



A new policy for our countryside

Environment, Farming and Rural Development

About us...

Collectively, The Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, National Trust and WWF-UK have over 6 million members and supporters across the United Kingdom.

We own and manage over 500,000 hectares of land, around half of which is actively farmed, either in hand or by one of our 2000 tenants and graziers. We want to work in partnership with Governments across the UK, and are calling on them to seize this opportunity to target public money to those farmers and land managers who deliver the most for society, and help create the conditions to foster markets that drive more sustainable land management.

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A better future for our countryside



People love the countryside. It's key to our identity as a nation, and wildlife is a crucial part of what makes it so special. It is vital to recognise that we all have a stake in its future.

Leaving the European Union will be one of the most defining events for farming and our environment in living memory, and provides an unprecedented opportunity to revitalise our countryside in a way that balances the needs of everyone, for generations to come.

Our vision is for a thriving, healthy countryside that delivers multiple benefits for society. As well as products such as food and timber, we need the natural environment to provide services like clean water and healthy soils, and the benefits to our wellbeing that contact with abundant and diverse nature brings. In turn, these services play a key role in supporting a prosperous rural economy.

But as the recent State of Nature report highlighted, we've lost species once common to much of our countryside, and face losing many more if we don't step up our efforts in the years ahead. And, fundamentally, the long-term future of farming is at stake if the natural systems on which it is based are depleted.

With farmland covering over three quarters of the UK, farmers and land managers are uniquely placed to help meet the challenge of restoring nature, and to capitalise on the opportunities this brings. It is critical therefore that the environment, farming and rural development policies we develop across the UK are focused on this urgent challenge and opportunity. We cannot afford to miss this chance.

Recent research shows that the public want support for agriculture to do more for nature. This isn't a choice between food and the environment; the future of food, farming and nature is inextricably linked. We need to work together to achieve a countryside rich in nature alongside vibrant communities and a thriving rural economy.

Now is the time to secure a sustainable future for our countryside.



What we need Governments in the UK to do



● **A new policy for our countryside** - Replace the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) with a policy for the countryside that delivers high environmental standards for land management and supports farmers and others to do this. Devolution will require separate policies for UK countries, but the UK Government should work with the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to develop policies that deliver high environmental standards across the board.

● **All agri-environment schemes should be kept open to new and existing applicants** - until a replacement scheme is fully operational. A managed transition is key.

● **An independent Policy Commission** - should be established to examine future policy for the environment, farming and rural development. A broad range of stakeholders should help Government design the new arrangements in an open and inclusive way that engages with the public.

● **A joined up 25 Year Plan for the environment** - In England, a future environment, farming and rural development policy should be a key part of the Government's 25 Year plan for the Environment.

Our principles for developing policies for the environment, farming and rural development



A countryside for food, wildlife and people.

Whether we earn our living from the land, live in a city or a rural community, we all have a stake in our countryside. In the coming months and years, we need an open and transparent public debate about its future, and how we can develop policies that work for everyone.



Nature should be abundant everywhere.

We need nature across the whole of the countryside, not just in protected areas. We must halt the declines in wildlife and the wider environment, and work to restore and enhance nature at a landscape scale, ensuring that every generation leaves the environment in a better condition than they found it.



Public payments and new markets working hand-in-hand.

Taxpayers' money should be invested in producing public benefits that the market does not provide including healthy soils, abundant wildlife and beautiful places for people to enjoy. We need to replace the outdated CAP with a system that is fair to taxpayers, and provides value for money. In the long-term, the market needs to better complement public funding, making it profitable and rewarding to manage land sustainably for both private and public benefit.



Unacceptable to harm nature, and easy to help it.

We need a strong legislative baseline to safeguard the natural environment that creates a fair and level playing field for farmers throughout the country. These simple rules should apply everywhere irrespective of payments, with properly resourced and effective enforcement. This should be combined with advice and a simple system for accessing the right support, making it easy for farmers and land managers to help restore and integrate nature into their businesses.



Coherence with wider policy and delivery.

For environment, farming and rural development policies to succeed, steps must be taken to ensure fairness to farmers by securing more of the profit that exists in the UK's food and farming sector. We also need much better alignment with different areas of policy such as trade, food, procurement, health and nutrition and climate change. Delivery needs to be flexible enough to meet local needs, whilst guiding action to meet our environmental ambitions at the regional and national level, through planning decisions and a new approach based on integrated mapping of ecological networks and natural assets.