



Food, Farming
& Countryside
Commission

Our Common Ground

RSA

21st century enlightenment



Our Common Ground

A progress report from The RSA
Food, Farming and Countryside
Commission

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Foreword

When we launched the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission in November 2017, a few people were sceptical. “Brexit will be all over by the time you publish your findings”, they said. “And, anyway, do people really care about these complicated issues?”

Well, the first is palpably not the case. There is a lot still to do to decide together what kind of country we want to be and what this means for our food, where it comes from and the countryside we share.

Secondly, people do care – and about a wide range of issues, including the beauty of our countryside – but they feel disconnected from policy and they desperately want to be involved in the issues and the decisions that affect them. Our team has travelled the length and breadth of the country, from Sheppey to Shetland, Cromer to Cardigan, Armagh to St Austell, meeting and talking to people about what matters to them. I’m grateful that they have been welcomed, without exception, wherever they’ve been.

We’ve heard that so many of the debates that excite policymakers in Whitehall and Westminster leave people cold in rural communities and businesses. Policies developed in departmental silos in Whitehall make no sense on the ground – and often actively conspire against each other. We’ve seen what happens in rural communities when schools close, when health services ‘consolidate’, when employers move away and when the broadband doesn’t work. When buses stop running; when the commuter belt creeps further out of cities, and rural housing becomes unaffordable for local people; or when second home owners outnumber locals. People care very much about all these issues and want to be involved in shaping an alternative.

But people are also clear that silver bullet solutions from London won’t be the answer. Lincolnshire requires something very different from Lancashire, not to mention the aspirations of the devolved nations to fashion their own futures on these matters. This is why we’ve spent more time in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and in three iconic counties of England, to understand more about what locally designed futures could look like.

People tell us that they care about where their food comes from, how it is produced and how it affects their health and wellbeing. They believe the government should do its job, making sure that what they can buy really is safe and healthy for people, compassionate for animals, and sustainable for soils and biodiversity. Second, they challenge the idea that ‘food poverty’ is best addressed by making food cheaper. Poverty is poverty. In rural areas, the cost of living can be up to 30 percent higher than in towns.¹ If people can’t afford basic goods and services – food, housing, heating, transport – then the answer must be in getting a better balance between the price of goods, the provisions of services and basic incomes.

Farmers and growers tell us that they want to do what is necessary to meet the nation’s needs. They are prepared to make changes but with the same support that any essential industry facing major change would expect from government. They want to be able to make a fair and just living from their work, like anyone else. They also remind us that big global challenges are at least as serious as Brexit – climate change, migration and global conflicts are already having significant impacts. These longer-term challenges must be kept centre stage if we are going to help the UK be fit to face the future.

In this progress report, we haven’t tried to cover everything, but are publishing our first ideas for further inquiry and our calls to collective action, which we believe provide practical and radical ways to help tackle these issues. We welcome your views, challenge and advice.

Please join in.

Sir Ian Cheshire

Chair, RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission

Proposals at a glance

We have concentrated on those areas where we think bridging the gaps – within government or between government, business and citizens – could bring the most promising results.

Organised into five themes, each line of inquiry includes a few of our early stage propositions, which we want to explore further with you, amongst other contributions. Propositions fall into three categories, described below left.

	1. Meeting our global obligations	2. Securing the value of land	3. Good work for a thriving economy	4. Good food for healthy communities	5. More than money
<p>DO IT</p> <p>Potentially, the quick wins, where we already have the policy levers available to us and must bring renewed focus on using them effectively.</p>	<p>In which we connect our changing place in the world with our responsibilities to combat climate change, transform farming systems and the trade choices we make.</p> <p>Create food, farming and trade policies that improve standards</p>	<p>In which we connect mediating the multiple needs and demands on land use with novel financial instruments to make this work.</p> <p>Support creative responses to housing needs</p>	<p>In which we connect shifting patterns of work in a changing economy with people's aspirations for meaningful work and rich lives.</p> <p>Put existing laws into practice</p>	<p>In which we connect the ways that food is grown, produced and eaten, with the effects on people's health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Invest in social prescribing and green care</p>	<p>In which we connect all the resource flows through rural economies with ways to revitalise rural democracy.</p> <p>Map and use all resources more effectively</p>
<p>TEST IT</p> <p>Policy territory where there is a good enough consensus, across businesses and civil society, on what must be done and where policy should catch up with the public appetite.</p>	<p>Develop a transition plan for agriculture to become sustainable in ten years</p>	<p>A national land use framework and a mechanism to achieve this</p>	<p>Support and promote social enterprise</p>	<p>Broaden membership of industry bodies to include representatives of the 'health community'</p>	<p>Take decision making back to communities</p>
<p>DEBATE IT</p> <p>Contested areas, where judgements and important choices must be made, and for which we want balanced debate and dialogue to help us make these choices. This is where courageous and inclusive leadership is required to help find ways forward on difficult issues.</p>	<p>Accelerate the decarbonisation of the economy across all sectors</p>	<p>Create financial instruments to protect and develop the public value of land</p>	<p>Open up information, with funds for innovation</p>	<p>Incentivise farming for health</p>	<p>Get services working together for rural areas</p>



Introduction: from false choices toward real change

We cannot carry on treating our food, farming and countryside as we do currently. We are failing our citizens, our communities and our environment.

Climate change is accelerating
2017 was one of the world's three warmest years on record.² Globally, sea levels continue to rise, greenhouse gas concentrations have increased, and the Arctic and Antarctic sea ice is melting fast.³ In the UK, floods, droughts, and heat waves are becoming increasingly normal.

Biodiversity has plummeted
The UK has lost significantly more nature over the long-term than the global average, making it one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. In the last 50 years, almost 60 percent of species have declined (making the UK #189 on the global rankings).⁴

Soil fertility has collapsed
Agricultural soil has been so severely degraded that some of England's most productive agricultural land could become unprofitable within a generation due to soil erosion and loss of organic carbon.⁵ The UK's Environment Secretary has estimated that the UK is 30 to 40 years away from the fundamental eradication of soil fertility in parts of the country.⁶

Poverty and food bank usage continues to rise
4 million children in the UK live in households that can't meet the official nutrition guidelines; food bank usage has increased 13 percent in just a single year, with over 1.3m emergency food supplies delivered to people in crisis.^{7,8}

Diet-induced illness is spiralling
Almost 4 million people have been diagnosed with diabetes in the UK – 90 percent of these have type 2 diabetes.⁹ Diet-related, type 2 diabetes costs the NHS £12bn a year, with a further £15bn (for all types of diabetes) due to absenteeism, early retirement and benefits.¹⁰ That's equivalent to over £1.5m an hour or 10 percent of the NHS budget for England and Wales.

Pay is low in farming and the food sector
Nearly 40 percent of people in agriculture, forestry and fishing and 60 percent of people in the food services sector are on low paid jobs.¹¹

The rural-urban divide has become increasingly stark
Only 8 percent of housing in rural areas is affordable compared to 20 percent in urban areas; almost a quarter of households in rural area have no, or slow, broadband compared to 5 percent

in urban areas. Half of households in the most rural areas have regular bus services compared with almost all urban households.

These problems are not new¹²

They are replete with real and stubborn challenges and tough choices. Many are shared with other nations. The UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals – to which the UK has committed – provide a framework for addressing them.¹³

But when it comes to solving these interdependent and systemic challenges, not only are they proving wickedly intractable, but some are getting worse. Not least, this is because of the impossible choices we are told face us:

- Do we want food quality and production standards that everyone expects or food everyone can afford?
- Do we want to protect fragile ecosystems or feed 9 billion people?
- Do we want diversity in our farms, villages and towns or consolidated, efficient economies?

As the UK prepares to leave the European Union, it is time to question the way these 'choices' are presented. Most obviously, this is because our regulations, standards, subsidies and trade policies dealing with food, farming and the countryside have developed in step with other European countries, notably through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Leaving the EU forces us to think anew.

Yet it is also because people are reacting against these choices, and voicing frustration at the underlying assumptions that make them seem unquestionable. Behind these apparent choices is the notion that 'there's not enough to go around'. This is the case

for many aspects of civil life – from concerns about local government budgets to debates about feeding the world.

The people we met across the UK, and our discussions and research, have led us to a different view. Instead, we ask, in the sixth richest country in the world, how can we use the resources we have more fairly, effectively and sustainably? How can we steward the same piece of land, so it produces food, protects wildlife and provides affordable homes? How much more can communities achieve when they pool and coordinate more of the resources available to them?

We have found many examples of why this change is needed – of people and places left behind, misunderstood, or written off by a detached, city-centred view of progress. We have also found many examples of how to do things better.

This matters to everyone. Discussions about food, farming and the countryside have been plagued by narrow visions, opaque interests and fragmented thinking within and between government, businesses and communities, which have been driven to compete in ways that are unhelpful for everyone.

Treating these big questions like a zero-sum game creates a rapid race to the bottom.

This Commission was established with different values. We believe that, when you bring people together with different perspectives, to look closely at those parts of the system otherwise ignored, and ask people what works, it creates practical and radical possibilities for fair and sustainable outcomes.

We know that some have said the remit and mandate of this Commission is too wide and that we should "focus" more. This is another false choice. We argue

that it is not only possible but essential that we keep the whole system in view, because it is in the relationships between the big policy categories where some of the most promising policy developments lie.

We argue that it is essential that we:

- Protect and regenerate our planet, land and landscapes AND meet our needs for energy, food, housing, ensuring access for all.
- Support safe, sustainable and secure farming systems in the UK AND globally, without exporting the negative impacts of our first world choices.
- Provide enough healthy AND affordable food for everyone.
- Grow flourishing economies and communities, making the best use of all resources available, in both rural AND urban contexts.

We are also persuaded to look beyond the limited aspirations of halting decline or maintaining business as usual, to policies that support regeneration – of our environment, our economies and our communities. We acknowledge that this requires courage, imagination, perseverance and determination, but we believe such efforts are not only justified but urgently needed.

If we don't rise to this challenge, the current trajectory sends us inexorably towards a society in which our environment is degraded beyond recovery, people become unhealthier and unhappier through diet, poverty and loneliness, the strains in society bring further fragmentation and disconnection – and even less capacity to act to change direction.

We live in an increasingly complex and sophisticated world. We can no longer accept one-dimensional policies designed to achieve single objectives, or siloed

policy-making, blind to the perverse incentives, costs and counter-productive side-effects created elsewhere. This is why we are encouraged by the UK Government's response to Sir Michael Barber's Public Value Review and its adoption of the Public Value Framework, which determines how public money is turned into results for citizens.¹⁴

It is also why we believe that the kind of changes we advocate will be widely welcome. For, as we have heard around the UK, farmers and growers, people in the countryside and towns, and retailers and producers, are all struggling in different ways with the big challenges that face us all. We are encouraged that when people get together with others they do not usually encounter, they are inspired and motivated by the conversations and the ideas that arise.

Our inquiry is still very much in progress: at this point, we are setting out our thinking, the responses to our engagements to this point, and we are seeking your views. As we write, negotiations on leaving the EU remain fraught and the Agriculture Bill is working through Parliament. While these and other developments have yielded fresh and challenging ideas, the same impossible choices are still on the table. The proposals in this report are our first ideas for how we could put a different approach into practice.

Our work has been shaped by the commissioners' commitment to hear from people around the UK who do not usually have a voice in national policy debates, and to come up with radical and practical solutions. Our team has toured the UK, convened inquiries in the devolved nations, and in three counties of England. We have also reviewed a thousand proposals that identify the key issues and gaps and held workshops on these topics. Our inquiries will continue into the spring and contribute to our final report in 2019.

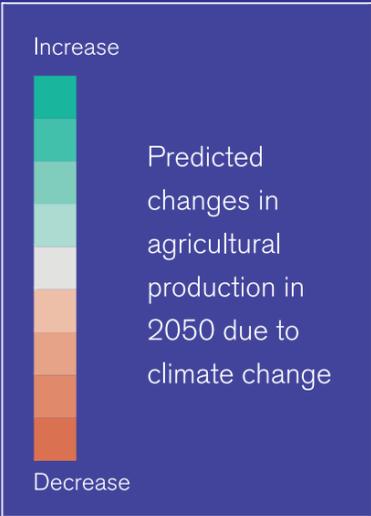
Some of these proposals may feel familiar, some may seem new. But most of them are based on the same insight, which was repeated during our research – that the siloed nature of policymaking and practice leads to cynicism, disconnection, false choices and waste.

The next five sections of the report make the case for policy and innovation to focus on sharing resources more effectively, and more fairly, rather than on their scarcity, when it comes to food, farming and countryside. We take a fresh look at the questions that arise when we think about a more connected, collaborative future for the UK, not just sustaining but regenerating and restoring ecosystems. In each, we outline some initial proposals, guided by what people have told us is important and inspired by what we have learned so far.

The final two sections of the report provide some background on our process of inquiry and most importantly, the next steps, including how to get involved.

Currently most of our agricultural imports come from Europe, but as we change our trade relationships this balance will shift. This needs to be navigated in the context of a changing climate

1/3 of our total agricultural imports are fruits, vegetables and horticultural products. 66% come from Europe. 10% come from Africa



1/4 of our agricultural imports from South America are soya products. The main product is soybean cake - a byproduct of soybean oil production imported for livestock feed

Exporting vegetables, flowers and tea to the UK accounts for 11% of Kenya's total exports

Lamb makes up over half of our agricultural imports from ANZ. UK exports lamb in autumn and imports in spring



1. Meeting our global obligations

What do we want the UK's role to be in the world, in response to the big global challenges that face us? That was the central question posed by our commissioners at the beginning of their deliberations. It goes to the heart of the leadership responsibility the UK could accept, as well as how we redefine our relationships with the rest of the world.

