The Future of our Farming
Foreword

It is now two years since I was appointed Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I’ve met, listened to and learned from a lot of people, and I have been struck both by the commitment and passion that British farmers have for their work and by the great affection that the public has for them.

Last year’s wheat harvest was a record. Farmers’ markets are more popular than ever. Demand for allotments is up. We’ve just seen the most successful Open Farm Sunday yet. Our TV screens have always featured programmes about how we prepare our food, but they are now being joined by programmes about how that food is produced, processed and packaged – and lots of us are watching! Farmers make a huge contribution to our rural economy and to our way of life. And in a world where we are more and more conscious of both the food we eat, and of the impact of what we do on our health and on the environment, we are increasingly recognising the vital role that farmers play. From where I stand, this is not before time.

Agriculture is at the heart of the two great global challenges we face – food security and climate change. I want British farmers to produce as much food as possible – and this is very important to maintaining our food security. But how will we feed nine billion people in forty years time if a damaged environment and a changing climate hit yields and increase the risk from disease? The answer is: we will have to produce more food but we will also have to change the way we do things. As Peter Kendall said at this year’s NFU conference: “We are in a new era when we must produce more, and at the same time impact on the environment less.” I agree.

It may sound like a daunting challenge – it is – but we should also see it as a huge opportunity; an opportunity to get ahead, to innovate, to compete and to attract new people onto the land. And as I travel around the country visiting farms and meeting farmers and growers, it’s clear that many are already doing just this.
when we are fighting for the same cause. Look at the successful bluetongue vaccination programme, our campaign to win changes on sheep EID, our stand on pesticides and the Soils Directive, or the work we’ve done together on environmental stewardship. We won’t always agree on everything – we’ve each got our own job to do – and in my case that includes taking tough decisions that may not be popular, and implementing legislation, whether domestic or European (although we need to be smarter about regulation). But we know when we work out our differences and work together, we get the best results.

So I want to propose a new approach – a way of doing things based on co-operation – which builds on some of the work we’ve done together already. I am supporting a new partnership, both to recapture the environmental benefits of set-aside and on cost and responsibility sharing for animal health. Farmers have asked to be trusted to do the right thing on these matters. Well, I’m willing to do exactly that.

This pamphlet sets out how we can best do this. No doubt you will tell me what you think, and I look forward to continuing to work alongside you to meet the challenges that lie ahead for all of us. But above all, I know that farmers will continue to care for the land as they seek to produce as much as possible, in a sustainable way and with high welfare standards. This is the future we all want to see.

The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs July 2009
Our shared aim for the farming industry is that we want to see it producing profitably and sustainably. Good farm businesses – like good businesses in general – have a lot of things in common. They are:

- producers of high quality food to high environmental and welfare standards
- quick to respond to what the market wants
- innovative and enterprising
- highly flexible and resilient
- serious about skills because they improve efficiency and develop more effective businesses
- sustainable, both economically and environmentally

In looking to the future, the more farm businesses that have these characteristics the better. But how do we achieve this? The answer is that we need to build on a lot that’s good but we also need to do some things differently.

The industry is already doing a lot of good work in many areas – the NFU’s Young Dairy Board, Open Farm Sunday, or the consultation on prior notification of pesticide spraying, to name just a few. And the industry is at its strongest when it is working with its partners in government and beyond. In tough times, faced with great challenges, we need to work together, in partnership. We need to be flexible, use whatever means are most appropriate, and put aside our differences.
Together we need a new approach...

**...on regulation**

We all accept that it is important to have regulation in some areas; in order to protect the environment for example. Currently around 60% of nitrates, 25% of phosphorus and 70% of sediments polluting our water bodies come from farms.

But we need to be sure we get the regulatory balance right – so that it’s effective and proportionate. We will continue to work with the farming industry and the European Commission to explore ways to reduce the impact of regulation, and make sure that where we do need regulation, that it is proportionate and sensible.

This is what we did on waterlogged soil and the management of hedgebanks – and what we’re trying to do on sheep EID and pesticides. And we’ve now taken a decision to work on a joint campaign to recapture the environmental benefits of set-aside.

