

# Briefing

## How the Farming Roadmap could support farmers, food production and nature



December 2025

### Summary

The government has promised a Farming Roadmap to provide a 25 year vision of a profitable and resilient farming industry. Primarily, it should clarify how the farming industry will be supported to deliver government strategies and targets for food production, emission reductions and nature restoration. This would help drive up investment, allowing farmers to plan to meet future needs.

Clarity in the following areas should be a priority:

- **Future development of the Environmental Land Management schemes.** The Farming Roadmap should set out the continuation of the three Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes (the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery), while providing more information on when each scheme will open and close for applications, how they will increase in ambition and how the budget for Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery schemes in particular will grow over time.
- **Connections to the Land Use Framework, Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan, Environment Act targets and the Food Strategy.** The Farming Roadmap must set out delivery pathways for these strategies and policies, showing clearly how farms will be supported to meet them (predominantly through ELM), including an improved advice service for farmers.
- **How private finance will be scaled up in ELM schemes.** The current farming budget falls short of what is required to deliver all the government's strategies and targets, so private finance is essential to achieve them.
- **How the government will support financial resilience.** This should include measures to help adapt agriculture to climate change and support the growth of horticulture and inputs for alternative proteins, alongside measures to increase supply chain fairness.

## Introduction

Farming in England is going through a transformation. The government will set out its long term vision for farming over the next 25 years in the upcoming Farming Roadmap.

In November 2024, Steve Reed, then secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs, announced that the government was developing a 25 Year Farming Roadmap, focused on making farming and food production more profitable and transitioning farming to new business models that are more environmentally and financially sustainable in the long term.<sup>1</sup>

This comes after changes which have affected farmers:

- Subsidies they previously received under the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy, based on the area they farmed, are being phased out by 2027. This has been replaced by the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes. These pay for public goods such as improved water quality, flood protection and nature restoration.
- Backlash against changes to inheritance tax for farmers, agricultural land and business owners, introduced in the 2024 budget, has accelerated discussions around the financial sustainability of British farming, which the Farming Roadmap will seek to address.
- Climate change is already having major impacts on food production. Three of the worst five harvests on record in the UK have occurred since 2020.<sup>2</sup> How land is used and managed is fundamental to addressing climate change and nature loss. Agriculture is responsible for 12 per cent of UK greenhouse gas emissions and is decarbonising more slowly than other sectors.<sup>3</sup> The Farming Roadmap must support reaching net zero by 2050.

This briefing explores priorities for the government’s Farming Roadmap if the industry is to become more environmentally and financially sustainable in the long term.

## Financial sustainability

### Farm payment schemes

ELM schemes have the potential to improve the livelihoods of farmers, but there is a lack of certainty about what they will look like in the future. With many farmers already working 65 hours a week, the need to keep up with haphazard policy development too has been challenging.<sup>4</sup>

Farmers support the transition: 83 per cent of them say payments for environmental outcomes will be important to their future business.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the total number of agri-environment agreements has more than doubled from 27,500 in 2020 to 65,400 in 2024 across England’s 102,400 farms.<sup>6</sup>

The roadmap must give certainty that ELM's three schemes, the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery, will be in place for the long term, with predictable application cycles.

### **Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)**

This is an entry level scheme encouraging small scale actions to benefit air and water quality, nature and lower emissions. It closed suddenly in March 2025, and it is not known when it will reopen, making planning difficult.

### **Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship**

This scheme is better suited to farms in the uplands than SFI, which has more arable options. There was a 55 per cent increase in applications in 2023, compared to the previous year, but more than a quarter were turned away and the scheme has since closed to applications.<sup>7</sup>

### **Landscape Recovery**

This scheme has great potential to restore nature and store carbon at the least cost to food production due to bespoke spatial targeting. It is also the only scheme partly funded by private finance.

As well as giving confidence that these three schemes will continue into the future, the Farming Roadmap should show how they will develop over time, as follows:

### **Recommendations**

#### **1. To ensure ELM schemes work well for all farmers, the Farming Roadmap should:**

- Set out that SFI, Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery will continue to be the three schemes that form ELM well into the future.
- Provide guidance on when the schemes will open and close for applications, and how big each is expected to be in terms of budget and agreements. This should be published with evidence to justify the size of the schemes. To provide long term stability, a commitment to the level of funding expected in future years is needed.
- Plan to expand Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery, so they constitute half of the 2025 Spending Review settlement, in line with what is needed to meet the Environment Act and net zero targets. Applications should be assessed against how they deliver the Land Use Framework (see below).
- Show how SFI will change over time to deliver increasing value for money through a rising baseline. The Farming Roadmap should indicate entry requirements for future years, including a carbon footprint assessment.