The issues we want to tackle

Several submissions to our Call for Ideas suggested that future trade agreements with countries outside the EU should make sure we avoid being flooded with cheap but low quality, low welfare, environmentally damaging food. But that is only one aspect of the problem.

Climate change, extreme weather and the disruption of natural systems are likely to lead to a two percent reduction in farming yields every decade.¹⁵ That puts farmers on the climate change front line. A recent IPCC report shows that governments must focus on limiting global warming to 1.5°C to help reduce the impacts of climate change on ecosystems, human health and well-being and make it more possible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁶ While the UK has played a pivotal role setting up global and national commitments to reduce greenhouse emissions to address the growing threat,¹⁷ it is also responsible for a large share of historical and current emissions, has a poor record of addressing agriculture emissions and must do much more to tackle this urgent problem.

Current rates of extinction are between 1,000 and 10,000 times the pre-human rate.¹⁸ The UK supports programmes like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).¹⁹ But global biodiversity loss is driven by continued inequality, poverty, over-consumption, conflict and poor governance. Over-extraction, intensification and the expansion of

farming, and climate change are all exacerbated by these. The UK draws heavily on land across the world for our food, fuel and fibres, and consumes fish from around the world with a huge impact on marine biodiversity.

As well as the questions arising for the UK's relationship with the EU and the world, wider global trade rules are themselves under threat with President Trump's protectionist approach to global trade.²⁰ It is not yet clear whether this means a disastrous vacuum or a chance for a creative rethink.

Meanwhile, the concentration of power along the food chain has grown rapidly, and a small number of multinational corporations exercise huge influence over the national and supranational resources that are the basis of our food supply.²¹ Global commodities, finance and investment activity is changing patterns of land ownership²² and use in countries around the world, as well as exercising significant influence over national and international policy-making. This further reduces the role the public has in shaping the future of the nation and its countryside – making the stakes higher and our opportunity for influence lower.

Why these issues are so intractable

These competing tensions - between consolidating, upscaling, industrialising business models and concerns to protect more diverse, sustainable systems – are, nonetheless played out to different outcomes. TTIP negotiations floundered,

"The market and state should serve people and place. There is tension between who controls the food market and systems, and who they serve. We need appropriate regulation to make markets serve the interests of people"

Community Farmer, County Antrim.

“The amount of waste food we receive from supermarkets is phenomenal. [The supermarket we work with] has a zero-waste policy. They don't send food to landfill – it is discounted, given to staff or sent to us. But most of the food we receive is highly processed and often full of sugar. I don't feel great when I'm handing this out”

**Food waste charity,
Central Scotland**

arguably, after public actions drew attention to lack of transparency and ‘irreconcilable differences’²³ on attitudes to animal welfare standards and consumer protection, among other things.

The requirements of our future food system are extensive. We have to meet society's desire for sufficient, nutrient dense food, whether produced here or overseas, and to make sure that wildlife can thrive, our climate is stabilised, and that future generations can meet their needs too. But it is also time we confronted the popular myth: that we must produce ever more food as cheaply as possible to feed a rapidly growing global population. We already produce all the food we need across the planet.

This widely held belief has tended to blind policy-makers to the real issues that face us: over-production at serious cost to ecosystems; excessive food waste (up to one third of all food produced);²⁴ a distribution system that itself requires too many resources in transport and packaging; and over-consumption by wealthier populations.

Towards more comprehensive solutions

The core principles of a UK farming system fit for the future and within safe environmental limits must include²⁵:

- Diversity (of farm size, crops types, genetics, people and growing systems) which maximises resilience in the face of an uncertain future.
- Maximising energy efficiency and carbon sequestration in soils and trees.
- Closed loop approaches so that nutrients are recycled and not lost into the wider environment where they may act as pollutants.
- Minimising risks to human health through inappropriate use of antibiotics, pesticides and herbicides, with their impacts on food safety and animal health.
- Avoiding ‘offshoring’ the environmental or social costs of our food production.

It makes sense, therefore, to grow the crops and animals that are best suited to different geographies, both in the UK and globally, so that their production is most resource efficient and least damaging. How much food will be produced in the UK, once direct payments for farmland maintenance have ceased, will depend on several factors: the trade environment, the availability of labour and the price the market will pay for UK food. Without subsidies, farm gate prices will rise, all other things being equal; almost all sectors will be affected.

New technologies such as gene editing or robotics, if handled in ways that do not generate new practical or ethical difficulties, could theoretically help us to overcome some challenges. Lab-produced meat, hydro/aquaponics and the use of novel ingredients from algae, fungi and insects may reduce the

dependency on land to produce some of our food and other products, freeing more of it for wildlife, recreation and ecosystem services.

Meanwhile, there are improvements to be made to efficiency, which will benefit both the environment and farmers' incomes. The spread between top and bottom performers across a range of metrics is very large, including on profitability. There is a skills and aptitude gap to close, and to bring the brightest and best into farming and growing – people who can deliver the best on farm and land management, including for environmental goods and services that will be as important a market as food in many places, and who are able to collaborate, innovate and add value.

While the UK won't be the cheapest place to grow most foodstuffs, due to limited land, relatively high standards and labour costs, we can build a reputation for high quality products that will be welcomed in both domestic and export markets. There is simply no point in a ‘race to the bottom’ strategy. It is a race we cannot win, and the penalties of trying to do so are just too great.

In any scenario, it is vital that the UK maintains the capacity to produce more food in the future, even if circumstances mean that it is not viable to do so now. Some scenarios, especially those facing up to the potential impacts of climate change, make food sovereignty just as important as ensuring a secure and resilient supply of food, and for which core skills, knowledge and infrastructure must be maintained. Moreover, to play our part in mitigating and adapting to climate change, soils must be protected and regenerated: it makes more sense to focus on healing the environment, rather than seeking to maximise production of low value commodities in ways that will induce further damage.

There are three system-wide approaches that we think merit further exploration here.

Next steps ▶▶▶

“I reckon this year was one of the hardest ones we've had. In the years I've been farming I've seen difficult years. But they are getting more and more regular. It definitely feels like things are changing”

**Salad producer,
Shropshire**



Create food, farming and trade policies that improve standards

Here is the problem, which we heard on the UK tour. A US pork farmer produces pork at 84p/kg and his UK counterpart at £1.20/kg. With UK welfare standards, we simply cannot produce to the same price. There is clearly a risk that the production standards of our agricultural produce will get eroded under most Brexit scenarios.²⁶ The US government has identified our standards as what they call “higher than necessary”.²⁷ But within Europe, the UK ranks 8th out of 10 countries in the Food Sustainability Index which includes government policies on food waste and loss, agriculture-related conservation and research and nutrition education.²⁸

A fall in standards would threaten our countryside, animal welfare and public health, and fly in the face of public expectations. The government must set regulatory baselines which make sure that risk and rewards are shared better, and businesses that deplete public value should pay the costs for doing so, as set out in the government’s Environment Plan.²⁹ That means, for example, clear labelling rules and pricing that makes sure the polluter pays.

To make sure that UK farmers and other businesses are not disadvantaged, these standards should also apply to imports. In developing and implementing these standards, we should work in partnership with low income countries and with reference to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UK has signed up to the SDGs – a collection of 17 global goals, and 169 targets – devised to achieve sustainable development. They are non-binding but represent the best consensus the world has so far, about what is necessary to confront the world’s most pressing challenges.

A 2018 assessment indicates we have achieved too little so far in food and environment related areas.³⁰ If the UK intends to continue to lead in the world, it is vital that the government considers the potential impact of trade deals on them and publishes the findings. We have said we must not offshore the effects of our own national choices. We must also prioritise trade deals that allow developing countries to grow their own resilient and sustainable economies.

Our ambition is for the UK to lead the world in the quality of our food and environment, the health of our people and animals, and the sustainability and resilience of our economy. This will require us to improve our standards – and it will involve a transition and investment plan to move towards sustainable farming systems in ten years.

“[A trade deal with] no tariffs with the US would mean 20 percent cheaper pork on the market. Our pigs are reared outside. I’ve been to farms with sow cages and tiny stalls with a stick in as ‘enrichment’. And that was in Europe”

Pork producer, Norfolk

Commit to a transition plan for agriculture which meets UK commitments to the SDGs

Farmers and policymakers are understandably braced for the impending transition away from CAP payments. But everyone recognises that an even more significant transition will be necessary, which is the change needed to mitigate and adapt to climate change and other global challenges. Further, the combination of rising costs, public concern and evolving science is expected to restrict access to the fertilisers and pesticides that many farms currently rely on. Unless more active support is available to help farmers manage this change, it will hasten insolvencies and land abandonment, ‘offshoring’ the environmental costs of our food production to other countries.

It’s time for a managed transition plan for agriculture, which rises to the challenges of climate change, at the same time as tackling other pressing issues, such as the decline in soil health, biodiversity, water and air pollution, the low profitability of many farms and rising input costs.³¹ This must focus on building both the capacity and the capability to produce food which is a component of healthy diets, grown or raised in harmony with the environment, which reduce our dependence on imported foods and livestock feed grown in environmentally damaging ways, such as soya beans, palm oil and irrigated vegetables from countries suffering from drought or soil degradation. It is also essential that food and farming systems play their part in moving fast towards ‘net zero’ carbon emissions by 2050.



To achieve these objectives, we should aim to:

- Develop food and farming systems which increase diversity, use natural resources sustainably, and provide the best fit with local soils, topography and climate.
- Maximise local processing and marketing potential, to reduce transport and fossil fuel use, while helping to maintain rural communities and cultural traditions.
- Build soil organic matter, and therefore carbon levels.
- Replace nitrogen fertiliser as much as possible by increasing use of forage and grain legumes.
- Increase production of fruit, vegetables and nuts, especially where this can be integrated into rotations on livestock and mixed farms, to maintain soil carbon.
- End the use of pesticides and herbicides, to protect biodiversity, where the evidence supports this.
- Reduce livestock levels and prioritise ‘pasture fed’ systems.

Crucially, farmers themselves must be fully involved in co-creating the transition plan, confident that such a transformation will get the investment it needs to speed the change towards a radically more sustainable farm system. But for this to happen in a transparent, inclusive and practical way, all kinds of farmers need a say, as well as others, who have an interest in how land is used and its impact on the environment.

Ultimately, farmers may respond by scaling up, or by collaborating with others to achieve efficiencies; by differentiating their offers, adding

“The consumer doesn't care about the whole ecological story – rotation, hedges, 8hr grazing cycles. They just want pampered cows”

Dairy Farmer, Norfolk.

value and seeking novel or specialist markets, including direct to customers in an attempt to capture a larger share of the retail price; they may cut back on production, and the costs associated with it, and supply environmental goods instead, or reduce input costs to improve productivity that way, or they may choose other ways of contributing to a vibrant rural economy, such as agri-tourism or providing space for business through conversion of buildings to offices.

Such strategies should consider all parts of the food and farming value chain and what will work best in different parts of the UK. For example, without local abattoirs and thriving local markets, diverse local supply chains can't develop and flourish. But – like any other successful transition (think energy or infrastructure) – proper investment now pays strategic dividends later, in making sure that the UK gets what it wants and needs from this critical sector and mitigates unintended or unforeseen consequences.

For this to be effective, government must regulate agricultural advisory services to decouple them from product sales, similar to rules on financial advice. Technical and business advice is essential to farm decision-making, especially in these times of rapid and novel change. When agronomists rely on input sales for income (for example, from pesticides, herbicides, and other chemicals), it creates a structural incentive to oversell products that contribute to the environmental footprint of farming. The government must ensure that the UK has an independent advisory system that is equipped to lead farmers through a successful transition to sustainable agriculture.

Accelerate the decarbonisation of the economy across all sectors

While we talk about climate change in this report, perhaps we should instead be talking about climate breakdown. The message put out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in a recent report could not be clearer: time is running out.³² Limiting global warming to an average 1.5C global temperature rise will require “rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society”. This sort of news might be expected to cause public panic and rapid political action but has instead been met largely with silence. We have known about this crisis for decades, and although the Climate Change Act 2008 makes it a UK duty to reduce net carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2050, the act has been criticised for its lack of annual targets and absence of a long-term strategy to ensure advances towards decarbonisation.

The food system is a major contributor to climate change – as well as land use change and the depletion and degradation of natural resources. Its environmental impacts could increase by up to 90 percent between 2010 and 2050³³ if mitigation measures are not implemented to keep us within the planetary and social boundaries that define a safe and just operating space for humanity.³⁴ Decarbonising the food system to reduce these impacts will require a ‘synergistic combination of measures’³⁵ including dramatic dietary changes (more plant-based diets, less intensive meat consumption), as well as reductions in food waste and loss and improvements in technologies.

There are many elements to decarbonisation (energy generation, transport, agriculture, etc.), and all sectors of the economy should be targeted – but one area that has seen some notable success is divestment.