Earlier this year we launched a practical guide to help farmers and land managers interpret guidance, regulation and legislation. The Code of Good Agricultural Practice offers free best practice advice for farmers to protect and enhance water, soil, and air quality. Similarly we’re aiming to use Business Link to provide a one stop shop with all the information that farmers need. And we’re working to continue to improve the RPAs’s performance.
How much food we can produce depends on a number of things, but ultimately it is demand that matters – i.e. what we choose to buy. The world is going to need more food, more farmers, and more trade – the events of 2008 showed us that. So as we argue this case internationally, there is an opportunity for the industry to seize, finding new markets for the high quality produce for which the UK is famous. Indeed, we already trade a great deal. In the EU, we are part of the world’s biggest agricultural exporter, and the UK alone exported £12 billion worth of food and drink in 2007.

It is very important for agriculture and the rest of the food industry to continue to improve productivity. The Rural Development Programme for England is now providing £600 million to support the competitiveness of rural businesses, and secure more sustainable communities – providing real help now.

There is, for example, no reason why we can’t grow more fruit and vegetables in the UK – and we should aim to do so. Following a suggestion from the Council of Food Policy Advisers, we’re holding a roundtable meeting of people from both the production and consumption sides of the fruit and vegetable industry. We will be looking at any barriers to increasing both production and consumption of fruit and vegetables in England, and agreeing what needs to be done to overcome them.
Farmers deserve fair prices for their produce. The food supply chain is complex and dynamic, so we need to ensure that farmers get a fair deal. The Competition Commission has consulted on having an ombudsman which would have the power to investigate and to police the chain fairly.

We are trying to improve the role of public procurement in providing a better market for British produce, and the government is certainly buying more British produce. Ministry of Defence procurement is up to 59 per cent, from 43 per cent. The NHS is up to 70 per cent, and almost 100 per cent of milk used by government departments is now British.

Consumers are also increasingly interested in the environmental impacts of the choices they make. The Milk Road Map, produced jointly by Defra, the dairy industry, and the third sector in 2008, described the impact of milk production on the environment and set targets for reducing it for each element of the milk supply chain from producers to retailers. Led by the industry it is now used as a model across the globe. Defra is also supporting the industry to develop a Red Meat Road Map, and a roadmap for the pig meat supply chain.

We’ve put £1 million in to pump prime the cereals industry (via the Home-Grown Cereals Authority) and improve business planning and risk management.

By pushing for reform of the EU system we have freed up wine producers to respond more to their customers, rather than to a set of outdated rules, and provided funding to develop production skills.

In the case of organics, we are providing considerable financial support through the Organic Entry Level Scheme – part of Environmental Stewardship. Around 80% of land under organic management in England now falls under this scheme. Defra also provides free advice to farmers who are considering converting to organic farming and funds R&D of benefit to organic production.

“We are trying to improve the role of public procurement in providing a better market for British produce”
Research and development will be even more important for our future. In June we launched the new Food and Environment Research Agency which will help us to monitor and tackle animal disease, and maintain the safety of the food chain. Along with the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board and NGO contributions, Defra and the industry invest a grand total of £164 million in agricultural R&D a year.

For example, Defra’s Crop Genetic Improvement Networks are working with plant breeders to improve understanding of traits such as nitrogen use efficiency and disease resistance, in conjunction with plant breeders. Joint projects with industry, through the LINK Programme, are bringing on cutting-edge technologies. For example, developing more competitive crop varieties which use lower inputs and therefore have lower environmental impact.

Similarly, work on animal breeding is looking to improve the quality of our livestock so they impact less in terms of emissions and environmental damage, giving farmers a better return and higher productivity – and ultimately making a big contribution to future sustainable livestock production. This kind of near-market research is very important but so is making sure that its lessons are taken up.

The Prime Minister’s Chief Scientific Adviser, John Beddington, is looking at the longer-term challenges of food security, climate change and global population growth and asking ‘how can the world feed itself sustainably in 2050?’. The findings of this study are due to be published in the autumn of next year.
...on animal disease

We all know how animal disease can have a devastating impact, and we need to improve our defences and how we respond, because the problem is not going to go away. For example, warmer summers bring higher midge activity – and with it a greater risk of Bluetongue.

