

The need for specific support for maintaining a diverse farm structure in new English agriculture policy

A number of organisations have joined together to present the case for protecting and enhancing farm diversity as a core purpose of the new agricultural policy to help create a resilient and dynamic farming industry, which works for the wider community as well as for the environment.

Having a diversity or range of farm sizes and types is vital to ensure a thriving farming and rural industry, available and attractive to new entrants, progressing farmers and producing a healthy countryside. Yet there has been a dramatic loss of English farms over the past decade threatening damage to landscapes, rural jobs and cohesion and habitats.¹ Now there is a major risk of further loss of a mix of farms, and small and medium sized farms in particular, unless safeguards are put in place for when we leave the European Union.

We are asking for clear acknowledgement of the need for such safeguards in new national policy and for specific measures to rebalance support to strengthen the dynamism, innovation and sustainability of smaller enterprises. The following approaches will help to ensure new entrants, progressing farmers and all entrepreneurs in UK farming can thrive under a new farming and trading regime:

- **Redistributed support** - Investigate the best way to achieve the fairest and most effective distribution of future support – such as a limit or tapering of support per enterprise - so that the farm support budget is more evenly shared between larger and smaller farms.
- **Targeted support** - Ensure that only active farmers are eligible for on-going support and that schemes are targeted and designed to ensure active farmers on small to medium sized farms get adequate support for delivery of public goods
- **Recognition of systems approach in new payments** - Recognise the benefits to the environment of whole farm ecologically based approaches which are likely to appeal to (smaller) farms unable, on economic grounds, to take large areas of land out of production
- **Directed research and development** - Invest in supply chain innovation for smaller and medium-sized farm businesses to improve market access so they can remain commercially viable
- **Concentrating investment** - Provide accessible and well-advertised grants, low/no interest loans or loan guarantees targeted to smaller and medium-sized farm business to deliver specific tools to maintain or boost important sectors
- **Delivering training, mentoring and advice** - delivery of affordable training, advisory services and farmer-to-farmer mentoring to provide a coherent joined-up service accessible to smaller and medium-sized farms
- **Data gathering and monitoring** – Regularly monitor the sector and present better data on size and structure and analysis of the changes in farm numbers and diversity in England.
- **Review issues of access to land** - Review issues including land prices, new models for tenancy, security of tenure, planning issues and loss of county farm estates.

The organisations supporting this initiative recognise the far-reaching social, economic and environmental benefits of a diverse farm sector. We accept that farms need to expand or shrink over time but challenge the continued concentration of tenure/ownership across the industry as a whole. We request specific action to increase the opportunities for people to stay in business, and to develop viable new farm businesses. We believe that farms of all sizes make a distinctive contribution to the quality of the countryside but are concerned by the loss of farm diversity and want to ensure these issues are discussed and solutions found to ensure a healthy and diverse farming and rural future.

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Supported by: CPRE, Family Farmers Association, Friends of the Earth, Landworkers Alliance, New Economics Foundation, Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming, Tenant Farmers Association

¹ See Background Briefing *The need to support action on farm diversity*, 2018