Over \$7.17 trillion in assets have been divested from fossil fuels, with pledges to remove funds from coal, oil and gas investments being led by the insurance industry.³⁶ Churches, pension funds (managed by councils), universities and philanthropic institutions have all started to divest, and targets are being expanded to include industries and businesses that are particular generators of carbon emissions. A significant push to force more companies and funds to divest, paired with industry pledges to ‘keep carbon in the ground’ and ensuring cities and towns become 100 percent renewable could all be implemented in the very near future. How then do we engage more people in more ways to move at a faster pace to fully decarbonise the economy before it's too late?



The way we use our land impacts every aspect of our lives, including our water, the air we breathe, the roof over our head, our energy sources and our ability to mitigate climate change

Off the Scottish Coast, salmon lice from fish farms are a major threat to wild salmon populations



In absolute area, the UK has more farmland than Germany. 32% of Germany is forested, compared to 13% in the UK

In Northern Ireland crops make up less than 5% of agricultural land area. 69% of land is Less Favoured Area

In the North Sea algal blooms are becoming more common, as more nutrient-rich water from human activities including agriculture enters the sea

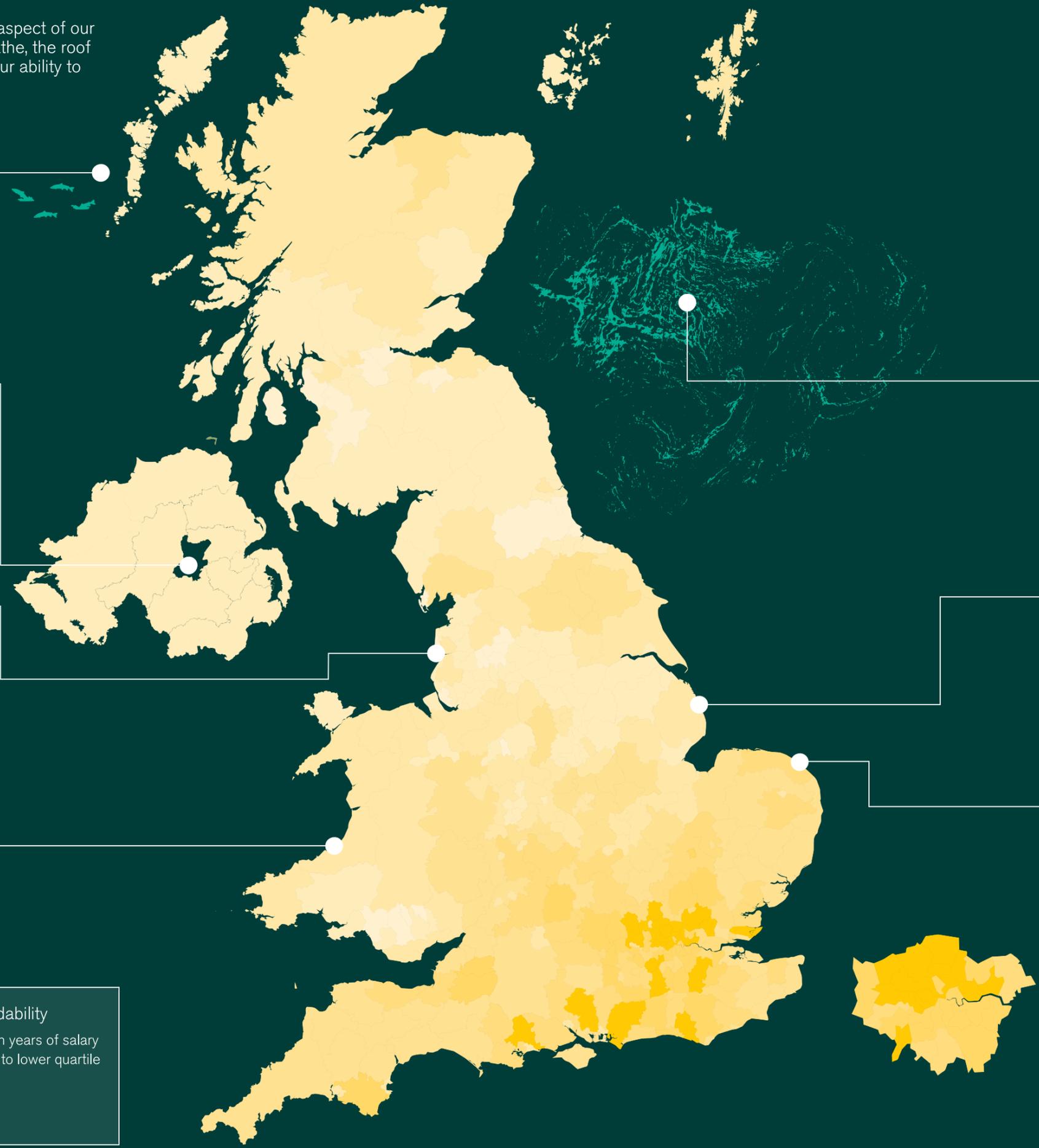
In Lancashire fracking for shale gas has resumed after a seven year pause

In Lincolnshire Anglian Water report levels of metaldehyde (slug killer) higher than safe for drinking during the spraying season

In Wales 94% of teenagers do not eat their '5 a day'. Less than 1% of Welsh land is used for fruit and vegetable production

In North Norfolk there are areas in which over 30% of homes are second homes

In London food waste costs authorities over £50 million each year





2. Securing the value of land

Competition for land uses plays out daily across the UK, over housing and energy developments, between shepherding and wilderness in the uplands, and as major infrastructure projects like HS2 carve their way across the country.

While agriculture and fishing contributes just £9.2 billion (8 percent) to the agri-food sectors £113 billion, it is the existing land use (pasture and arable) for over half of the UK's land.³⁷ Land is the UK's most valuable non-financial asset, worth around £5 trillion in 2016,³⁸ though that under-represents the societal value of land in providing a multitude of ecosystem services, distinctive landscapes and beauty.³⁹ The future direction for agriculture will hugely influence land use and land management systems, and – vice versa – how land use is framed will largely determine how agriculture evolves in coming decades.

The issues we want to tackle

Almost a decade ago, a major inquiry by the government's Foresight Unit made the case that pressures from competing land uses would grow and recommended addressing this with a more strategic approach. Crucially, it recognised that the same land can deliver several benefits at once, and that the need for such 'land sharing' or 'multifunctionality' will increase.⁴⁰

Yet present policies tend to block this. Agroforestry – having trees on farmland, which can provide productivity, environmental and animal welfare benefits – has historically fallen foul of CAP rules that treat farming and forestry as mutually exclusive. While amendments to the CAP has helped remove this block, other barriers remain. The government's proposals in the Agriculture Bill to enable integrated land

uses like these are encouraging. Yet there are still cultural silos between farm and forestry specialists, across government agencies and beyond.

Why this has been so intractable

One underlying challenge that affects different land uses, from housing to agriculture, is that land itself has increasingly become the object of financial speculation, investment and land banking.⁴¹ This has sucked investment from more productive uses and contributed to low housing supply. It has also led to land and house prices becoming detached from growth and income in the wider economy.⁴² One aspect driving land inflation will diminish during the transition from CAP – grants and payments through the Basic Payment Scheme – but other factors like inheritance tax relief (on farm land), land banking (for housing), and foreign investments (for speculation) may all continue to push up prices.

Huge profits from land speculation and land banking have created a perception of land as an easy source of wealth but have side-lined potential solutions that focus on restoring other kinds of land uses.

Towards more comprehensive solutions

We do not believe that the future of land use is best mediated via an inflexible strategy imposed from central government, which is unable to engage with the character and contexts of different places, and the particularities

"Environmental management schemes are currently approached from the top down, they are not monitored, they are not based on the individuality of farm and location, and it removes local knowledge. Farmers buy into environmental management schemes and the design is based on a farmer's previous yield, there is no monitoring of productivity or biodiversity in the systems once applied"

Farm Advisor, Cumbria

“We’ve always had to share the water with energy folks, at least as long as I remember. It used to be oil and gas. They’d disrupt the catch when they were working. But we generally worked out ways we could both get our job done. The wind turbine folks though, they have a different ego about them. Like ‘I’m saving the world. Get out of my way!’”

Crab fisher, Norfolk

of their soils, wildlife, housing needs and identity. But these debates over rival uses of the land have to be mediated through an enabling framework – across finance, infrastructure, services, planning, agriculture and other domains – that allows local decision-makers in communities, businesses and government to negotiate the different uses and benefits of land.

Scotland has a land use strategy (2016-2021), which includes a long-term vision, objectives relating to the economy, environment and communities, and principles for sustainable land use to guide policy and decision making.⁴³ Wales adopted its Wales Spatial Plan in 2004, and is currently working on a National Development Framework which will set out a 20-year land use framework to replace the Wales Spatial Plan.⁴⁴ Northern Ireland has made significant progress towards developing a land use strategy which was presented three years ago to a group of Assembly Members but has not been implemented.⁴⁵ Whilst none of these is an unalloyed success so far, they do illustrate a commitment in the devolved nations to start to deal with difficult issues that have been ignored for too long.

England is the exception. It has a National Planning Policy Framework,⁴⁶ which provides a basis for locally-prepared plans for housing and other development, but no overarching strategy to guide land use in the public interest. The challenges that such strategies now need to address range from a shared view on how we use land, to the unintended effects of things like cheap mortgage finance, to how we protect and regenerate land for carbon sequestration to how landscape is valued. While these are devolved matters, there should also be a mechanism to debate and mediate

those issues with local (cross border catchments like the Severn, Wye or Tweed) and supranational impacts (like aquaculture practices; or water quality).

Some ways forward are set out below.

Next steps ►►►

Support creative responses to housing needs

Housing affordability in rural areas and for rural workers is still a significant issue. In some rural areas the impact of second home ownership is negative – for example limiting homes available to local families and pushing up house prices⁴⁷ – but it may also stimulate the rural economy through tourism and housebuilding. Policies must be sensitive to the local impacts of second home ownership and increase policy support and public resources available for small-scale housing development, including self-build, custom-build and affordable housing. Examples of policies include:

- The Princes Countryside Fund proposes a strategy which allows farmers to build a retirement house on their land, so that they can pass on the farm but not have to leave their home.
- The One Planet Development scheme in Wales, which supports sustainable housing in rural communities, could be rolled out more broadly across the UK to support innovative local practices.
- Planning policies such as Rural Exception Sites, which allow for small areas of agricultural land to get planning permission for housing, and therefore can help increase affordable housing for which people with a local connection are eligible.
- Agri-villages, which are a model of sustainable community-led housing that integrates land-based enterprises with affordable housing, such as the Millom project.

Making connections between affordable housing and more sustainable land use extends to how we build and what we build, as well as where we build. The Royal Society proposes making more

use of timber as a building resource as part of a suite of practical proposals for greenhouse gas reduction.⁴⁸ Tying housebuilding with a land use framework in this more systemic way illustrates how integrated approaches could generate benefits across the policy territory. This could help mitigate the unintended consequences of positive policy intentions in one space undoing intentions in another. The Help to Buy Scheme is a case in point; it transferred public money to house-builders, but with little prospect of a sustainable housing solution. It also cost £2bn in the first nine months of 2017 (about the same, pro rata, as the cost of the Common Agricultural Policy).

The relationship between affordable housing, second home ownership and employment opportunities in rural areas needs nuanced policy approaches. It is much harder for younger people to live in these areas because there are fewer jobs available. Research by the Centre for Towns shows that since 1981, Britain’s towns and villages have lost more than 1 million people under 25 but gained over 2 million over 65-year olds.⁴⁹





"There is a vociferous aura around re-wilding. There are some within the movement who understand the complexities, yet the ones who speak the loudest are extremists who drown out the realists... Farming communities are turning inward, they are feeling under attack by environmentalists. Since the 1980's there have been two opposing forces between farming and conservation and that has eroded the middle ground"

Campaigner, Cumbria

A national land use framework and a mechanism to achieve this

Nearly all contributors so far agree that the UK should have a strategic land use framework. But the mechanisms for getting there are complicated. Our findings underline the need for something of the kind previously recommended by government's Foresight review. This would have established duties, objectives and mechanisms for government departments and agencies that already influence land use to coordinate their activities in the public interest.

The Multiple Land Use Framework now used in Australia, for example, makes these decisions more transparent by setting out questions, principles, risks and the factors that should be considered, especially when land is designated for a single use.⁵⁰

The UK government has acknowledged that there are aspects of the national landscape that require better processes for strategic development, for example, through the National Planning Policy Framework and the National Infrastructure Commission, but these are not coordinated with other areas of policy that affect land use, including agriculture.

The National Infrastructure Commission was set up to provide independent, transparent analysis and evidence-based advice to the government on the UK's infrastructure needs; and to unblock progress towards the major projects that governments have argued are needed for economic and social development. A standing body along similar lines for land use would take responsibility for convening, synthesizing and mediating the complex and competing perspectives on land use.

A National Land Use Commission could bring comparable independence, expertise, analysis and long-term thinking, but with stronger accountability to landscape bodies, communities and local authorities, and a responsibility for the overarching framework. As well as mediating different land use needs – for food and forestry, development, energy or natural capital – it would also ensure that aspects, like the value of landscape and beauty have a voice. It could help advocate for and drive important strategic investments such as coordinating rural transport, housing and rural development projects – on a more modest scale than HS2 or Crossrail but nonetheless vital to integrated rural regeneration. The appropriate remit of the framework and commission – UK or England – requires discussion.

