



## Devon Countryside Access Forum

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### Defra consultation

#### Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit

#### SUMMARY

Closing date: 8 May

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-future-for-food-farming-and-the-environment> (64 pages)

Defra is seeking views on the future of agricultural policy. One document on that link contains a wide range of facts and figures about the agricultural industry which illustrate its importance in terms of food production and the economy; the health and quality of the environment; and support for the rural community. Pages in *The Future Farming and Countryside Evidence Compendium* are referenced after paragraphs as EC:xx). See [here](#) There is also the main consultation document.

The Government aims to introduce a new environmental land management system following the end of the current Common Agricultural Policy and transitional arrangements.

Chapters in the consultation document focus on:

1. Agriculture: The case for change
2. Reform within the Common Agricultural Policy
3. An 'agricultural transition'
4. A successful future for farming
5. Public money for public goods
6. Enhancing our environment
7. Fulfilling our responsibility to animals
8. Supporting rural communities and remote farming
9. Changing regulatory culture
10. Risk management and resilience

11. Protecting crop, tree, plant and bee health
12. Ensuring fairness in the supply chain
13. Devolution: maintaining cohesion and flexibility
14. International trade
15. Legislation: the Agriculture Bill

The Government proposes for its “new agricultural policy to be underpinned by payment of public money for the provision of public goods. While environmental enhancement and protection are of key importance, better animal and plant health, animal welfare, improved public access, rural resilience and productivity are also areas where government could play a role in supporting farmers and land managers in the future.”

The area most pertinent to the work of the Devon Countryside Access Forum is public goods and the relevant sections are quoted below, followed by the consultation questions. **Text relevant to recreational access is in bold**. Some reference is also made to recreation in Chapter 6 and some quotes and questions follow.

Consultation responses to the questions can be made online or it is possible to respond by email. The Government sees this consultation as the beginning of a conversation on the future of farming, food and the environment.

### **5. Public money for public goods**

Protection and enhancement of our environment could be considered the pre-eminent public good, providing value for farmers, land managers, citizens and taxpayers alike. The actions of farmers and land managers now can help to preserve our natural landscapes and capital for future generations. Environmental public goods underpinning our approach to future agricultural policy could include:

#### **i. Improved soil health.**

Healthy soil is essential in underpinning a huge range of environmental benefits, including food production; biodiversity; carbon storage; and flood protection. However, the ability of soil to perform these functions is reduced when it is degraded, eroded or lost. Soil health can be affected in a number of ways, including by erosion from water or wind; poor land management practices that increase compaction; or even an inappropriate amount of vegetation cover [EC:61].

#### **ii. Improved water quality**

Maintaining and improving the quality of our water has a wide range of important benefits, including protecting our supply of clean drinking water; improving public health; providing increased recreation opportunities; underpinning sustainable food production; and preventing loss of, or damage to, habitats and species that rely on the water environment [EC:60].

### iii. Better air quality

Clean air is vital to human health and the environment. When ammonia is released into the air, it reacts with nitrogen oxides and sulphur dioxide and forms 'secondary particulate matter' which has a significant impact on human health [EC:65]. Most notably, ammonia contributes to smog in urban areas. In addition, when deposited on land, ammonia can cause acidification or overload soils and watercourses with nitrogen, leading to biodiversity loss in sensitive habitats.

### iv. Increased biodiversity

Biodiversity describes the variety of life on Earth – of ecosystems, species and of the genetic diversity they contain. Biodiversity 2020 commits us to 'take steps to halt biodiversity losses', both because it is valued in its own right, and because biodiversity provides a range of other benefits such as supporting pollinators, which have an estimated value of between £700 million to the UK economy, or even climate regulation. Land management practices can have major impacts on biodiversity.

