

Food & Farming

Farm 'staycations' remain popular post-pandemic

Figures compiled by the campsite website pitchup.com show searches for UK campsites are up 266% this year. Many holidaymakers are switching their overseas holidays for 'staycations' closer to home – due to financial pressures and following a resurgence in domestic holidays due to the pandemic. Farmers and landowners have benefited from this trend, and the agri-tourism industry continues to grow. This growth has been supported by recent changes to permitted development rights (PDR), which have extended the duration a pop-up campsite can operate from 28 days to 60 days. Pitchup.com's most popular on-farm campsite operates under PDR and has generated £63,000 so far this year. Contact our [rural tourism and leisure team](#) to discuss tourism and leisure opportunities.

Gene-edited cereals heading towards on-farm trials

A project led by the British on-Farm Innovation Network aims to trial gene-edited cereals on farm in the 2025/26 growing season. This will be a European first. Professor Nigel Halford at Rothamsted Research developed one of the varieties. It has been gene-edited to contain 50% less asparagine than conventional wheat. Asparagine is an amino acid that forms acrylamide in high-temperature cooking, which is possibly carcinogenic. Food manufacturers are keen to reduce levels of acrylamide in their products because the Food Standards Agency regulates it. The Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023 makes the on farm trials possible. See our recent [Food and the environment](#) Spotlight to learn more about the Act and the focus of current precision breeding research projects.

Biodiversity increases as a result of agri-environment schemes

Research commissioned by Natural England has found butterfly numbers were 53% higher in areas with agri-environment scheme agreements in place. The study assessed the wildlife response to the schemes at a local and landscape scale over four years and recorded 1,358 species of birds, bats, and insects. On a landscape scale, bats were found to have responded positively to the schemes specifically, the barbastelle bat, which is protected and incredibly rare. It is thought this is because the agri-environment schemes have improved habitats' connectivity and pollinators' prevalence, thus helping the barbastelle bat to thrive. Other notable findings from the study include a 25% increase in breeding birds and an improvement in the abundance of bumblebees.

Policy

New EPC target confirmed

Speaking in the House of Commons, Ed Miliband, the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, recently confirmed the government will require landlords in England to improve the energy performance of their properties to meet a minimum standard of EPC C by 2030. Last autumn, the previous government scrapped a target for all private rental properties to achieve EPC C by 2028.

Support for improving properties is likely to be available, as the Labour manifesto included a commitment of £6.6 billion to enhance the energy efficiency of homes in Britain. The party said its 'Warm Homes Plan' would provide grants and low-interest loans to support insulation, solar panels, batteries, and low-carbon heating investments. Specific details and eligibility requirements are awaited. In our Spotlight on The Future of Rural Homes, we set out a [four-step process](#) that landlords can take to create an energy efficiency strategy for their portfolio.

New AHA succession rules

New Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 (AHA 1986) succession rules will come into effect in England and Wales on 1 September. They apply to all succession applications where the date of death or giving of the retirement notice is on or after 1 September 2024. The changes include:

- The removal of the commercial unit test that prevented successors from occupying an additional commercial agricultural holding
- A new suitability test meaning successors must show they can farm to a high standard of efficient production whilst caring for the environment. There is also a requirement to consider if the applicant

would be among the candidates a prudent and willing landlord could reasonably be expected to grant the tenancy to in an open market letting exercise.

See our [rural research briefing note](#) for full details of the new test.

Land Use Framework

It appears Labour's process for drawing up the Land Use Framework may be more collaborative than that of the previous government. Baroness Young of Old Scone recently asked the government when they planned to publish the Land Use Framework, what its scope will be, and whether it would be subject to formal consultation. Whilst not providing a timeframe, Baroness Hayman of Ullock, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Defra, responded, "it is time for" the government to work openly with stakeholders and experts to understand and support the changes needed to maintain nature and food production in England.

She mentioned the government would take a collaborative approach and the framework would address issues such as food security and the expansion of wetlands, peat bogs, and forests, aligning with the commitments in the Labour manifesto. Balancing food production, energy, and environmental priorities will be key. A recent report by Natural England analysed nine different land use scenarios and found that not a single scenario delivered greenhouse gas emission reductions without impacting food production.