Together we kept the country free from Bluetongue last year – thanks to farmers vaccinating their herds and flocks. It was really impressive to see farmers acting so swiftly to use a vaccine that the government had ordered. This was cost and responsibility sharing in action. It’s a better way of doing things and a model for the future.

On bovine TB, we recognise how desperately hard it is for the farmers and their families living with this devastating disease. But having tried badger culling, the Independent Scientific Group’s recommendation was clear, if unpopular. We now have the TB Eradication Group, and the government has committed £20 million to vaccine development over the next three years. We expect an injectable badger vaccine to be ready and licensed for use in 2010, and we will fund a deployment project in six areas to start using it as soon as it is available. We will also continue to monitor progress in other parts of the UK and around the world as we try to eradicate this disease.
...on responsibility and cost sharing

Changing the way we currently share the responsibilities and costs of animal health and dealing with disease outbreaks has been under consideration for some time. The industry itself has asked for greater responsibility for taking its own decisions and managing disease risks, and this will improve the way we control animal diseases. Farmers’ reluctance to take on some of the costs of doing this is understandable, and affordability is an important consideration. But it is not unreasonable that the livestock industry should pay a fairer share of the costs of doing things that benefit them while being given greater responsibility for deciding on what should be done.

We need to work together to set up the new responsibility-sharing body for animal health, so we are now establishing a joint industry/Defra advisory group to help plan this.

This group will advise on the body’s detailed design and ways of working to ensure that it has the confidence of both the industry and the general public. This will be a very important step towards giving the farming industry greater responsibility for its own future.
We need to farm in a more sustainable way, so that we don’t erode our capacity to produce food in the future. Farmers are the stewards of our landscape and the industry has made huge progress on environmental stewardship, of which we can be proud. Farmers are providing a public service in managing the land, and our aim for CAP reform is to shift away from the current system, to paying farmers for sustainably managing the land – a service that the public needs and that only farmers can provide.

Five million hectares of English farmland are already covered by Environmental Stewardship agreements – that’s 54% of our agricultural land (and together with an additional 1 million hectares still in predecessor schemes this rises to 65%). These schemes help safeguard and enhance important landscapes, habitats, species and features of historic value. We’re putting £400 million a year into Environmental Stewardship (almost double the size of the previous programme), that’s £2.9 billion over the lifetime of the Rural Development Programme for England, to help farmers manage their land sustainably.

Following last year’s review of progress, some new stewardship options are being introduced, changes made to others to help farmers to better target environmental benefits on their land, and a new advice programme being introduced later this year for Entry Level Stewardship. A new strand of Entry Level Stewardship, Uplands ELS, is being introduced in 2010 for farmers in Seriously Disadvantaged Areas. This followed extensive consultation with the industry – which showed government listening – and the results were widely welcomed.
We’ve worked together on finding ways to recapture the environmental benefits of set-aside and Sir Don Curry has brought together all those with an interest to try and agree on what to do. We have travelled a long way and have now agreed on an industry-led voluntary approach, having worked closely with NFU, CLA, FWAG, the RSPB, and with our Agencies the Environment Agency and Natural England.

This is an important moment for farming as it takes responsibility for dealing with the problems of declining farmland bird numbers which are an indicator of the health of the wider environment.

Mobilising hearts and minds across the industry, supporting action and offering incentives through complementary Environmental Stewardship payments has the potential to offer more than something solely led by government. We all hope the Campaign for the Farmed Environment will be a big success and we will give it our full support.
...on climate change

Climate change will affect farmers more than most. Increased temperatures and changing rainfall patterns will affect yields and increase the risks of pests and diseases. So as farmers will be among the first to feel the impacts on their businesses, they will have an important role to play in helping to tackle the problem.

Agriculture, land use change and forestry are responsible for around 7% of the UK’s greenhouse gas emissions, over a third of methane emissions – from livestock and manure – and over two thirds of nitrous oxide emissions, mainly from inorganic fertilisers. The government will shortly be publishing an Energy and Climate Change Strategy that will set out how we can work with the industry to help meet the UK’s ambitious carbon budgets.

