

Food & Farming

Prince Charles speaks out over small family farms

The Prince of Wales issued a warning over the future of small family farms in an essay for Radio 4's Today programme. Within the essay, Prince Charles said 'the focus on producing plentiful and cheap food threatens the survival of the country's smaller farms' and their disappearance will 'rip the heart out of the British countryside'. He condemned intensive agricultural systems on account of the 'hidden costs' they generate due to chasing efficiencies. The Prince of Wales is known for speaking out on environmental and rural issues, and wrote of his concern over soil degradation, watercourse pollution and carbon emissions as well as diminishing natural landscapes. He did however say that he is increasingly confident that a transition to a more sustainable form of agriculture is possible, and he praised the efforts of high profile people such as Jamie Oliver, Henry Dimbleby and Marcus Rashford for raising awareness of issues within the food system. Defra responded to the Prince of Wales' request for more urgent action to support small scale farmers by highlighting its planned Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme, which will be available to all farmers in England and will incentivise sustainable farming practices with a particular focus on soil health. It hopes all farmers will ultimately join with 70% signing up during the first year.

National Food Strategy Part Two released

The much-anticipated Part Two of the National Food Strategy was released on 15 July. Led by Henry Dimbleby, co-founder of Leon restaurants and the Sustainable Restaurant Association, this is the first national strategy outlining a way to 'fix' England's 'broken' food system. The report describes today's food system as both a 'miracle and a disaster', defying Malthusian predictions of mass famine. Globally we now produce more than enough calories to feed the world's biggest and still growing population, however, in doing so, we have put the health of our planet, and ourselves, in a precarious position. The report looks at the key problems of the way in which our food system currently exacerbates the climate, nature and health crises – and sets out 16 recommendations for government action.

Proposed measures include:

- A 30% reduction in the amount of meat consumed
- The introduction of a sugar and salt reformation tax
- The creation of a Rural Land Use Framework to set out which areas of UK land are best suited to high yielding food production, nature restoration or regenerative farming
- A government commitment to maintaining the total agricultural support budget until 2029
- A new statutory duty for all food companies with more than 250 employees to publish an annual report on metrics around healthy and unhealthy food sales
- A Community Eatwell programme, through which GPs would be able to prescribe fruit and vegetables to patients suffering the effects of poor diet or food insecurity.

For more detailed analysis of the National Food Strategy please see our briefing note.

Farming water rules under scrutiny in Wales and England

NFU Cymru has been granted permission by the High Court to judicially review the Welsh government's decision to designate all of Wales as a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ). The union argued the Welsh government acted unlawfully as it failed to consider all relevant factors in its impact assessment, and is concerned that the investment many farmers will need to make to achieve compliance will make their businesses unviable. Water pollution regulations are also in the spotlight in England, where criticism has been levelled at Defra and the Environment Agency because there have been no prosecutions under the farming water pollution rules. The Environment Agency is now recruiting 50 additional agriculture regulatory inspection officers.

Interim funding for Producer Organisations

Producer Organisations (PO) allow farmers in the horticulture sector to work collaboratively to increase their strength for negotiating against major produce buyers through an exemption from competition regulations, and together produce over 50% of the UK's fruit and veg. The PO concept is seen as a success story: through match funded investment UK productivity of key soft fruit crops such as strawberries has increased significantly. Environment Secretary George Eustice has an ambition for the PO concept to be rolled out to cover other agricultural crops and

the Agriculture Act 2020 allows for this. In the meantime the government has just granted short-term transition funding to POs to ensure there is no funding gap while a new UK horticulture productivity scheme is developed.

Policy

Welsh government to substantially upscale forestry sector

The Welsh government has acknowledged that Wales requires a step change in woodland creation rates in order to achieve its targets of planting 43,000 hectares by 2030 and 180,000 hectares by 2050. This is equivalent to planting 5,000 hectares of woodland each year, however last year only 290 hectares were planted in Wales and annual woodland creation has not exceeded 2,000 hectares since 1975. Lee Waters, Deputy Minister for Climate Change in Wales has said the Welsh government hopes to scale up the forestry sector not only to reach its planting targets, but also to generate a new green economy, increase job opportunities and create additional benefits for society from woodland. 80% of the timber used in the UK is imported and only 4% of the 1.5 million m³ of timber harvested in Wales each year is processed to be used as construction grade timber. It plans to create a timber industrial strategy for Wales to identify the supply chain changes needed to increase the use of domestic timber and a Trees Task Force has been created to develop solutions to the barriers that currently exist in upscaling the forestry industry in the country. Such barriers include leveraging private finance for woodland creation, increasing coordination amongst stakeholders, increasing public funding for tree planting and reducing the complexities of current schemes. The Welsh government has committed £17 million to the Glastir Woodland Creation scheme over the next two years and also intends to introduce a new, more consistent woodland creation funding offer. The Sustainable Farming Scheme, the Welsh government's successor to the Basic Payment Scheme, will fund planting of woodlands in 'hedges and edges'. Further detail will be set out in a new Woodlands for Wales Action Plan later this year.