Create financial instruments to protect and develop the public value of land

Sharp rises in land values make land, whether for farming, housing or other uses, increasingly inaccessible to those who do not own it. Mechanisms that allow communities to capture part of this increased value have the double benefit of discouraging speculative investment and sharing the rewards.

The main way in which rises in land values are currently captured to compensate the local community is via Section 106 agreements based on the Town and Country Planning Act or Community Infrastructure Levy – though some local authorities have not used their S106 funds properly to invest in improvements to public services.⁵¹ But there has been no systematic method set out for capturing rising land value for the public good since the attempt to create a Development Land Tax in 1976. This was widely agreed also to have been too complicated and it was repealed in the Finance Act 1985.

There are several possible approaches that could make some inroads into capturing rising land value, creating a more efficient land market, raising public revenue, and revitalising marginalised areas of the country. One is to allow local authorities to buy land at existing or agricultural use value – excluding any 'hope value' of the land being developed in future. This is how the new towns were built in the UK and is behind some of best examples of new development in Europe, such as Freiburg in Germany or Vathorst in the Netherlands. Another related approach, is to create a sovereign wealth fund for land, managed independently of the government, under a renewable charter, such as that which governs BBC. This could be used to buy land with particular public value, so that stakeholders can have some say in future land uses that sustain vibrant

and flourishing rural economies, with environmental benefits. We will look at several ways to capitalise such a fund in the next phase of work.



"Our landscape is full of cultural stories. And the people that have written a lot of these stories are farmers. If we push farmers to the side of their own narrative then we're damaging our landscape and misunderstanding it"

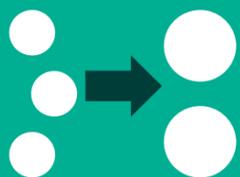
**Conservation Manager,
North Pennines**

In ten years a lot can change. Across different sectors in our food chain we see different stories of entrepreneurialism, market concentration and automation

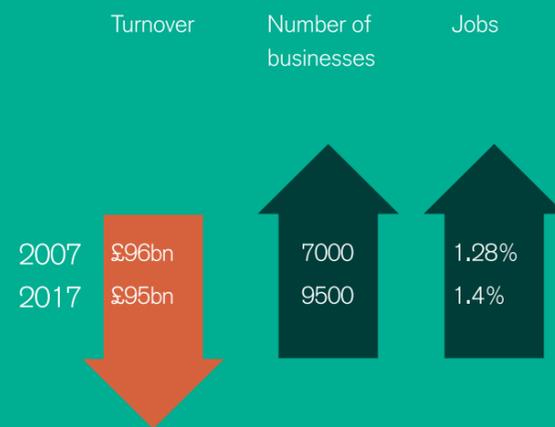
Agriculture and Fishing



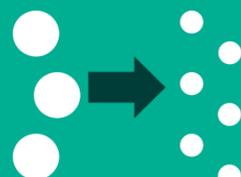
While there may be fewer farms with less workers generating bigger outputs, there are profitable farms of all sizes. Since 2005 there has been a 26% decrease in the number of farms over 100ha yet only a 14% decrease in the number of farms under 20ha



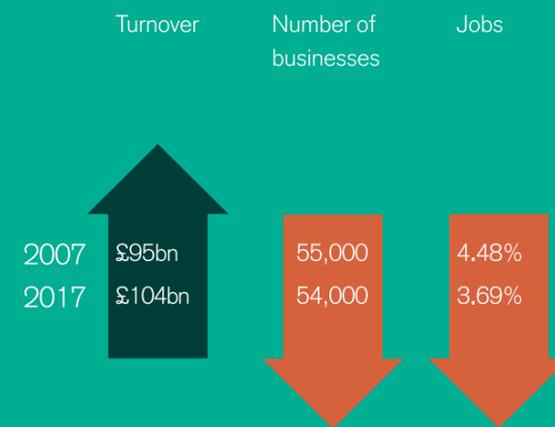
Manufacturing



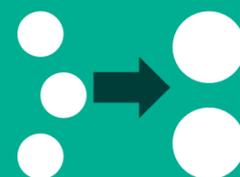
SMEs make up 98% of food manufacturing, and in the past 10 years there has been 20% increase in the number of food manufacturing businesses. Meanwhile employment and real turnover in food manufacturing has decreased



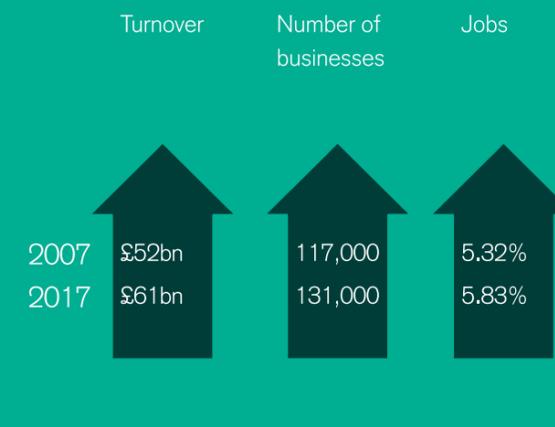
Retail



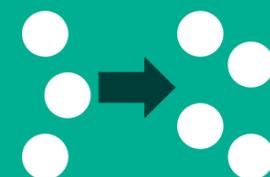
Food retail has grown in real turnover, though fewer businesses and fewer workers are generating this increase. Market share of the big four supermarkets has decreased, with most growth seen in discounters, online and independent retailers



Catering



The catering sector has grown 17% in real terms since 2007. The array of choices for eating out continues to grow, and we are eating out more. In turn this has implications on how we think about dealing diet-related health challenges





3. Good work for a thriving economy

Workers and employers in food, farming and rural communities face acute challenges, yet they are also grappling with structural pressures and long-term trends that are shared across the economy: the training and skills to meet seasonal demands; the lack of year-round secure employment opportunities; the lack of infrastructure to support rural working; and perhaps most importantly – low wages for workers while value is captured by larger players in the supply chain.

We met Mike in a food factory in Birmingham, and he outlined the irony of his position – making food but unable to afford to eat properly. Thousands of people working in food manufacturing and farming live this paradox every day.

The issues we want to tackle

A key question here is how we can develop a much more inclusive and innovative view of the future of work in food and farming systems, and in rural economies, when we have surrendered so much of the debate on the altar of ‘cheap food’. We have assumed that the contract between food producers and consumers is a zero-sum game, ignoring the benefits, in profit and social impact, that can be gained by adding value in the supply chain. It also ignores the scope there is for investment in primary production to drive innovation in productivity and quality. Potentially there is a virtuous circle, but in food and farming, the barriers are substantial.

This challenge arises not just from a simplistic, competitive view of people’s roles in the economy – as either producers or consumers – but from a dominant business model which is no longer fit for purpose. It is a model that is also causing many of the problems which we have encountered during the work of the Commission – in people’s health, in labour shortages and rural deprivation.

Meanwhile, pressures on efficiencies drive consolidation, farms become larger and more specialised, barriers to new businesses are high. The UK has lost a fifth of its farms in the last decade, with an ageing workforce: around a third of all land holders are over 65 years old, and only 3 percent of farms are owned by people under 35 years (although this hides the reality that 80 percent of holdings are family farms, run by members in formal or informal partnerships). While the jobs currently done by migrant workers might be carried out by robots in the future, many are hard to automate, and all will require investment.

Why this has been so intractable

Raising the quality of work, and the number and variety of jobs available in rural communities, means new thinking and new policy. For example, it is possible to raise the productivity of farming through automation, but, in practice, the cost of investments required can be a major barrier to uptake. And in turn, such automation can take certain jobs out of the sector. As businesses told us throughout the UK tour, the current economic uncertainty is holding them back from the kind of capital investment that would drive change at scale.

Furthermore, labour crises are exacerbated in rural areas by poor services. In Norfolk, a quail farmer told us how difficult it is to recruit managers

“Why is it that I work in a factory making food and my wage stays low? Over the years the price of a car has got more expensive. And we just expect that, that’s normal. But why not food? Why does that stay cheap? And all of us that make food, our wages stay low. I work in a factory and I make food, but I can’t afford to buy whatever food I want. I buy food in the discount section because that’s what I can afford to buy. But I get free cakes from the factory”

**Factory worker,
Birmingham**

“We’ve been exploring collaboratively how we might use labour between us and think more intelligently about providing greater job security, development and upskilling. In the winter it may be packing work. We want to secure a good pool of labour. We need to get the work-life balance right as well. It shifted from where before you would turn up every day, now if the weather looks bad we give them a few days off and ask them to come in on a Sunday instead”

**Arable farmer,
Lincolnshire**

“Tech will result in huge consolidation of the industry, particularly in processing. Slaughter houses in Germany are much bigger and largely automated. They’re huge. A small farmer taking 4 to 20 pigs at a time just couldn’t work”

Pork Producer, Norfolk.

when there is no local school. We heard from micro and small businesses how hard it is to hire workers, particularly seasonal ones, where there are no public transport links.

Towards more comprehensive solutions

We know that it is possible to ameliorate the vicious circle, because we have met people in the course of the Commission’s inquiries who are doing things differently, building a richer and more realistic economy that recognises and rewards enterprise, collaboration and trust, paying attention to what people care about and not just what they will pay for. Businesses like Tamar Grow Local, who started out by co-ordinating local producers to supply a box scheme. Less focussed on generating big profits and more interested in building community capacity and reciprocity, they have now seeded many spin offs: a shared kitchen, a starter farm scheme, a honey co-op, an equipment share scheme, a cider co-op and more – whilst reaching out deliberately to all parts of their local communities.

Our outline proposals below try to learn from these kinds of experiences.

The thrust is to help people collaborate where this is in the public interest, within businesses and communities, between them, and along the chain from farm to fork. They range from enforcing the law as it stands to protect workers, to investing in social enterprise. One overall effect is to place more value on farming, forestry and other land-based work.

More research is needed to answer at least three of the biggest practical questions at the heart of this conundrum. First, do we need to explore things like a new supply chain settlement, or some kind of basic income successor to farm support? Second, in distorted markets, how do we prevent the more powerful players taking the

biggest share of the value for themselves? Third, how do we enable young people to make careers in the countryside, bringing critical mass back into rural communities, and replenish demand for rural services, like healthcare, schools and transport.

On the third question, Lord Curry of Kirkharle set out in his 2002 Commission several ideas – share farming, whole farm contracting or work-to-rent schemes.⁵² He is now leading a task-force on workforce skills for the agri-food industry.

But more than this, a flourishing rural economy will also need to respond to the opportunities afforded by much wider variety of jobs and sectors, which are so far underexplored. From the ‘restoration economy’, an idea which seeks to put back in through ecological restoration⁵³ what generations of extraction has taken out, to creative and new technology sectors who, with the right infrastructure and opportunity, would choose to locate their businesses in rural communities.

Next steps ▶▶▶

Put existing laws into practice

A key message from our inquiry so far concerns the untapped potential of existing laws that are already on the statute book but are ignored or barely used. Workers’ rights and protections are one such area. Research into agency work and the gig economy, by the Resolution Foundation, the Taylor Review and Sir David Metcalf’s Labour Market Enforcement Report, and others, suggest that the main objective must be to enforce existing laws.⁵⁴ They also point out that the capacity of agencies to enforce the law is minimal – businesses can expect a labour enforcement inspection once every 250 years.⁵⁵

One solution is for government agencies to share intelligence and, potentially, cross-enforce. For example, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) operates the licensing regime for businesses that supply temporary labour in high risk sectors in the fresh food supply chain. They gained additional powers to investigate modern slavery and other labour abuse offences across England and Wales regardless of worker status or sector. When it comes to modern slavery, anyone can report potential problems: the key here is extending this power, and training, for example, environmental health or fire safety inspectors to become confident in recognising and reporting breaches.

Dame Glenys Stacey’s interim report on Farm Inspection and Regulation aims to simplify, streamline and enforce the myriad regulations that apply to farms, which would be an important step.⁵⁶





Support and promote social enterprise

There are now more than 100,000 social enterprises in the UK employing around 2 million people and contributing around £60 billion to the economy.⁵⁷ They are innovative (half of social enterprises introduced a new product or service in 2017 compared to a third among SMEs) and resilient (over half of social enterprises made a profit in 2017 compared to a third of SMEs). Yet they have difficulty accessing finance. Two mechanisms designed to address this, Social Investment Tax Relief (SITR) and the Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme (SEIS), specifically exclude many land-based businesses. We want to explore how SITR and SEIS could be extended to cover farming, gardening, woodland forestry enterprises.

As important as enabling new social enterprises is encouraging existing enterprises to become more 'social'. Riverford, the veg box company, has recently taken the step of going 74 percent employee-owned. Some farms are beginning to experiment with share farming, as way of giving would-be successors a stake in success. Mutualisation – the process of making a business more cooperative or worker or customer-owned, requires incentives. Building on the success of the EU Fruit & Veg Scheme in incentivising growing businesses to form marketing coops – the scheme was only open to such ventures – and we want to explore, among other things, whether a UK successor should also be open to individual businesses where at least half of their shares are owned by staff.

These ideas all contribute to 'disintermediation' in the rural economy, a now widespread feature of disruptive business models in urban settings. Producers and consumers deal directly with each other, often through enabling platforms, to 'cut out the middleman'.

As well as direct to consumer food businesses, Airbnb is another platform which assists rural businesses to directly access a share of the 'tourist pound'. Further innovative developments being explored – especially in rural communities with denuded transport systems - could combine delivery trips with ride-sharing.

