks. Historic sites such as Bamburgh Castle, Ely Cathedral and Blenheim Palace as well as the Youth Hostels Association were among the recent beneficiaries.

Game management qualification launched

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and BASIS have collaborated to create a new game management course, which is designed to encourage best practice across the sector. The [course](#) provides a Certificate in Game Management professional accreditation. There will be four courses run in 2021, which will be held at the GWCT Allerton Project in Leicestershire. The course takes three days and contains both practical and theoretical modules covering topics such as industry regulation, predation control, game crops, gamebird releasing and shoot and land management.

Other Rural News

Debate over trespassing

On Monday 19 April 2021, MPs debated a petition relating to trespass. The debate was led by Katherine Fletcher, Conservative MP for South Ribble. The petition was created in response to a statement in the government's manifesto which said "we will make intentional trespass a criminal offence". It received over 134,000 signatures from people who are concerned that new legislation will 'attack ancient freedoms...and further tilt the law in favour of the landowning 1% who own half the country'. However the manifesto commitment was intended to be more limited, the new offence that the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021 will create only applies to trespassers who intend to reside on any private or public land in vehicles without permission. During the debate MPs raised concerns that the drafting of the Bill risks criminalising activities such as wild camping when accessed by a motor vehicle or bicycle. Responding on behalf of the government, Kit Malthouse the Minister for Crime and Policing stressed that the powers will not apply to people camping in tents in the countryside or to others who

inadvertently stray on to private land.

Land managers should also be aware that on 24 April 2021 Extinction Rebellion North is encouraging people to mark the anniversary of the Kinder Scout trespass by peacefully climbing over no trespassing or private property signs and exploring creative, peaceful and Covid-19 safe civil disobedience related to the land.

And finally...

Mini Cheddars launches devolved range of flavours

Mini Cheddars has launched a new range of flavours inspired by the devolved nations of Britain. Ploughman's Cheshire Cheese, Dragon's Breath Chilli Cheddar and Strathdon Blue Cheese were designed to spotlight different cheeses from England, Wales and Scotland. The Welsh cheddars have been renamed 'Cheddars Bach', and Scottish have changed to 'Wee Cheddars'.

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