



5 Principles for a New Agricultural Policy

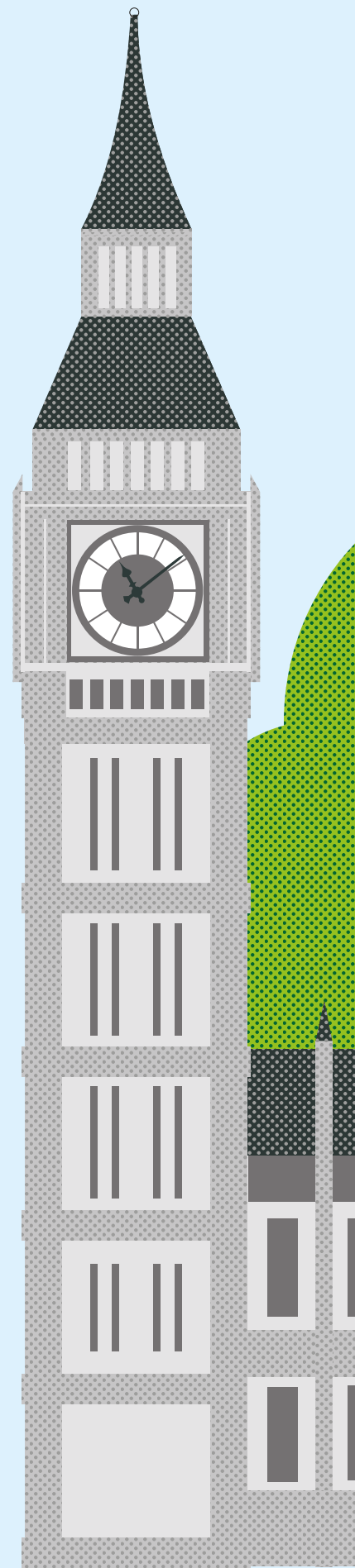
- #1 Promote productive and competitive farming
- #2 Support the work of other land managers
- #3 Encourage diversification and public engagement
- #4 Address the digital divide
- #5 Sustain upland landscapes and communities



The food and farming industry is nationally important, generating over £108 billion a year for the UK economy and underpinning our food security. It is particularly important for our most rural areas where farming is often central to the economic and social life of the community as well as playing a vital role in conservation. The establishment of the first British agricultural policy in over 40 years is therefore hugely important, not just to farmers but to the future of the countryside and the nation as a whole.

Leaving the European Union (EU) provides the opportunities to create an agricultural policy that is better suited to the regions and nations of the UK than the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and to simplify the current system of support payments and grants. However, this process will involve significant change as the Government has confirmed that it will move away from direct income support in favour of payments for certain types of public goods outlined in the Government's "Health and Harmony" consultation on the future of food, farming and the environment.

How the Government chooses to define and reward 'public goods' in a new system of support payments will determine the landscape of our countryside, the food we eat, and the nature of many rural communities for a generation and beyond. To ensure farming plays its part in a living and working countryside outside of the EU, the principles we have set out in this document must be at the heart of our new agricultural policy.



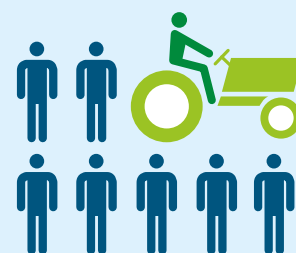
A new agricultural policy must achieve the following:

#1 Promote productive and competitive farming

Our new agricultural policy must start with the objective of securing a productive and competitive farming industry by looking at ways of supporting farmers in their task of producing food. The environmental public goods that the Government wants to reward in a new system of support payments such as improved air quality, climate change mitigation, and increased biodiversity, are sound objectives but they cannot be achieved without working with farmers to deliver them. Unless we recognise the dual role of farmers as food producers and conservationists then we risk turning farmers into environmental contractors with little incentive to continue farming, which would be damaging to the jobs and communities that depend on farming as well as weakening our food security.

FACT

1 in 8 people are employed in food and farming

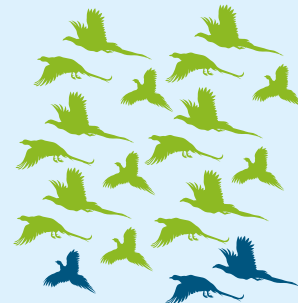


#2 Support the work of other land managers

The conservation work of farmers is often supported by other land managers including those who hunt, shoot, and fish. Farming is the cornerstone for many of the activities enjoyed by people in rural areas, and many farmers benefit from the economic and social role which activities such as shooting contribute to the life of the farm. A new agricultural policy must recognise the close relationship between farming and country sports by continuing to permit activities such as fishing, game shooting, deer stalking, and drag or trail hunting, on land which receives payments under a new system of support. There should also be specific payments for public goods such as improving water quality and maintaining and restoring woodland.

FACT

85% of game shooting takes place on farmland



#3 Encourage diversification and public engagement

Tourism and other forms of diversification are an important source of income for many farmers. Our new agricultural policy must give farmers greater flexibility in allowing temporary non-agricultural use of their land. A temporary change in land use to permit a campsite on agricultural land for more than 28 days currently involves the Rural Payments Agency, the local authority, and several other government bodies. The process could be simplified under a new system of support payments to encourage farmers who want to diversify their businesses. The Government should also reward farmers who host educational activities for schools and promote engagement with their local community through schemes like Open Farm Sunday. However, any increase in public access must respect the countryside as a living and working environment.

FACT

One third of total farm business income comes from diversification



#4 Address the digital divide

Digital connectivity is essential for farm businesses and yet many farmers still lack access to high speed broadband. This is a cause of great frustration, particularly in 2015 when the Rural Payments Agency attempted to move all applications for support payments online, despite knowing many farmers would struggle. The Government should include options for improving digital infrastructure and skills as part of the new system of support payments, similar to the schemes provided by the EU's Rural Development Programme, in recognition that this is also a public good. This must be integrated with existing work being done to improve connectivity by Westminster and the devolved administrations. The Government must also ensure that applications under a new agricultural policy are able to be made by post as well as online for as long as universal connectivity is lacking.

FACT

17% of rural premises are not getting decent broadband services



#5 Sustain upland landscapes and communities

Farmers in the uplands and other marginal areas are limited to low intensity grazing which has small profit margins and is often more exposed to market volatility than other sectors of the industry. Without direct income support, many hill farmers would struggle to make a profit even with income from diversification. Their work, however, often provides the most amount of public good in creating and maintaining some of our most iconic rural landscapes which support many of our rarest habitats and wildlife, and are central to rural tourism and leisure for millions of people. The work of hill farmers must be recognised and rewarded in a new agricultural policy with specific payments for upland farming.

FACT

Rural tourism provides £19 billion a year to the UK economy



For more information, please contact the Countryside Alliance at policy@countryside-alliance.org or on 020 7840 9260.

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