"Schools are small orders and they need to be delivered many times a week. Absolutely my biggest challenge is logistics"

**School Catering
Procurement Manager,
Suffolk**

Open up information, with funds for innovation

This debate is replete with the same issues and challenges - on the type, use and ownership of data - faced by many sectors today. Arguably, though, the stakes are higher in food, farming and environment, where we still need to decide what is, in fact, material information, to ensure fair and equitable access to it, to enhance value throughout the value chain, and to help us navigate our way at pace towards more sustainable practices.

We want to explore two key areas. First, how Defra, UKRI and the levy boards could significantly reorient research and development investment in agriculture and forestry towards collaborative projects led by practitioners. Initiatives such as Innovative Farmers,⁵⁸ ADAS's Yield Enhancement Network⁵⁹ and Scotland's Rural Innovation Support Service⁶⁰ illustrate the potential yet remain small-scale. We anticipate a higher potential public return on investment from this approach, relative to existing agricultural research and development, via improvements in productivity and reductions in environmental costs.

Second, we welcome the Agriculture Bill's moves to enable open and transparent supply chain data. This is too important to be left to individual technology companies. Farm data is vitally important in identifying the most productive and sustainable farming practices and sharing them faster. Currently many producers and distributors that can benefit from data and technology are resistant. The industry is young and there is no guarantee their investment will yield returns, or their data will remain accessible to them over the long term. As we decide which metrics matter, and as more farming data becomes available,

opportunities to innovate using this data will be taken by those with the most available resource to do so, potentially driving market concentration.

Many producers we met on the UK tour have described both the benefits of data to improve practices and yield, and the risks associated with, say, committing to a single proprietary provider. Similarly, food supply chains, and particularly last mile delivery, are financially and environmentally inefficient, and are driving excessive market concentration. Innovation funding and open data standards must take this into account and create opportunities for producers operating at every scale.



"I'd love to see benchmarking. We need more data. A lot of products are sold as being integrated these days, but everyone wants to sell you their own control box. Every machine is different, we need more cross compatibility"

**Arable farmer,
Lincolnshire.**

Everyone has an idea of which foods are healthy and which are not. But making the decision to eat healthy foods often feels hard. In reality, there are a number of factors beyond our control that contribute to our food choices



Crops and food products

	Potatoes, bread and other starchy carbohydrates		Meat, dairy, beans and other proteins
	Fruit and vegetables		Oils, sugars and occasional food



4. Good food for healthy communities

Whilst farming, growing and countryside matters might seem distant to urban dwellers, everyone eats food. What we eat, how we eat, and where our food comes from generates heated debate, particularly when it comes to our health and wellbeing.

The issues we want to tackle

One of the intractable issues at the intersection of food, farming and the public's health, is that the rapid increase in diet-related ill health is a result of over-consumption of calories, largely from food of poor nutritional quality. We live in an obesogenic environment – one which encourages us, through marketing and promotion, to buy and eat more than necessary.⁶¹ Many of these calories come from the sorts of food which sector specialists call 'value added'. It may be time to ask the question: "value added for whom?"

This requires leadership as well as a step change in thinking. Currently, we are ramping up production by growing ever more commodities in more specialised systems to provide low cost components for a global processing system. Instead, we should focus on changing both the methods of production and our patterns of consumption.

Type 2 diabetes – almost entirely diet-related – costs the NHS £12 billion a year, with a further £15 billion (for all types of diabetes) due to absenteeism, early retirement and benefits. And it costs individuals their health, wellbeing and even their limbs. How food is produced also affects our health. Certain forms of livestock production pollute water, air, and increase antimicrobial resistance – one of the biggest risks facing the planet.⁶² Our food system is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and agro-chemicals can cause illness and disease.

These negative impacts of food production and consumption are unequally distributed throughout society.

Today there are an estimated 8.4m people in the UK who can't afford to buy enough nutritious food,⁶³ and there has been a dramatic rise in the UK of emergency food banks in the last few years, as well as gradual rise in malnutrition and obesity – all of which hits the poorest in society the hardest:

"Obesity prevalence for children living in the most deprived areas was more than double that of those living in the least deprived areas."⁶⁴

"A boy born in one of the most advantaged 20 percent of neighbourhoods in 2015 can now expect to outlive his counterpart, born in one of the least advantaged 20 percent of neighbourhoods, by 8.4 years."⁶⁵

It is widely acknowledged that social and economic circumstances (including income, education, employment, housing and early childhood development) have a huge influence on health outcomes.⁶⁶ The picture is getting progressively worse.

Around 4 million adults in the UK struggle to put food on the table.⁶⁷ Around 10 percent of children in the UK are living in households affected by severe food insecurity.⁶⁸

"Routine practice is to sanction people and signpost to the food bank at the same time. It's outrageous. That is the state imposing hunger. It is a public health issue. We get people in temporary accommodation with no cooking facilities. We have kettles we give out, can openers. We'll reach more people by doing this at food banks and social eating clubs"

**Community Worker,
Derbyshire.**

"My uncle took a load of lambs to market, sold them and bought a tractor; these days that wouldn't be possible. The price of everything has gone up, except for food. This is what triggers off an unhealthy nation – people expect cheap food and find it everywhere. Only it's rubbish food"

**Sheep Farmer,
Denbighshire**

Why this has been so intractable

These issues derive from another false assumption: that the way to deal with poverty and inequality is to promote unhealthy food to the poorest parts of our society through the chimera of 'affordability'.

This is one of the most problematic consequences of our generation's modern food system: in an under-scrutinised food and farming system, businesses can profit while damaging people and planet, with the most vulnerable bearing the brunt. This cannot be remedied by relying on constrained consumer choice: governments and businesses together must take responsibility for making sure that minimum standards are not only met, but that the bar is raised.

This is more than just a moral and healthcare crisis: it is an industrial crisis. As the UK's largest industry, the food and drink sector is not only responsible for this situation but also exposed to its consequences, for example through days lost to work and reduced productivity. These problems are exacerbated by a low wage food and farming system. Research shows that low paid workers in the four big supermarkets (Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons) require the taxpayer to top up wages by around £1 billion a year in tax credits and extra benefits payments.

Towards more comprehensive solutions

Our proposals look at some ways to intervene now, but we are also suggesting more fundamental methods of providing incentives for a system of farming for health.

Similarly to the sugar tax, taxes on other ingredients could encourage healthier and more sustainable behaviour by the public and businesses, and taxes on certain inputs in food production –

such as a nitrogen fertiliser – may help to recoup some of the hidden costs of the food production system.⁶⁹ These proposals require the public's health to be placed at the centre of the UK's industrial strategy for farming, food and drink.

Next steps ▶▶▶

Invest in social prescribing and green care

In another illustration of the false choices that limit us, debates about whether the public's health and wellbeing are best led from the NHS, or from local government, or from other service providers often get stuck in the scarcity mindset. 'Social prescriptions' which guarantee access to schemes for better health and wellbeing, can range from exercise and healthy eating support, to access to green care and intergenerational befriending schemes. It is encouraging to see support for social prescribing in the £4.5m pledge towards social prescribing schemes such as gardening or arts clubs made by the health secretary Matt Hancock in July 2018,⁷⁰ though more can still be done. But we know doctors are already overwhelmed, and we're not suggesting medicalising social needs. Instead, the role of health and wellbeing services can be to support citizens and their communities to discover and mobilise community assets which benefit them; this makes doctors 'participation advocates' who collaborate with patients rather than simply prescribing medicine and social activities.

This kind of work can be done through other professions; community pharmacists, or 'health champions', an idea in GP practices which began in Yorkshire and has now spread nationwide, or by utilising the community pharmacist networks.⁷¹

"Supporting people to create pathways towards a good life is not about prescriptions or referrals, it is about walking alongside people in their life's journey. A doctor can't do that alone, but they can advocate for greater participation and ensure that social issues are not medicalised, and community efforts are not devalued."⁷²

Forest schools, and similar programmes, are important vehicles to connect children and young people with green space. Farmers, themselves can and should also be more directly involved in green care. The Let Nature Feed Your Senses (LNFYS) project and the growth in care farming has captured huge enthusiasm from both farmers and the thousands of people who have benefitted from access to the countryside and farming.⁷³ An evaluation of the project showed that farmers who had participated felt appreciated by non-farming people as doing something positive for society. Care farming (a broad category of therapeutic activities in the outdoors), farm visits like LEAF's 'Open Farm Sunday', but also direct sales, break out of this disconnected model and give producers a direct connection with the positive impacts of what they do for other people, helping them to feel more valued.

Finally, the benefits of being in nature and the countryside requires green spaces to be easier to reach by public transport, so that more people can benefit. Extending green corridors into towns and cities brings the countryside closer to where more people are. The countryside is integral to Britain's sense of identity. It must be easily accessible to more of us.



"We've been doing cooking classes and providing veg bags to people who have been diagnosed with type II diabetes. The trial has been going about a year so it's still early days but anecdotally the reports are amazing. People are telling us that it is totally transforming their health, their mood, that their families are eating together, that it's changing their lives"

**Local Food Coordinator,
Cornwall**

"She told me before she came she was planning on taking her own life. She told me this garden literally saved her."

Care Farm, Norfolk.



Broaden membership of industry bodies to include representatives of the 'health community'

One example of how an apparently simple change could have far-reaching effects, is to increase transparency and public participation in the food value chain. For instance, bringing public interest representatives onto the Food and Drink Sector Council, first announced in the government's Industrial Strategy white paper⁷⁴ should include people from health, consumer and environmental groups. This will enable public health bodies to be involved in the transformation in food manufacturing, retail and catering needed to meet public health objectives, backed up by a clear regulatory timetable. Alongside a ten-year plan for more sustainable agricultural systems, progressive improvements in food standards in parallel, over a ten-year period, allows businesses and investors time to adjust in step, ensure that 'hidden' costs are fairly and equitably accounted for, without pushing up the price of food too quickly. The industry must change shape and the Council should lead that change.

Incentivise farming for health

This means recognising and promoting the relationship between food, farming, nutrition, health and wellbeing. It means 'farming for health' in the wider sense of the word, rather than over-supplying a food system with cheap calories and all its associated health and environmental impacts.

In this complex territory, there are many potential routes to beneficial impacts. We could incentivise ecologically intensive production systems like agroforestry, and fruit and vegetable production, though this alone will not solve the problem of diet related ill-health. We could look at the other ways of stimulating the market – for example with procurement contracts that stipulate that UK fruit and vegetables should be sourced. But more fruits and vegetables are far from enough in a food supply system that is overloaded with calories. What is needed is a 'whole food chain' approach to driving out excessive calorie consumption, particularly in the form of sugar and highly processed foods and reducing meat and dairy consumption. Current strategies, using nudges or conditional approaches to get processors and supermarkets,⁷⁵ to take more responsibility for their impact on the public's health (as we suggest above) may still work, but more substantial drivers may yet be needed to move at pace. Another possibility might be to mobilise shareholder action through pension funds and investors, who are now turning their attention towards their power to drive change within the food system, by supporting initiatives such as FAIRR.⁷⁶

The relationship between food, nutrition, health and wellbeing - across all kinds of social spaces - has to find a new standing in these debates. As we've said elsewhere, when we frame people as consumers, and reduce everything to choices made on price, we neglect the social and cultural aspects of a thriving and healthy food system.

Commentators as diverse as food activist Michael Pollan, poet Darren McGarvey and chef Tom Hunt⁷⁷ argue that the social role that food plays in our lives is being eroded and lost. We know that buying local food has a positive multiplier effect in rural economies.⁷⁸ We know provenance also matters to people – it's why supermarkets have been known to use faux farm names to brand their groceries. Asking better questions about where our food comes from, and how it gets to be on our plates, reveals much more clearly the hidden impacts that the food systems plays in our lives. This otherwise neglected dimension must be folded into this debate.

So, as citizens, we have wider interests at stake than price alone. As citizens we have a right to ask questions about the role that food could and should play in our health and wellbeing – in schools, hospitals and public institutions, as well as all the social settings which are essential to a flourishing society – the restaurants, cafes, pubs and times at home, where people gather over food. When government is also addressing the problem of loneliness and isolation – in urban as well as rural settings – it is time to ask whether the increased atomisation and individuation of social spaces (the meals for one, the bedsits, the increasing attachment to pastimes which requires no actual human contact) are good for us. We realise that this is not simple or easy, so it makes no sense to be prescriptive – but it means opening up this debate, setting a broader context for policy and putting more resources into successful ideas that are already working. In the next stage of our work, we will be inviting participation from people from across this system, to help us frame the right research to address this.