Farmers see the impact of our changing climate already, and initiatives like the Carbon Calculator for Land Managers developed by the Country Land and Business Association is helping farmers and land managers to measure their emissions and look at where they can reduce them. The NFU, the CLA, and the Agricultural Industries Confederation launched a joint Climate Change Task Force in January 2007, and we are working through the Rural Climate Change Forum to share advice, raise awareness and encourage action.

The ACT ON CO2 campaign is encouraging farmers to tackle climate change, looking at water, how to make the best use of waste, and at how lowering emissions can also lower costs. Anaerobic digestion is one way of doing so. It reduces the cost of dealing with organic waste and can reduce energy costs by producing renewable energy to power and heat the farm and other buildings, while any surplus electricity is sold to the grid. It also reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and produces an effective bio-fertiliser.

Five cutting-edge demonstration projects will receive funding from our £10 million Anaerobic Digestion Demonstration Programme. We’re working together in the Anaerobic Digestion Task Group who will shortly be publishing an Implementation Plan setting out how we can make the most of this opportunity.
Agriculture needs skills for the future. Of course, farming and food production are highly skilled businesses, but we know that skills are increasingly critical to profitability, productivity and responding to consumer demand. At our roundtable in April we discussed where skills need to be strengthened. The industry is now developing an action plan setting out what it can do and how we can help.

Agriculture also needs to attract young people into it – the farmers of tomorrow. We’re providing a new Diploma in Environmental and Land-based Studies for 14-19 year olds, which will start this September. Defra is continuing to support Fresh Start training academies that offer business and management skills and mentoring for new entrants to the farming industry.

We are also helping to ensure that our children reconnect with where – and how – the food they eat is produced.

We are providing a ‘countryside classroom’ for curricular and other studies through farm visits under agri-environment schemes. And we continue to support the work of Farming and Countryside Education in their aim of improving children’s understanding of farming and the rural way of life.
Summary – stronger together

For all the challenges facing farming, this is a **moment of great opportunity**. The question now is what use we make of it. We all want the same thing – British farming that is profitable, productive, sustainable and resilient. **So let’s work together to:**

- **get the balance right on regulation** and, where possible, reduce the impact on farmers
- **support production**, provide help for rural businesses through the RDPE, and work with the fruit and vegetable industry to overcome any barriers to increased production and consumption
- **improve country of origin labelling**
- **improve the role of public procurement** in providing a better market for British produce
- **develop the skills that agriculture needs**, and make the new Diploma a success
- **continue to fund R&D** to ensure the industry is able to meet future challenges to food production
- **respond to climate change**, including funding the Anaerobic Digestion Demonstration Programme
- **develop vaccines to tackle bovine TB**, fund a deployment project as soon as it is available, and continue to fight the disease
- **share the responsibility – and the cost – of animal health** and dealing with disease outbreaks
- **continue to support environmental stewardship** and press for CAP reform so that farmers are rewarded for sustainably managing the land
- **recapture the environmental benefits of set-aside** through our jointly-agreed campaign
- **raise awareness of the importance of agriculture**, to encourage the next generation of farmers.
Useful links:

- Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board: www.ahdb.org.uk
- Biotechnology Biological Sciences Research Council: www.bbsrc.ac.uk
- Bluetongue advice: www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/bluetongue
- Business Link: www.businesslink.gov.uk
- Campaign for the Farmed Environment: www.nfuonline.com/x37826
- Carbon Calculator for Land Managers: www.calm.cla.org.uk
- Code of Good Agricultural Practice for farmers, growers and land managers: www.defra.gov.uk/farm/environment/cogap
- Council of Food Policy Advisors: www.defra.gov.uk/foodrin/policy/council
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: www.defra.gov.uk
- Diploma in Environmental and Land-based Studies: www.diplomaelbs.co.uk
- Environmental Stewardship: www.naturalengland.gov.uk/ourwork/farming/funding/es
- Farming and Countryside Education (FACE): www.face-online.org.uk
- Food and Environment Research Agency: www.fera.defra.gov.uk
- Fresh Start: www.defra.gov.uk/farm/working/new-entrants
- Lantra (the Sector Skills Council for environmental and land-based industries): www.lantra.co.uk
- Rural Climate Change Forum: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/agriculture/rccf
- Rural Development Programme for England: www.defra.gov.uk/rural/rdpe