EU announces proposals to reach net zero

The European Union has announced how it plans to achieve the bloc's target of carbon neutrality by 2050. The measures, which have been touted as the EU's most ambitious plan yet to tackle climate change, have been named the Fit for 55 package because they would put the EU on track to meet its 2030 goal of reducing emissions by 55% from 1990 levels. For context, by 2019 the EU had cut its emissions by 24% from 1990 levels. Within the announcement are proposals to introduce a carbon border tariff, which would require EU manufacturers to pay more for importing materials like steel and concrete. A tax on aviation fuel and a ten year tax holiday for alternatives is also proposed, as are tighter emission limits for cars, which are expected to effectively ban the sale of petrol and diesel powered vehicles within the next 20 years. More ambitious targets for expanding renewable energy around the bloc have been proposed as well as a requirement for countries to more quickly renovate buildings that are not energy efficient. Corporate lobby BusinessEurope criticised the plan saying it risks destabilising the investment outlook for many sectors, however environmental campaigners have said the proposals don't go far enough. The measures are likely to increase household bills and the costs of flights into the EU, EU climate policy chief Frans Timmermans acknowledged these proposals ask a lot of society and business, but said 'we do it for a good cause. We do it to give humanity a fighting chance'. The proposals need to be approved by the bloc's 27 member states and the EU parliament, which could take years of negotiations.

Environment & Natural Capital

Planting the right tree in the right place, but where is it?

The NFU has launched a [Tree Strategy](#), in response to the government's recently published [England Trees Action Plan](#). The NFU commends the plan and agrees that tree planting rates need to be increased in order for the rural sector to contribute to net zero. However, it is concerned the plan fails to reference farmers as the key drivers of afforestation. As 70% of the land in England is managed by farmers, if tree planting goals are to be achieved, farmers need to be 'on board and recognised'. The NFU is therefore urging the government to develop policies that will allow farmers to deliver carbon sequestration through tree planting, 'in a way that works alongside their business and primary role as food producers'. In its own Tree Strategy the NFU highlights the principles and approaches it believes the government must take into account when developing its new tree planting policy.

The key concepts the NFU seeks to promote are that the right tree must be planted in the right place, increased incentives to bring existing woodlands back into management (which the NFU believes should be a priority over new plantings), that land managers must make the decision to plant trees voluntarily, and that the government should address existing policy barriers, in particular existing tenancy clauses. The NFU's strategy also asks the government to reconsider the permanency element of tree planting which it believes is currently a barrier to woodland creation, and if permanent land use change does happen, the government should ensure incentives exist to compensate for the permanent reduction in the capital value of the land. The NFU would like to see more

recognition for trees outside of woodlands and also believes that a separate Environmental Land Management offer for commercial forestry and large woodlands is needed, due to the complexity of forestry delivery. The NFU and government agree on the scale of tree planting that is required, but the NFU is asking for this to be implemented in a different way to current government proposals.

Soil farm carbon code development awarded NEIRF funding

The projects and organisations that have won funding through the first round of the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund ([NEIRF](#)) have been announced. The fund aims to drive private investment in nature and tackle climate change, 27 successful projects will each receive up to £100,000. Many of the winning bidders are local councils, wildlife trusts, AONBs and national park authorities, and there appears to be a low number of private organisations amongst them.

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West has been awarded funding to develop a Soil Code for UK farms. This code would verify and accredit carbon sequestration in soils, for example through regenerative agricultural practices. The funding will support code development and piloting, with the aim being to launch in 2022. Many projects that won NEIRF funding are intending to develop environmental bonds, localised natural capital investment banks and financial scaling instruments for nature based projects. The only private estate to obtain funding is the Swinton Estate which was awarded £85,551 to develop a new business model for multi-functional forestry. The Environment Agency and Defra are planning to launch a further application round later this year. If you would like to discuss the fund please contact [Adrian Matthews](#).

