

Defra's 'Health and Harmony' agricultural policy command paper and consultation: *What MPs need to know*



Covering three-quarters of UK land, how and what we farm has a huge impact on the environment and wildlife, on the economy of rural communities and on our health. The **purpose** of future policy should be a prosperous, resilient and sustainable farming system that provides healthy food grown to high standards of animal welfare, environment and nature protection. Farming must be able to provide good food, as well as good livelihoods, supported by fair prices and trading practices. Farming must also play its part in reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that cause harmful climate change.

Achieving this vision means **integrated policy and adequate budget and regulation**, including incentives for farmers and land managers to make the transition to better practices where the market will not pay. It requires Westminster and the devolved nations to support better food and farming as a core priority.

Government policies still often encourage damaging production systems and many farmers and workers are struggling to make a decent living. Policy is failing to protect British and overseas farmers from unfair trading practices of big players in the supply chain, such as supermarkets. Farming, especially UK horticulture, faces a crisis in access to labour, and many food and farm workers experience low pay and few of the normal employment benefits that are an everyday expectation in other sectors. Our health, soils, bees and smaller farmers are in trouble. Improvements in agricultural policy and public investment could do much more to help, for the benefit of everyone.

Defra's 'Health and Harmony' Agricultural Policy Command Paper (March 2018) makes a reasonable start at addressing such issues. However, there is much that can be improved. Given that such policy will underpin how the UK farms and trades in food for decades to come, we are concerned there are some big gaps, not least relating to the role farm policy and public subsidies play in improving:

- **Human health (public health)** linking farm policy with safety, nutrition and access to nature
- **Environmental protection** for biodiversity, pollinators healthy soils, clean air, clean water (inland, and at sea via farm run-off) and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions
- **Farming livelihoods** and power in the supply chain, at home and overseas
- **Pay and working conditions** for food and farming workers
- **Farm diversity** in terms of size and type
- **Animal health and welfare** as a priority and delivering on health and environment objectives
- Reduction of **farm antibiotic use**, at home and globally
- Promotion of **whole farm systems** based on ecological principles

In addition, Defra's Agricultural Command Paper does not deal adequately with the prospect of **UK trade deals** either supporting or undermining the ambitions for prosperous, healthy and sustainable future for British food and farming, nor how such deals will be scrutinised by Parliament.

Sustain is the UK alliance for better food and farming. We represent around 100 not-for-profit national organisations and many more at local level, working together to achieve a prosperous, healthy, ethical and sustainable system for food, farming and fishing. **Overleaf**, we provide a point-by-point table of what we believe to be current gaps in Defra's Agricultural Command Paper, and our proposed topline solution in each case. We can provide further information on request.

www.sustainweb.org/foodandfarmingpolicy

MP briefing on Defra agriculture command paper, Sustain, April 2018

Sustain's recommendations for Defra's Agricultural Command Paper and subsequent UK Agriculture White Paper, UK Agriculture Bill, as well as the agricultural research agenda and the UK's approach to trade in food	
Key concerns	What can MPs do? Sustain recommends:
Public money for public goods is a welcome principle for investment of taxpayers' money and environmental outcomes; much needs to be done to establish this in detail and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome the 'public money for public goods' principle; apply this also to human health and animal welfare • Support pilot schemes to test for beneficial impact • Critique the narrow definition of 'productivity' and its primacy www.sustainweb.org/foodandfarmingpolicy/public_money_for_public_goods
Removing area-based payments and capping farm payments are welcome principles and need backing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome the end to area-based farm payments, and moves to cap payments to larger and wealthier farms, to ensure a fairer distribution of money, and more available for public goods
Human health is almost absent from the Command Paper, and entirely absent from the list of 'public goods' that Defra/HM Treasury proposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand inclusion of public health as a public good • Demand public health aims and outcomes in agricultural policy • Support more and better UK horticulture www.sustainweb.org/blogs/mar18_public_health_is_a_public_good
Animal health and welfare is included in Defra's Command Paper, yet absent from the list of 'public goods' and the paper lacks a firm commitment to supporting animal welfare certification schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand inclusion of animal health and welfare as public goods • Demand inclusion of farm antibiotic reduction as a public good • Require better labelling for origin and method of production • Support high welfare schemes such as organic, free range, cage-free, pasture-fed and other certified systems www.sustainweb.org/foodandfarmingpolicy/overuse_of_farm_antibiotics
Environmental protection is a welcome emphasis: for biodiversity, pollinators, healthy soils, clean air, clean water (inland, and at sea via farm run-off) and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and pesticide use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome the environmental emphasis, and ask for more detail • Back the set-up of an environmental land management system • Integrate environment and health aims into agricultural research • Demand robust measures, payment methods and outcomes • Demand reinstatement of key legal principles: precautionary, polluter pays; rectifying pollution at source; access to information; 'do no harm' www.sustainweb.org/foodandfarmingpolicy/environment_and_climate_change
Farming livelihoods need protecting with statutory codes of conduct for food buyers; also fair and transparent prices and trading practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argue for powers to investigate unfair trading issues and extend the Groceries Code Adjudicator to protect all farmers • Argue for transparency in prices and costs, and for enforced, statutory codes of conduct for supermarkets and others in the supply chain
Pay and working conditions for food and farming workers are too often notoriously low, and the industry (especially horticulture) faces a crisis in attracting labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back re-establishment of a new body for sector bargaining for agriculture workers in England (Northern Ireland and Scotland still have Agricultural Wages Boards; Wales has an agricultural advisory panel) • Boost inspection and enforcement of the Modern Slavery Act • Support an enhanced Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) www.sustainweb.org/foodandfarmingpolicy/farm_pay_and_working_conditions
Farm diversity – size and type of farm – is part of our treasured landscape and rural resilience, accessible to new entrants and promoting innovation for agro-ecological farming and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for a review of issues affecting farm viability/new entrants • Demand support for rural resilience and a diversity of farms • Simplify payments and access to finance for smaller farms • Ring-fence budget and argue for investment in infrastructure to help boost local and direct sales, returning more value and control to smaller farms www.sustainweb.org/foodandfarmingpolicy/farm_diversity
Promotion of whole farm systems can achieve some or all of the other desirable outcomes – health, environment and better jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand support for agro-ecology agroforestry, pasture-based livestock systems, and organic systems. • Support more fresh fruit and vegetable production, especially for local supply chains and boosts for sustainable horticulture enterprises
Trade policy must support, not undermine, a prosperous, healthy and sustainable future for British food standards and sustainable farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require Defra and trade officials to consider farming, health and sustainability – accountably – when negotiating trade deals • Demand Parliamentary scrutiny of trade parameters and deals www.sustainweb.org/foodandfarmingpolicy/sustainable_farming_in_trade_deals
Read more at: www.sustainweb.org/foodandfarmingpolicy/beyond_2020_new_farm_policy	