"£2.50 for a three-course meal, 50p for kids: liver and onions, mushroom soup, chicken dinner, lamb roast, veg curry. We call it 'good food' not 'healthy food' – which puts people off. Getting a meal is more important than the nutritional value, and hunger is a serious issue around here"

**Community Worker,
Derbyshire**

"In recruiting members, we always thought that people would join for the veg boxes. But when we surveyed our members we found that people actually value the social aspects and opportunities to be outdoors more. This is what our members value most"

**Community Farmer,
Essex**

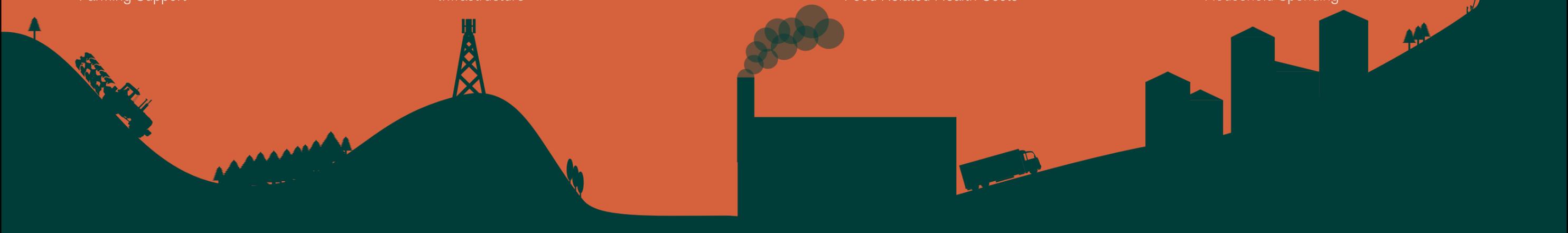
Beyond the £3 billion budget of the CAP, resources flow through our rural economies in many ways. For rural communities it is also trust, collaboration and reciprocity that enable them to thrive

Farming Support

Infrastructure

Food Related Health Costs

Household Spending



In Lincolnshire a group of farmers invested in shared GPS signal boosting equipment

In rural areas around the country village shops and pubs are kept alive by committed volunteers

£85m

Less Favoured Area support

£250m

Rural broadband

£2.34bn

Antibiotic resistance

£423m

Agri-environment schemes

£5.7bn

Flood and Drainage

£9bn

Cardiovascular disease

£2.4bn

Red diesel subsidy

£7.6bn

Water treatment

£17bn

Diabetes

£2.7bn

Direct Payments to farmers

£17bn

Food waste

£19.6bn

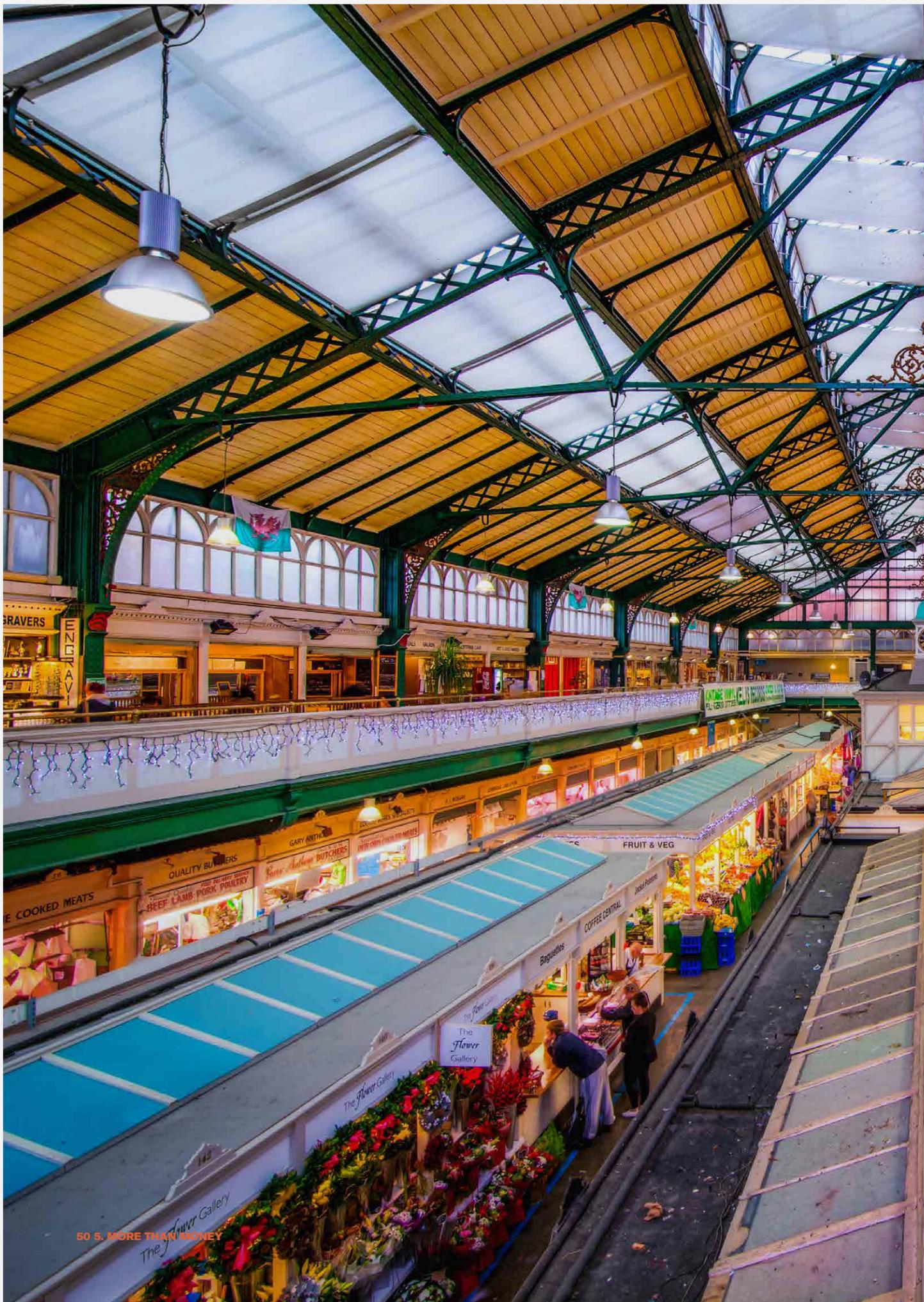
Malnutrition

£49bn

Eating Out

£220bn

Food Retail



5. More than money

The debate over public spending is dominated by scarcity and focused on reduction and competition. Should we prioritise healthcare or education transport or the environment? When it comes to food, farming and countryside, competing like this just doesn't add up. Such debates miss much of the spending and investment that is already happening, and they miss that the smart money is spent in ways that can achieve many benefits.

The issues we want to tackle

Central to recent food and farming discussions has been the future of the £3 billion a year that the UK currently spends through the Common Agricultural Policy. But this is only a small part of the resources that flow through food and farming systems and rural economies. For example, almost £10 billion is channelled through the UK's share of the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund, all of which will be put into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, designed to reduce inequalities between communities across the UK's four nations. Not all this money is used in rural areas but the bulk of it flows to less developed areas. Then there is the £220 billion per year that consumers spend on food, a large share of which is captured through supermarkets and food service companies. In Chapter 4 we describe the costs to healthcare and business of diet related illnesses. Another illustration of the perverse consequences of fragmented systems, is the cost to water companies of mitigating the chemical burden in water; with agri-chemicals and diffuse pollution entering our water at one end of the food chain, to the pharmaceuticals needed to treat illnesses attributed to our modern lifestyles, at the other.

In our review of 1,000 recent policy proposals, government, farming and conservation groups agree that, in contrast to the payments farmers now get per hectare, the principle in future should be to pay 'public money for public goods'. Economists define public goods as benefits that everyone can access and from which no one is excluded. The focus is on public goods because international trade rules state taxpayers can pay for those fully, without distorting markets. Definitions of public goods affected by farming include soil health, clean water and biodiversity. Recent debates have swung back and forth on whether these are the right or enough public goods from farming.

We argue we have to go further, to look beyond 'public goods' at what government calls 'public value'.

'Public Value' is a set of ideas for better public management. Adopted last year by the Civil Service as a result of the Barber Review,⁷⁹ the 'public value' framework sets out ways to align public spending for better outcomes for citizens that improve public value. We argue that public value is a better lens through which to scrutinise the overall benefit for society that governments, and others using public resources, achieve, by aligning all kinds of spending – not just subsidies, but also taxes and reliefs, procurement, regulations and more.

"Subsidy needs to be regional and relevant. I'm all for supporting public goods but we can't be judged the same as other regions"

Arable Farmer,
Lincolnshire.

“Aylsham Country Market is a place where people come together. Most of the market stall holders are in their 70s and no one really makes any money doing this. But we’re a big community of friends. The market helps the older people keep track of each other. They notice if someone isn’t there and can check on them”

Market Coordinator,
Norfolk

The public value framework⁸⁰ identifies other transitions in the thinking about effective public management, relevant here.

- From contexts which are largely stable to complex and continuously changing.
- From broadly homogenous populations to increasingly diverse communities.
- From problems largely defined by professionals to being negotiated by citizens and communities.
- From strategies produced by the state to co-produced by civil society.
- From governance in top down hierarchies to networked and partnership processes.
- From the main actors being public servants to distributed civic leadership.
- From public goods to public value.

But one of the problems with public value is that the inputs and outputs involved can be invisible. Policy-makers require a clearer view of the whole resource applied through food, farming and the countryside.

Why this has been so intractable

The short answer is that it is so complex. Alongside current CAP payments are: tax reliefs, for example on fuel, inheritance and food processing factories, funding for research and innovation, investments in community regeneration, Section 106 payments, tax breaks where public income is forgone, public procurement of food, timber and energy, renewable energy incentives, national and local spending on basic services such as healthcare, transport, education and housing, and local government procurement of

food. Beyond CAP, procurement is one of the most significant ways that the government can positively impact food systems and rural communities.

Public value includes in its definition “all those using public resources”. This validates the growing interest from policymakers and citizens in the way that private money – from NGOs, social enterprises and businesses – works alongside taxpayer pounds to build (or indeed deplete) natural and social capital. Regulation is important here, both directly, in limiting ‘public bads’ and in its indirect effects, encouraging investment to achieve public benefits. The practical implications of this was described clearly in a recent report on the hidden costs of UK food. It estimated the total ‘hidden’ cost to the public health and to the environment at over £120 billion, equivalent to £1 for every £1 we spend.⁸¹ Where we choose to set the regulatory baseline affects that bill.

This was brought to life on the tour, where we saw how not regulating can lead to extra environmental and social costs passed on to civic society. In Herefordshire, for example, we saw what consolidation in the poultry sector looks like, in the form of several big new chicken sheds and processing units, built in the name of efficiency. The nearby communities argue that these have loaded costs onto them.

As well as hidden costs, focusing on public value begins to illuminate other resources, sometimes called ‘social capital’. Collaboration, trust and reciprocity are vital features of economies everywhere, but patchy public service provision, limited market access and smaller communities make them especially important and visible in rural areas. And we saw startling examples of this hidden resource being eroded.

Towards more comprehensive solutions

Looking at food, farming and countryside through the lens of public value, rather than simply ‘public goods’, or departmental budgets, makes a much bigger resource visible. It shifts effort away from the competition over tight budgets, towards coordinating spending and enabling collaboration and making sure all spending is aligned to enhance public value instead of, as is clearly the case, weakening and depleting it. It requires public bodies to define their goals more clearly and to engage their citizens in that process.⁸² Involvement is crucial to mapping the full public resource and to understanding what people care about, central to defining public value. Barber is clear this applies to all levels of government – as much to Westminster’s law-making and trade deals as it is to local authorities.

These can seem like difficult technocratic questions, but to develop a prosperous, more democratic countryside, we need to work towards some better methods of making the invisible rather more tractable. Our proposals here set out a starting point and takes us towards ways in which these improved tools might be put to work. Furthermore, our work in Cumbria (page 62) is currently piloting some approaches.

Next steps ▶▶▶



"When I started at the school we had no production kitchen. Uptake on school meals was low. We took a loan to have a kitchen installed and trained catering staff. Having a production kitchen onsite has actually saved money, and the food is much better. Most of the students keep having school meals right through until they leave"

Headteacher,
Cambridgeshire

Map and use all resources more effectively

At present it is almost impossible to identify, track and realign all the resources that flow through any given place. Total Place and whole place budgeting started to test this in pilots, but these tended to be largely urban areas and focussed on the big-ticket budgets like health, social care and education. Small scale experiments in mapping the 'green money' (money used for ecological purposes) resource flows have started to reveal some interesting patterns: for example a government report found that most spending on natural capital is largely outside of Defra and central government, and that, despite it being the primary policy driver, of the £805m of direct spend on improving natural capital assets, almost half of the money spent had no impact on natural capital.⁸³

We have described the interdependencies of those bodies whose budgets are held in very different ways and with different degrees of transparency and accountability – in local government, in health commissioning groups, in environment and rural schemes and so on. A research project in pilot sites will help us understand in more detail the resource flows in a rural area, and to make the data transparent and open, as the Total Place initiative attempted for certain services.⁸⁴

When it comes to utilising existing resources more effectively, some of the basic tools to promote public value already exist. The Social Value Act 2013 allows people who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits. But it is being underused: one study showed that 43 percent of Clinical Commissioning Groups either had no policy on the Social Value Act, were not aware of the policy or had a policy in some

incomplete stage of development.⁸⁵ Creating a statutory duty to buy for social value would mean that schools and the NHS can use the Social Value Act as an enabling mechanism to help promote health outcomes. NHS commissioners can work with local public health and adult social care commissioners to consider how services might maximise public value.

We therefore propose strengthening a statutory duty for healthy and sustainable procurement, on local authorities and the full government estate, including the NHS. This should extend beyond food to other goods which support sustainable economies, for example driving procurement towards sustainable timber. We recognise that it can be difficult for hard-pressed procurement officers, responsible for increasingly larger areas, and believing they are keeping costs low, to do this. We argue that this duty is better rested with chief officers and this, along with our suggested 'duty to cooperate' (see page 56) will make this vital ambition happen. Preston and Nottingham,⁸⁶ beacons for sustainable procurement, offer inspiring examples of what can happen when this commitment is shared across the system.