### v. Climate change mitigation

Nitrous oxide and methane greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture have fallen by around 15% since 1990, and agriculture currently contributes 10% of UK emissions [EC:63]. Whilst it remains incredibly important that we continue to reduce carbon emissions from the farming sector, environmental land management could play a pivotal role in responding to climate change by increasing the ability of farmland and the countryside to sequester carbon, thereby enhancing the benefits and value of our natural resources.

### vi. Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

**Agriculture and farming practices shape our rural historic environment, our distinctive landscape features and our historical monuments [EC:55-6]. The conservation and enhancement of our cultural heritage contributes directly to a healthier environment, benefitting people, offering support to thriving rural economies and national prosperity.**

**Woods and forests offer many benefits to society and the economy.** They offer the potential for very significant benefits in carbon sequestration; **provide outdoor spaces for exercise and recreation**; and also contribute to improving agricultural productivity and rural business diversification.”

In addition to environmental enhancement, our new policy could also work towards achieving any or all of the following outcomes:

#### *Better animal and plant health and animal welfare*

##### i. World-class animal welfare

The public has an expectation of high animal welfare standards and consumers want to know what they are buying. Better welfare can contribute towards healthier animals and this can drive up farm productivity and profitability.

## ii. High animal health standards

Poor animal health and endemic disease costs millions of pounds each year in lost productivity for the livestock industry, with the extensive grazing sectors in particular suffering low incomes. For example, mastitis alone costs industry £180 million each year [EC:32]. Action that helps to improve animal health and the capability of farmers to manage the risks posed by disease can help to create a more productive, resilient and self-reliant livestock sector. It helps strengthen the nation's biosecurity, protecting society from the impacts of external pest and disease risk.

Animal health also has a wider impact on public health. For example, the use of veterinary medicines to tackle endemic diseases contributes to the development of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). This poses a risk to the future effectiveness of antimicrobial medicines for both animal and human use, and thus places a burden on the National Health Service [EC:32].

## iii. Protection of crops, tree, plant and bee health

Managing and reducing the impact of pests and diseases on the farming and forestry sectors helps protect the value that healthy trees and plants contribute to the UK economy, society and environment, estimated to be at least £8 billion per year [EC:33]. In addition to the wider benefits of healthy woods and forests outlined above, better biosecurity reduces the risks of dealing with costly outbreaks and promotes more productive and self-reliant farming sectors.

### *Improved productivity and competitiveness*

Alongside its responsibility for regulation and taxation, the public sector provides or funds many of the foundations of productivity – including education, vocational training, transport and other infrastructure, and scientific research. Investment in research and development can improve productivity and bring environmental benefits. This matters, because our natural capital is an essential basis for economic growth and productivity over the long-term.

There are a range of innovations across farming (e.g. technology, data science, gene-editing, improved tracking and traceability of livestock or new plant biosecurity measures) which can increase productivity; help us to safeguard the public goods of animal and human health; and ensure we better protect the environment.

### *Preserving rural resilience and traditional farming and landscapes in the uplands*

Agricultural land is rich in a social and cultural relevance beyond just the economic and environmental. Farmland has shaped and continues to shape England's unique

natural landscape. The identity of England's natural landscape is locally dependent and is a place where past generations have toiled to shape future ones. The beauty of the upland farm is often in inverse proportion to the fertility of its soil and the profit margins of their businesses. Hill farmers maintain a panorama of dry stonewalls and grazed moorlands. The upland way of life, the unique food produced, and the great art that these landscapes have inspired attract visitors from around the world.

Areas such as the uplands deliver many public goods that are worthy of public investment: not only are they a beautiful and rich part of our heritage, they can encourage biodiversity, protect water quality and store carbon. Farm businesses and communities in rural areas can face particular challenges, including physical and digital connectivity. Improved connectivity increases innovation and productivity across the economy, bringing significant economic rewards.