## **2. To improve planning, support and guidance for farmers, the Farming Roadmap should:**

- Integrate with the Land Use Framework, which should be published by the end of 2025. The Land Use Framework should identify where land use change and management is needed to meet the targets set in the Environmental Improvement Plan and Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan, including peat restoration and woodland creation. Together, these policies should guide ELM spending to areas of the country, particularly national parks, where funding should prioritise those farm businesses that need to transform their operations to remain viable.
- Make clear the importance of farm advice, showing how existing advice schemes will evolve to help farmers cope with future changes. A dedicated facilitation fund to support peer to peer learning should also be established.

## **Reducing methane emissions**

Methane is a highly potent greenhouse gas. The UK needs to cut its methane emissions rapidly, including from agriculture, which is the source of over half of the country's emissions.

One of the simplest actions farmers can take is to feed cows methane suppressing additives. Dairy cows are especially well suited to this. Methane suppressants are up to 60 times more cost effective at emissions abatement than other farming interventions currently receiving government subsidies.<sup>8</sup> The cost is low, around half a penny per pint of milk produced. The government's Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan shows that the adoption of methane suppressants will lead to greater agricultural emission reductions than any other policy.<sup>9</sup>

Methane produced by cows can also be cut by the wider adoption of better slurry management techniques, such as acidification or capturing the methane for use on the farm, although government support and mandatory requirements may be necessary to encourage this.

## **Recommendations**

The Farming Roadmap should:

- Provide certainty around how the government will support farmers to implement the use of methane suppressing feed additives. We suggest subsidies should be offered for English farmers to use them as soon as possible. This has successfully been done in Denmark with a partial subsidy topped up by financial support from dairy processors and supermarkets. Incentives could be gradually phased out to be replaced by a mandate over the period of the Farming Roadmap, with costs spread across multiple stakeholders throughout the supply chain.

- Outline how policy will evolve to reduce emissions from slurry stores. This includes continuing the Slurry Infrastructure Grant Scheme and Farming Equipment and Technology Fund, which supports farmers with high upfront costs to reduce their impact on waterways, as well as reducing ammonia and methane pollution. During the period of the Farming Roadmap, requirements to either acidify slurry or otherwise neutralise methane emissions, or capture and use methane from slurry stores, should become mandatory.

## **Governance and nature markets**

The global economy relies on natural assets, yet economic activity is depleting it at an unsustainable rate. Regulation can change this by giving businesses a clear stake in nature and its restoration.

The government set a goal in 2023 of £1 billion in private finance invested into nature every year by 2030.<sup>10</sup> But, in 2022, only £95 million had been secured.<sup>11</sup> Voluntary markets are insufficient, and they lack standards and governance, leading to claims of greenwashing.<sup>12</sup>

There is no agreement around the regulations needed to drive private finance into nature restoration. Establishing these is beyond the scope of the Farming Roadmap. To do this, we recommend that the government establishes a joint commission across Treasury, the Department for Business and Trade and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.<sup>13</sup>

The new commission should investigate incentives for supermarkets and food producers to invest in nature through their supply chains, and include industry, academic and civil society representatives. It should consider initiatives, including new compliance markets and levies, that ensure farmers receive a fair return for their produce, without driving up the price of food for those that can least afford it.

In the meantime, there are ways the Farming Roadmap could help.

## **Recommendations**

The Farming Roadmap should:

- Provide certainty around the opportunities for private finance investment through ELM. This should include details on the growth of the Landscape Recovery scheme, which already accepts private finance. It should also explore how Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship and SFI could, over time, supplement public money with private finance.
- Provide clarity and timelines on the mandated reporting of key environmental impacts by large retail and supply chain food companies. This should cover scope 3 emissions (supply chain emissions) and domestic and overseas nature impacts. Additionally, the Treasury should set out a date when reporting aligned with the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures will be mandated. This would require large

companies to report on the nature risks they face and the impacts they have on nature through their supply chains.

- Name the date by which the government will publish its response to the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero consultation on the governance of voluntary carbon and nature markets.

## **Farming and food production**

Extreme weather is a major concern for all arable farmers. The 2024 harvest was the second worst on record in England, due to heavy rainfall and flooding, severely affecting the profitability of cereal farms.<sup>14</sup>

While the government cannot control the weather, it could take steps to make sure farmers receive fairer prices for their produce. The Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) is the body responsible for regulating relationships between the UK's largest supermarkets and their direct suppliers. Most farmers are not protected by the GCA, as they tend to sell to mid-supply chain food businesses, rather than directly to supermarkets.