Property & Development

Bringing beauty back to planning

The Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick has announced a set of new planning measures designed to improve communities' infrastructure, champion neighbourhood design and support walking and cycling to boost wellbeing. The Building Beautiful Places plan focuses on the importance of creating beautiful, environmentally sustainable, life enhancing communities. The plan will ensure that good quality design is paramount, putting local communities at the heart of decision making in towns and cities. Within the new government measures is the announcement of the National Model Design Code, which is a toolkit that enables councils and local communities to create their own local design requirements, providing guidance on aspects of development such as tree-lined streets, sustainable drainage and design that supports walking and cycling.

The government has also updated the national planning policy framework (NPPF), putting beauty back at the heart of the planning system by placing a greater emphasis on place-making and the natural environment. Finally, there is the creation of a new Office for Place which will help to drive up design standards, testing and trialling the National Model Design Code with more than 20 local councils and communities. These measures mean the word 'beauty' will be specifically included in planning rules for the first time since the system was created in 1947, echoing an era when a greater emphasis was placed on delivering attractive buildings to install a sense of local pride. These reforms to the planning system follow the publication of the [Living with Beauty](#) report in January 2020 that called for three new principle goals within the system – to ask for beauty, refute ugliness, and promote stewardship.

Business & Economy

British public's opinion towards food standards in trade deals revealed

The NFU commissioned a survey to explore the British public's expectations about food standards within the UK's trade agreements. The survey was conducted by OnePoll and of the 2,000 English and Welsh adults surveyed, 85% said that they want future trade deals to protect UK farmers from being undercut by 'cheaper, sub-standard food imports'. 84% said trade deals should ensure environmental farming standards for imports are the same as the UK's and 86% believed it is important that animal welfare standards match the UK's own standards. 75% of respondents said they trust British food more than food from the rest of the world, and interestingly 73% said they often or always look specifically for British food when shopping, which the NFU says is the highest figure to date since its first survey in 2012. There is a strong feeling that Covid-19 has significantly increased public support for British farmers and the food that they produce.

Other Rural News

Local food system offers promise

The charity Sustain, in collaboration with the RSPB, has written a policy brief to make the case for government investment in local food infrastructure. The report is titled [The Case for Local Food](#) and says a 10% shift in food

retail towards a more sustainable and local food system could result in up to 200,000 more jobs, as well as supporting a green recovery and restoring nature. The report recommends a new Local Food Infrastructure Fund should be set up by the government to provide strategic support for local, agro-ecological food production, in order to make it easier for small scale sustainable businesses to access £2 billion of national and local food procurement contracts. The report suggests that every £10 spent with local home delivery box schemes results in £25 spent in the local area, compared with £14 when the same amount is spent in a large scale supermarket system. An analysis of 228 box schemes across four countries, including 147 from the UK, found 41% used produce from their own farms and 76% from within 100km, with the report noting 70% of beans, peas and asparagus in UK supermarkets are freighted in by air. The report suggests local food systems are the key to supporting domestic producers and growing sustainable farming enterprises - it recommends that by 2025 every local authority in the UK should be served by a food partnership.

Report digs into global on-farm waste

WWF and Tesco have released a new report, 'Driven to Waste: Global Food Loss on Farms' which reveals an estimated 2.5 billion tonnes of food is left uneaten globally every year. The report focuses on food waste created on farm, during harvest and slaughter as well as the food lost in supply chains, retail and consumption. This is the first time the waste of the complete food system has been analysed since 2011 and it has resulted in an increase of approximately 1.2 billion tonnes on the previous estimate of food wasted each year.

These new figures estimate that of all the food grown globally, approximately 40% goes uneaten. This means 4.4 million km² of land is used to grow food which is wasted on farm every year, an area larger than India. Alarming, the report found 58% of the food waste that occurs at harvest happens in the high and middle income countries of Europe, North America and industrialised Asia, despite these countries having higher on-farm mechanisation and only accounting for 37% of global population. This report presents evidence that farm-stage food loss is an overlooked food waste hotspot, contributing to 16% of all global agricultural emissions. It remains to be seen how policymakers will respond.

And finally...

The return of Clarkson's Farm

Celebrity Jeremy Clarkson has confirmed his hit series Clarkson's Farm will return to Amazon Prime for a second series. The good news for ardent fans is that former Top Gear star Clarkson will once again be joined by his eclectic farming team – Jeff, Cheerful Charlie, Lisa and Gerald. The team also includes Kaleb Cooper, a 21 year old tractor driver who has won the heart of viewers and shot to fame - he now has an agent and a huge number of fans on Instagram. According to sources, filming for the second series of Clarkson's Farm is already underway. Dan Grabiner, Amazon Studio's head of UK originals, described the show as 'Jeremy's unfiltered love letter to farming'.

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