Take decision making back to communities

The challenge of enabling more local control of decisions is especially acute in rural areas, often criss-crossed by overlapping boundaries and, in district councils or unitaries, dominated by urban centres.⁸⁷ Our thinking here is to revitalise a sense of local control and democracy in rural areas, which can feel particularly remote from good government, by experimenting in fresh ways of making the available resources more visible and accountable. The potential impact of other new institutions - like regional banks and new mutuals - are also vital to make the supportive, responsive investments local communities need. The UK has few of the local banks which exist in other parts of continental Europe which act as engines for local economies.

The arguments for a new devolved settlement for government in England are gaining pace, underpinned by principles of subsidiarity. In addition, we want to explore and build the case for new duties and accountabilities devolved to bodies who could be much closer to their communities: to parishes and community councils. Where they work well, parishes or community councils are closest to their communities and at a scale that generally makes intuitive sense to people, but there has been little to develop their responsibilities since the Quality Parish scheme at the end of the last century.⁸⁸ These duties could include more useful and generative tasks than those which normally fall to parishes - developing locally responsive sustainable development plans, and other ways of bringing collaboration, co-design and democratic decision-making closer to people in their communities. It might also include experiments with adapting arrangements from other countries, including parish mayors (France), drawing down powers and responsibilities from districts on subsidiarity

principles (Scandinavia) or local budget setting (USA), all three of which have traditions of local rural involvement which are at risk of withering in the UK.

Meanwhile, democratic accountability must be strengthened on the new 'middle' layers between local and national tiers. We welcome consultations to strengthen diversity and accountability on Local Enterprise Partnerships. But we also note the suggestions that new landscape or catchment scale arrangements could take responsibility for allocating public and private money. Whilst these could mobilise and align private investment for public gains, (such as inviting housebuilders to invest in farmer-led flood management plans upstream of their new developments) they must have appropriate democratic balance and accountabilities to guard against public money being transferred to private hands, with little public value achieved. One model might be the Exmoor Partnership Fund, which makes grants available to businesses, community groups and individuals, to help the National Park Authority achieve its purposes.⁸⁹

Revitalised local arrangements need to be supported into being. We will explore the potential of a national network of community facilitators or 'public entrepreneurs', to connect communities more effectively with all the relevant institutions; identify and mobilise the resources at a local level, to help build the capacity of parish and community councils, and connect between communities to share experience, knowledge and resources. This would have to be funded and convened, independent to local authorities, by a national body with appropriate knowledge and experience, such as ACRE or Plunkett Foundation.



"In some villages, a defibrillator in the car park of the village hall is the only presence of the NHS. Extending public service provision – at least in this decade – is unrealistic. I rely on infrequent and expensive buses for a 30-mile round-trip for every antenatal appointment. It seems we don't have a plan for the poorer half of society to raise families in rural villages"

Local Resident,
Derbyshire

Get services working together for rural areas

The silos in government, which make efficient and cost-effective policy-making so difficult for the countryside, are replicated at a local level. Collaboration and innovation is seriously compromised by a complex web of different agencies, with different boundaries, targets and priorities. We want to debate a new suite of potential duties and practices to address this.

A duty to cooperate between public bodies to align strategies and plans around community goals, in a similar way as the Localism Act set out over planning matters is most promising. This could be supported by a requirement for public services to involve local people. All too often, public sector innovation reverts to institutionalist and managerialist responses. Like workers on business boards, lay or community members on any new joint arrangements have the potential to bring a non-institutional perspective.

We think it's time to look again at the benefits of local authorities and other bodies co-locating in towns and villages, to create hubs to integrate services. Learning from previous iterations, this has – potentially - many benefits that could meet today's needs. It could streamline the public estate. It would make services accessible and visible to the community. In our challenged market towns, this would also have the effect of revitalising high streets. Such a debate should not be confined to conventional public service organisations: any agency or body with community interests or responsibilities could join. We imagine public services working together with SMEs, community groups and services in a collaborative and entrepreneurial way in town-based hubs.

This debate enables local communities to be more involved in creative and innovative approaches to health, welfare, work support, education and skills. 'Community supermarkets' could provide all the convenience people have come to expect by co-locating producers in easily accessible places. On the UK tour we've seen:

- community shops that provide work support for the young and retired alike.
- community kitchens providing free and cheap meals, teaching cooking skills helping people in emergency accommodation eat well from a microwave and young families to incorporate more vegetables.
- type 2 diabetes patients given vegetable bags from horticultural apprentices, funded by health services.
- community gardens that have helped numerous people with mental health challenges, by signposting and simply providing healing spaces.

These activities create spaces for connection as well as potential for collaboration which provide support in a dignified way and integral to participation in community life. We're not simply talking here about 'scaling up good practice'. We think sustainable local capital is borne out of creative and collaborative co-design processes on real issues that people care about. The localising turn is not new: and sometimes these ideas have been tried and found wanting. But we also know that the call for more autonomy, more control and more agency in rural communities was universally expressed where-ever we went on our tour. When people have a greater sense of control over decision making and resourcing,

and with the right conditions for collaboration and creativity, it's possible to design appropriate and context sensitive responses that work, in the rich diversity of the UK countryside.

So, it is essential that we look critically and honestly about what works, what gets in the way and what needs to be supported and amplified for sustainable change. We think local 'system entrepreneurs' can help people and groups to navigate institutional structures when required and to grow citizen and community-led initiatives, when institutional responses are not the answer. These all form part of the 'preventative' infrastructure or hidden resources that underpins social capital and marshals local action for other kinds of co-production.

"There's a big community spirit in crofting – common grazings; communally owned sheep, sheep stock clubs, lots of communal sharing of mowers, tools, equipment. This is as important for farming here as the subsidy payments"

Crofter, Skye.

Where next for the Commission

Over the next six months, the Commission will:

- Commission research and publish further papers – developing and setting out the detailed proposals, which require critical consideration
- Convene discussions around the country on the more difficult questions that require further thought and judgement.
- Conduct polling, and other research, to gather public opinions on the potential solutions to the conundrums we have identified.
- Continue with the local inquiries, which are testing out practical possibilities, and with the devolved nations.

The areas we've outlined in this progress report now require detailed exploration and further work. From the start, the Commission has developed our ideas with the people who have knowledge, interest and stake in the issues.

Throughout our travels, we have found creative ideas, radical thinking and practical proposals that suggest far reaching changes in the ways we think about and treat our land and our rural communities. You can read about many of these in the weekly blogs, written by our researchers, about what they saw and heard. The UK tour stories will be curated and published separately as a companion document.

The people, projects, businesses and ideas we have met have helped shape the work so far, and they will continue to help us with making common sense of all we have heard. We will be inviting people to comment on and discuss the practical relevance of the proposals with their groups, colleagues and

communities. We want to understand how they are received in context, and where more work is needed, and what will, ultimately, work on the ground.

How people can get involved next

- Comment on the propositions in this interim report.
 - » Are they important and material to a safe, secure and sustainable food and farming system, a more accessible countryside and a flourishing rural economy for all?
 - » Are there important issues we've missed, or ducked, or misunderstood?
 - » Are we being bold enough, innovative enough, practical enough? We're still open for the radical big ideas.
- Join the next stages of deliberations – find details on the website.
- Contact us through the usual channels.
 - » FFCC@rsa.org.uk
 - » www.thersa.org/ffcc
 - » Follow @FFC_Commission on Twitter or Instagram

Our work so far

The RSA Food Farming and Countryside Commission is a two-year independent inquiry, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, with a purpose to:

- Inspire and develop a shared mandate for change among the diverse groups and communities with a stake in the future of our food, farming and countryside, bringing new voices into the debate.
- Set out a vision that is fairer, can stand the test of time, and aligns more closely with public expectations and values.
- Propose solutions to achieve that vision, identifying where communities and business can take a lead, and where national policy is essential.

Chaired by Sir Ian Cheshire and comprising 14 further commissioners, we set out our stall early on by inviting commissioners from sectors not typically included in these discussions. The Commission is also supported by a transdisciplinary research advisory group.

The Commission's distinctive contribution

- Joining up 'horizontally' – for better quality conversations between policy areas that are so often silo'd, disconnected and fragmented.
- Joining up 'vertically' – connecting people with policy debates; and policy formulation with the realities of implementation on the ground

Our work programme

For the opening phase of this inquiry, we have focused on two things – reviewing the existing research, and talking to citizens, businesses, stakeholders and communities around the UK.

Reviewing the existing research

We looked at over a thousand proposals made since 2015. From these we took five key insights, which prompted us to invite ideas to address the questions arising.

1. Proposals are mostly in policy silos

How can we make connections between policy or organisation silos so that we get multiple and reinforcing benefits – social, economic and environmental. Or indeed, avoid the risk that policy intentions in one sector are undermined by work in another?

2. Public money for public goods is a common theme

How can the principle of public money paying for public goods extend beyond ‘ecosystem services’?

3. Wildlife tends to trump climate change

How can we encourage policymakers, businesses and citizens to prioritise systemic and global challenges, as well as what’s currently most visible or popular?

4. Calls for action by government are widespread

How can we support effective leadership practices that span government departments and agencies, and across public, private organisations and civic society?

5. Many proposals are vague about how and where changes will happen

How can we develop a better awareness of how policy implementation happens and how best to harness the energy for change throughout the system?

Involving stakeholders, citizens, communities

The responses to the call for ideas fed into the roundtable series. Commissioners met and talked to people from farming, food sector, environment groups, businesses, retail, the voluntary sector, government and elsewhere – and structured around five key areas.

- Our place in the world – from trade relationships to our international commitments to global challenges.
- The future of land use – from regenerating ecosystems to a land use plan for the UK.
- The future of work – from managing labour shortages to increasing opportunities for meaningful work in rural economies.
- Food and farming; health and wellbeing – from food grown, bought and eaten, access to greens space to impacts on the nation’s health and wellbeing.
- The whole resource – how public money, private money and the hidden resources create public value.

The UK Tour

We also travelled the UK on our bike.

It is notoriously difficult to do good citizen and community engagement in rural communities. Towns and villages are geographically dispersed, public transport is poor, and digital connectivity is patchy. These communities are also not easily found using traditional public engagement processes, inviting people to ‘focus groups’ or ‘town hall’ meetings. Furthermore, so much conventional public engagement follows fundamentally the same patterns – sitting round tables, or in circles, using unfamiliar language, engaging in strange practices – such as writing on post it notes, or sticking dots on flip charts.

Sometimes this can work well. It is how many large and small group processes are designed. But there’s no getting away from the fact that it sets up a particular power dynamic, tipped in favour of the ‘consulting’ body. And when it doesn’t work, it’s not unusual to ‘blame’ the citizens – calling them “hard-to-reach.”

By contrast, getting on a bike and going out to where people are – mainly by invitation but otherwise through curiosity – we showed that we are serious about involving the broadest cross-section of citizens and communities in our work. Through the long hot summer of 2018, we managed between 20 and 30 miles a day, through lowlands, highlands and fenland, through the hills and valleys of the nations and regions of the UK.

It has been inspiring and novel. We found that many of those we met can be a little taken aback to be interviewed by someone from a bike, but they realise that our cyclist has made an effort to see them. They have not stepped out of a car where they had been listening to music and had to make a sudden transition to this local world. They have

not turned up in a suit, fresh from the office. They’ve turned up keen to learn, genuinely curious to find out about the places they visited, and, they have been met, without exception, with a generous welcome.

The repeated message from the UK tour is that every rural area is different and regards itself as such, and that people are fed up with the one-size-fits-all policies that dominate and constrain their lives. They want government and local authorities to be appropriate to their places and as locally accountable as possible. This has become, as a result, a central plank in our inquiries.

Locally-led inquiries

We also recognised that glimpses of the UK countryside are not enough to fully understand and work through some of the more complex and intractable issues which people are grappling with in their communities. So, alongside this UK tour, we are spending longer – nine months or more – in three counties which reflect the archetypal challenges in the countryside – Cumbria, Devon and Lincolnshire.

Devon

“The largest of the south west counties, Devon is largely rural and boasts two National Parks, five AONBs and two coastlines. The majority of farmland is either permanent or temporary grass with smaller proportions of arable and woodland. Food, farming and the countryside are critical to the local economy- agriculture employs around nineteen thousand people directly, to say nothing of the wider network it supports. The county is also proud of its strong local food sector as well as rural tourism and other rural based businesses. Given the importance of these sectors to Devon, we welcome the opportunity for the Commission to connect local challenges with

wider national debate. It is vital we do this to ensure the county and its communities can thrive in the future. Local knowledge and local solutions should be a key part of this progress.

For this local inquiry we've convened a steering group of people from across a range of organisations, from health to farming to community development, including some members from our neighbours in Cornwall. Together this group has identified key challenges which they will be exploring in smaller spin-off groups. Our New Entrants to Farming group are looking at career paths in agriculture in the county; the Health and Thriving Communities team are exploring the important links between our citizens' health and the agricultural sector; the important questions of the Environment and Biodiversity will be the focus of a third group; and the final group are looking closely at challenges related to Food and Livestock farming. Meetings will continue over the Autumn and Winter as we seek to highlight good practice and produce recommendations for the Commission."