### **Recommendations**

- The government should do more to connect farmers with the food strategy, ensuring they produce food the UK population should eat more of, particularly fruit, vegetables, beans, pulses and other alternative proteins. A horticultural growth plan could be delivered as part of the Farming Roadmap.
- The GCA should be empowered and resourced to take more effective action against unfair practices, running investigations and applying fines for non-compliance.<sup>15</sup> Its remit should extend to include pricing and retailers with a turnover of over £500 million, rather than the current £1 billion. More clarity is also needed about how the Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator, responsible for enforcing these, will work alongside the GCA.<sup>16</sup> Sectoral codes should cover all sectors of the supply chain to ensure farmers get a fair deal.
- The government should build new routes to market for farmers, with a growth plan for alternative food supply chains which connect consumers and producers more directly, as this tends to give farmers better returns.<sup>17</sup> This would also help to reduce the competition with imported products produced to lower environmental standards than in the UK and give farmers domestic markets for their goods.

## **Conclusion**

Farming will continue to face significant challenges over the next 25 years, not least those caused by climate change and nature loss. The government's Farming Roadmap must give farmers greater confidence in how policy will

evolve to support them in the face of these challenges, whilst rewarding them for emissions reductions and nature restoration.

The roadmap must make progress on how more private finance will be brought into ELM schemes and deliver long awaited measures to protect farmers in supply chains, to help address financial instability which public funding alone will struggle to rectify.

By accelerating progress across the range of issues discussed here, the Farming Roadmap would be a positive and confidence building intervention for the industry.

---

**For more information, contact:**

Sophie O'Connell, senior policy adviser, and Lydia Collas, head of natural environment, Green Alliance  
[lcollas@green-alliance.org.uk](mailto:lcollas@green-alliance.org.uk)

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), 21 November 2024, speech by Defra Secretary of State Steve Reed at the 2024 CLA Conference.

<sup>2</sup> T Lancaster, 22 August 2025, 'UK on course for fifth worst harvest after drought hits staple crops - new data', Energy and Climate Intelligence Hub. This analysis looked at the crops AHDB publish harvest tracker data for wheat, spring barley, winter barley, oats and oilseed rape. Yields were at or below the five year average for all crops apart from oilseed rape. However, the five year average includes two very poor harvests (2024 and 2020). Compared to the ten year average, cereal yields this year are below or well below average, with the exception of spring barley.

<sup>3</sup> Climate Change Committee (CCC), 2020, *The sixth carbon budget: agriculture and land use, land use change and forestry*

<sup>4</sup> *Farmers Weekly*, 28 September 2018, 'Fit2Farm: hard work and long hours take toll on farmers'. On average, farmers work 65 hours per week compared to the national average of 37.

<sup>5</sup> Defra, 2024, 'Farmer opinion tracker for England: October 2023'

<sup>6</sup> National Audit Office, 2024, *The farming and countryside programme*, p10; according to the NAO there were 27,500 live agri-environment agreements in England in 2020. Defra, 5 August 2024, 'An update on SFI and our agri-environment schemes'. According to data collected by Defra, this increased to 65,400 in 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Defra, 17 July 2023, 'Countryside Stewardship: Higher Tier agreements to start in 2024': Defra received 758 agri-environment and mixed applications for Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship in 2024, up from 490 in 2023. Almost 200 of these applicants were turned away. Nature Friendly Farming Network, 2023, 'NFFN England: Higher Tier campaign': a petition calling for more Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship agreements secured thousands of signatures.

<sup>8</sup> L Hardy, 2024, briefing, ‘English farmers are at risk of being left behind in tackling methane emissions’, Green Alliance

<sup>9</sup> Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2025, *Carbon budget and growth delivery plan*

<sup>10</sup> HM Government, March 2023, *Nature markets: a framework for scaling up private investment in nature recovery and sustainable farming*

<sup>11</sup> UK Infrastructure Bank, 2022, ‘Our role in natural capital markets’

<sup>12</sup> Environmental Markets Board, ‘Facilitating the operation of high-integrity Environmental Markets in the UK’, [www.environmentalmarketsboard.org.uk](http://www.environmentalmarketsboard.org.uk)

<sup>13</sup> Green Alliance, 2024, ‘Why the UK needs nature-positive fiscal rules’

<sup>14</sup> *Farmers Weekly*, 11 October 2024, ‘Harvest 2024 second lowest on record, says Defra’

<sup>15</sup> Sustain, 2024, ‘Fairness in the food supply chain debate’; and Sustain, 2022, *Unpicking food prices*. Lack of resource affects the Grocery Code Adjudicator’s (GCA’s) ability to act as an effective regulator, as the cost of one investigation is more than its average annual operating budget. The Groceries Supply Code of Practice has also been criticised for not covering regulation of pricing so there is potential for retailers to squeeze farmers on cost.

<sup>16</sup> Sustain, 2024, ‘Joint briefing on supply chain fairness by the Groceries Code Action Network (GCAN)’. The Grocery Code Action Network has raised concerns that the sectoral codes could perpetuate regulatory fragmentation, as the GCA and Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator are owned by different government departments.

<sup>17</sup> Sustain, 2022, op cit