### ***Public access to the countryside***

**With agriculture accounting for more than 70% of land use in the UK, farmland forms an important amenity value for those who are accessing it and farmers and land managers can have a vital part to play in facilitating a deeper connection with the countryside. This may be through the maintenance of public rights of way, which can improve public health through access to clean air and exercise, for instance horse riding or providing opportunities for recreation and tourism. In 2010, England's National Parks accumulated 104.2 million visitor days and attracted spending of £2.2 billion.**

The UK's unique landscape also makes it a widely sought after location for film and television, thus providing an important advantage for the UK's creative arts industry over its international competitors. Initiatives such as Open Farm Sunday can also act as an important vehicle to educate the general public about where their food comes from and the natural environment.

**Consultation questions Which of the environmental outcomes listed below do you consider to be the most important public goods that government should support?**

**Please rank your top three options by order of importance:**

- a) Improved soil health
- b) Improved water quality
- c) Better air quality
- d) Increased biodiversity
- e) Climate change mitigation
- f) Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

**Of the other options listed below, which do you consider to be the most important public goods that government should support?** Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) World-class animal welfare
- b) High animal health standards
- c) Protection of crops, tree, plant and bee health
- d) Improved productivity and competitiveness
- e) Preserving rural resilience and traditional farming and landscapes in the uplands
- f) Public access to the countryside

Are there any other public goods which you think the government should support?

### **Chapter 6: Enhancing our environment**

“The principal public good we want to support in future is environmental protection and enhancement. A new environmental land management system, underpinned by natural capital principles, would contribute to delivering against many of the key outcomes set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan and the Clean Growth Strategy. These include clean air; clean and plentiful water; thriving plants and wildlife; reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought; using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently; enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement for the natural environment and mitigating and adapting to climate change.”

**“We can conserve and enhance our landscapes and rural heritage and increase the quality, diversity and access to nature-based recreation and tourism.”**

This chapter looks particularly at how landscape and catchment level approaches could deliver environmental outcomes and asks some additional questions relevant to public access.

A number of case examples illustrate the potential to deliver in these areas. The example covering enhancement of the environment and engagement is the National Forest.

#### ***Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment***

The National Forest is creating a vast, new forest for the nation across 200m<sup>2</sup> of the Midlands. Since 1991, the area has been transformed through the planting of 8.5 million trees, with forest cover increasing from 6% to 20%. 70% of the new woodlands have been planted by private landowners, including around 320 farm woods, which range from 0.25 ha to 100ha in size. Many landowners have moved

from being purely farmers to tree planters and increasingly woodland and tourism managers.

Farm woodlands have often been planted to provide the setting for landowners to diversify into leisure, tourism and biodiversity land uses. 79% of the Forest's new woods have some public access. 2,200ha of wildlife habitats have been created or brought into management. Many schemes have featured community tree planting and educational activities for schools – contributing to improved health, recreation, wildlife and air quality benefits across the area. This includes the sequestering of 66 thousand kilo tonnes of carbon between 1990 and 2010. Farm-based forestry, leisure and tourism schemes are also significant elements of a growing visitor and woodland economy. The National Forest now attracts 8.16 million visitors a year, which supports around 4,850 tourism jobs and contributes £395 million to the local economy. Management of farm woods is also supporting a growing woodland economy, with around 70% of woods now in active management.

### **Consultation questions**

**From the list below, please select which outcomes would be best achieved by incentivising action across a number of farms or other land parcels in a future environmental land management system:**

- a) Recreation
- b) Water quality
- c) Flood mitigation
- d) Habitat restoration
- e) Species recovery
- f) Soil quality
- g) Cultural heritage
- h) Carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas reduction
- i) Air quality
- j) Woodlands and forestry
- k) Other (please specify)

Three other challenging questions are part of the response for Chapter 6. These are outlined below:

*What role should outcome based payments have in a new environmental land management system?*

*How can an approach to a new environmental land management system be developed that balances national and local priorities for environmental outcomes?*

*How can farmers and land managers work together or with third parties to deliver environmental outcomes?*