David Fursdon, Commissioner and lead of the Devon Local Inquiry

Lincolnshire

"Lincolnshire is a major agricultural county, constituting 10 percent of the English agricultural output. Soils are fundamental to this agricultural economy. The county has a wide range of soil types, and more Grade 1 land than any other county in the UK. Ensuring these soils are in a healthy state will provide the agricultural sector with resilience against future threats from climate change and help create long-term sustainability in food production.

At LIAT (Lincoln Institute for Agri-Food Technology) we use research, technology and education to support food and farming to be more productive, efficient and sustainable, and so the work of the Commission fits well with our concerns and those of our networks.

Farmers play a key role in ensuring our soils are protected, and therefore engagement and uptake of sustainable soils practice with the farming community is essential for soil health, from the local to the national scale. With the Commission we are working to engage with a range of farmers to look at sustainable soil practices: large farms; small farms; different soil types; and farmers who are at different stages of the 'soil health journey'. In doing this, we are finding that the Lincolnshire farming community are very keen to engage with the project, highlighting a real interest in soil sustainability. Our work with the Commission will continue over the winter in several locations in the county and will focus on peer learning and providing practical support."

Iain Gould, lead of the Lincolnshire Inquiry

Cumbria

"Cumbria is the third largest county in England, and largely rural. Its population of half a million is dwarfed by tens of millions of visitors each year, many of them heading to the iconic Lake District. Recently inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site for its cultural landscape the area is, however, subject to intense debates about the future of upland farming and the impacts of potential policy changes on local communities, farming and non-farming.

The Lake District is only one part of Cumbria's story. A range of landscapes and challenges are found across the county, from difficulties with transport and affordable housing, to an ageing population, to areas of severe deprivation.

There is significant activity from government, industry and the third sector taking place in the county, particularly centred on the uplands. We spoke to local stakeholders across farming, conservation, local government and community engagement to look at the best way to approach the Commission's inquiry in the county. Rather than convening our own network structure we are seeking to work in partnership with existing initiatives.

The theme which emerged strongly in discussions across the county is the interconnection of landscape, identity and economy, and the need to ensure that local people are at the heart of decisions which will shape these. Over the Autumn we will be joining with a community action organisation as they work with people from across the county to explore these issues. We also plan to map and better understand resource flows in the county, in line with the Commission's interest in understanding the Whole Resource."

Josie Warden, RSA and FFC
Commission Local Inquiries Lead

The Devolved Nations

This Commission's mandate covers devolved matters: these are replete with their own wider concerns about how the Brexit deal could impact on the devolved settlements and where power to determine policy will sit. We have taken a pragmatic position; we've worked with leadership groups in each of the devolved

nations to devise ways to contribute to the work of the Commission, with a focus on those issues on which they want to make their own progress.

Northern Ireland

The Commission's Northern Ireland Inquiry has decided that its deliberations will be citizen led. We are currently embarking upon a series of dialogues so that we are informed and guided by what the people of Northern Ireland feel about the future of food, farming and the countryside. Given our current political stalemate and the very significant impacts of Brexit on the border and our relations with the Republic of Ireland, we are determined to ensure that Northern Ireland voices are amplified in this debate.

Our review of existing research and our own discussions have led us to conclude that there is a nexus around the theme of 'reconnection'.

The kind of questions that we plan to explore with citizens, include:

- What would help restore the connection between farming in and our desire to eat healthy, affordable, good quality food?
- What would a social contract between farmers and the rest of society look like?
- How do we protect our food supplies from the impact of climate change?
- How do we ensure that farming practices are compatible with a healthy environment?
- How do we reduce food waste?
- Where does the balance lie between producing food for export and for local consumption?

- How can we develop the appreciation and experience of the countryside by people of all ages and backgrounds?
- What is the role of land in providing a resilient future for our society?
- Questions on identity, place and peace-building.

A second nexus that stands out for us is that of ‘governance’: issues such as regulation, an independent body and joined up policy, together with power, empowerment and trust. We will approach this by using governance as the lens through which we approach the second phase of our work – our own deliberations on what we have heard from citizens. Broadly, the task we are setting ourselves is to recommend what governance structures, policies and processes are needed to deliver the kind of vision of reconnection emerging from the first phase.

The Commission’s Northern Ireland Inquiry, therefore, will identify ‘leverage points’ in what is a complex system and provide advice on the most effective ways in which to intervene. In taking a ‘systems thinking’ approach we will seek to make the connections across government, business and civil society that others have not and provide a route map to achieve a vision for which there is public support.

Wales

Our focus in Wales has been to use the opportunities afforded by the distinctive Welsh policy framework to make more rapid progress towards sustainable practices. The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (WFGA) 2015 is a progressive component of Welsh policy making.

It requires public bodies – such as local authorities, health boards and organisations like the Arts and Sports Councils of Wales – to put long-term sustainability at the forefront of their

thinking, and work with each other along with other relevant organisations (such as third sector groups) and the public to prevent and tackle problems.

To create a more sustainable Wales, public bodies must work towards seven Well-being Goals and enact the five Ways of Working listed right:

Led by Professor Jane Davidson, and supported by Menter a Busnes, the FFCC inquiry in Wales is focussed on how public procurement can work more effectively, to support the seven goals. Specifically, we’re working on procuring food for the ‘public plate’, in partnership with Welsh growers and producers, and in doing so, ensure Welsh production is supported and helped to change towards more sustainable farming systems

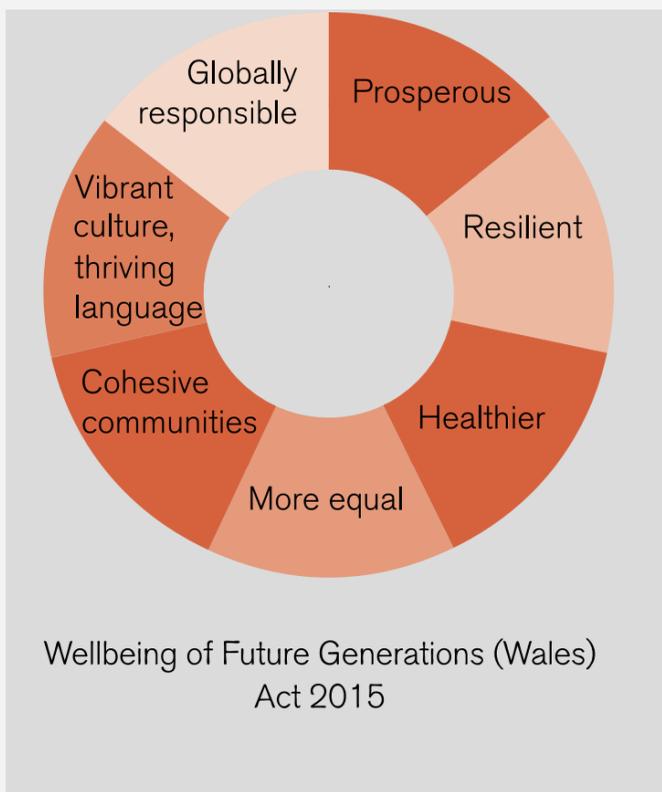
Better public procurement is a topic central to the Commission’s broader inquiries. Here, the focus is on where practical progress can be made, when the policy levers line up and intentions are aligned. Designed as an ‘action learning’ project (where participants meet to improve a situation by taking action and learning from it) a public service leaders group is convening in West Wales, with the support of Cardiff University, and a farmers, growers and producers group is convening in North Wales. This way we can explore issues on both sides of the contracting relationship.

Scotland

Scotland’s commitment to its own food, farming and countryside futures are well developed in their landmark plan Good Food Nation and their commitment to sustainable farming and food production. Our early inquiries in Scotland suggested two particular areas on which leaders in the Scottish food, farming, health and environment sectors were broadly agreed required further thought.

- The scale and diversity of Scotland’s rural communities are frequently misunderstood outside Scotland and sometimes within Scotland itself. The needs of Highlands and Islands communities, especially the really remote areas, are habitually under-addressed. The bike tour in the Highlands, and to Skye and Shetland told us that Edinburgh feels as remote to them as London does to English rural counties.
- For all the innovative and focussed policy work on food and sustainable farming, the two sectors feel disconnected from each other. Farming groups told us that they would like to be more included in emerging food policy. Food and health groups wanted to feel more connected to their farming communities and both want to work more closely together to develop healthy sustainable local supply chains.

To progress these discussions further, and pick up any other issues, Professor Lorna Dawson, Head of Forensic Soil Science at the James Hutton Institute, Sector Lead for Environment for the SEFARI Gateway, member of the Commission’s Research Advisory Group (and RSA Fellow) is helping convene a series of roundtables around the country.



A note on design principles

The UK Tour has embodied our approach to public engagement. Werner Ulrich, in his work on better public engagement for better planning and policy making, challenges us to think harder about whose voices count, who sets the boundaries – and therefore what counts as evidence to be considered.⁹⁰

Working with ‘whole systems’ has the potential to draw a different boundary around the questions asked and therefore where we look for more promising answers.

Our longer-term programmes of inquiry are *action research*. This is a method of research that addresses the traditional split between theory and practice. It’s based on the view that the key to

resolving differences and conflicts is to facilitate learning, and that we cannot truly understand a system until we try to change it.

Action research is characterised as:⁹¹

- Research *in* action rather than *about* action;
- Participative;
- Concurrent with action – people learn from taking action;
- A sequence of events and an approach to problem solving.

The central purpose is that action research uses a scientific approach to study, to resolve important social or organisational issues, together with those who experience these issues directly.

Our Commissioners

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Judith Batchelar OBE, Sainsbury’s

Helen Browning OBE, Soil Association

Shirley Cramer CBE, Royal Society for Public Health

Kath Dalmeny, Sustain

David Fursdon, Beeswax Dyson Farming

Professor David Hill, The Environment Bank

Professor Tim Jackson, Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity (CUSP)

Ann Jones, The Women’s Institute

Ufi Ibrahim, Strategic Business Leader

Dr David Pencheon, University of Exeter

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Professor Alan Matthews, Trinity College Dublin

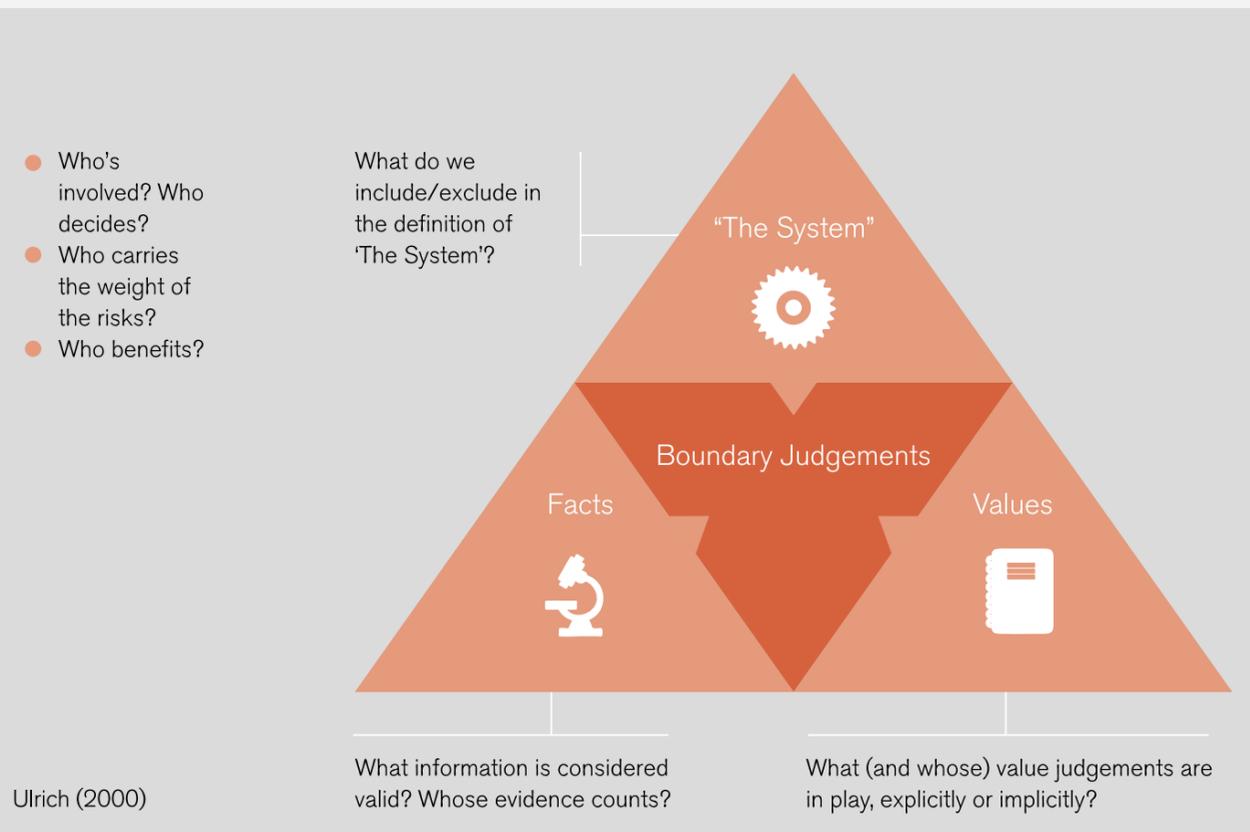
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ENDNOTES - DATA VISUALISATIONS

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