Environment & Natural Capital

Finding the ideal places for rewilding

A recent study has found more than a quarter of land in Europe, totalling 117 million hectares, is suitable for rewilding, including 1.9 million hectares in Scotland. Researchers used a human footprint index to evaluate the suitability of land for rewilding; it considered factors such as buildings, agriculture, roads, and pylons. Land with a score of five or less on a scale of zero to fifty was deemed suitable. Using this methodology, Scotland, Scandinavia, and the Baltic states were identified as having the most potential for rewilding. In contrast, Wales was found to have no suitable land, and England only had 158 hectares suitable in Northumberland. Currently, there are approximately 150 rewilding projects in Scotland.

Nature reserves must adapt to climate change

The Wildlife Trusts has highlighted drought as the primary threat to UK nature reserves should current climate change trends persist. According to the organisation, close to 1,300 reserves are projected to face heightened risks of extreme wildfires and temperatures over the next 25 years, as well as drying peatland and wetland habitats. In response to this looming risk, its members have undertaken several adaptation initiatives, including planting 8,000 trees in the Isle of Man to establish a new temperate rainforest. This aims to offer a cool, moist sanctuary for wildlife seeking respite from escalating temperatures. Another project focuses on improving fenland resilience by connecting three fenland sites. The improved connectivity of the habitat aims to maintain peatland carbon stores during drought. The Wildlife Trusts has called for the government to commit to climate adaptation in the UK, stating, "we've seen one climate record after another broken over the past 12 months. The UK's natural habitats, and the wildlife that depends on them, are under huge pressure, so it is vital that the UK government raises ambition on adapting to climate change."

Property & Development

Four million kilometres of underground infrastructure to be mapped in the UK

The National Underground Asset Register (NUAR) is scheduled to be finished by 2025. This government project, which commenced in 2019, aims to create a comprehensive register of the locations of cables and pipes located underground throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The project's goal is to reduce accidental damage to these underground assets; there are about 60,000 incidents a year, costing £2.4 billion to repair. While registration with NUAR is voluntary, several major utility companies, such as Virgin Media, O2, and Thames Water, have already signed up and mapped their assets. In addition to reducing repair costs, this project aims to enhance the protection of Britain's underground asset network, thereby decreasing cyber-attack risks, like the recent incident in France where Olympic activities were disrupted due to fibre-optic cables being severed intentionally.

Rural areas to receive 'internet upgrade'

The government has announced up to £800 million will be invested in improving connectivity across the UK, which it hopes will benefit 312,000 rural homes and businesses. As part of this, a £228 million contract has been signed with Openreach to connect 96,000 homes and businesses in England and, for the first time, Wales. Areas to

benefit include Lancashire, North Wiltshire, South Gloucestershire, West and Mid-Surrey, Staffordshire, West Berkshire, Hertfordshire, West and North Devon, and Northwest, Mid and Southeast Wales.

This investment should benefit rural businesses struggling with outdated broadband infrastructure and signal black spots. A 2023 NFU survey found 42% of farmers did not feel that their broadband speed was sufficient for their business needs and insufficient connectivity was hindering rural and farm businesses from taking advantage of tech innovations such as robotic milking or precision farming. The labour manifesto contained a pledge to achieve national gigabit coverage by 2030.

Business & Economy

Farmland supply at its highest level in 22 years

Land supply increased by 36% in Great Britain compared to the first half of 2023. The supply increase was highest in Scotland, with a 42% increase, followed by England at 37% and Wales at 11%. Nationally, this marks the highest level of farmland supply in 22 years, with 118,200 acres of land brought to the open market in the first six months of this year. Average values remain stable, albeit with regional variations. The overall average value for farmland is now £8,200 per acre, up from £7,800 at the start of 2023. Prime arable land averages £10,100 per acre, and grade three pastureland £7,100 per acre. Our latest [Market in Minutes](#) report contains further market insight and commentary from our teams across the country.

Other Rural News

And finally... insure your fish and chips

A food truck in the Isle of Man offers seagull insurance to protect customers and their food from sneaky seagulls that swoop in and steal their meals. Customers can opt to buy this insurance for a £1 premium; it allows them to claim a replacement meal if seagulls steal it. The food truck, Hawkins BBQ, has announced all profits from the insurance will be donated to the Manx Wildlife Trust, which protects the Island's wildlife, including the herring gull, the main suspect in these chip-stealing crimes.

A cheese toastie shop in St Andrews has implemented a similar policy due to ongoing issues with seagulls where customers have been attacked by gulls after a bite of their toasties. The shop's owners brought in "toastie insurance" after a series of deterrents failed, including a speaker playing bird-of-prey noises and a predator-shaped kite.

If you have queries about any of the articles, please get in touch with us.

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