

Written evidence submitted by the Nature Friendly Farming Network (AB58)

Nature Friendly Farming Network

Written evidence to Public Bill Committee on the Agriculture Bill

The Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN) would like to thank the House of Commons Public Bill Committee on the Agriculture Bill for the opportunity for NFFN UK Chair, Martin Lines, to give oral evidence on Tuesday 23rd October. Following his oral evidence to the committee, the Network would like to submit this supplementary written evidence on the Bill.

Key points

The NFFN welcomes the overall direction of the Agriculture Bill, in particular the **public money for public goods** approach. The Network is aware of discussions surrounding productivity but believes that productivity and environmental goals are not mutually exclusive but go hand in hand. The environmental goals in the Bill must not be undermined by additional clauses on food production – the Network would like any productivity payments to be conditional on meeting environmental goals. This will ensure that long term food security is not undermined by short term productivity goals which harm the land and environment.

To achieve long term food security, the Agriculture Bill should also set a **robust baseline of environmental standards** for land management for all, even those who choose not to engage with any environmental land management schemes to receive financial support. This baseline should aim to raise current standards and keep land in 'good heart' for future generations. Allowing a minority to ignore the environmental impact of their methods will be costly in the long run. A strong regulator is needed to enforce these standards.

The Network remains concerned that future trade deals could undercut the high standards set by UK farmers. It is crucial that UK farmers are not undermined by cheap imports produced to lower environmental, animal welfare and food safety standards. NFFN would support additions to the Bill to ensure that **trade deals promote high standards** and protect farmers and the public from products which do not meet the high standards of UK agriculture.

NFFN supports calls for greater certainty about **long-term funding** under the Bill, including multi-annual budgets and a regular assessment of financial needs in the sector. Payments for the delivery of public goods must be generous enough to properly reward farmers and incentivise them to adopt environmentally sustainable practices.

Government should demonstrate leadership and make real commitments to support sustainable, nature friendly British agriculture. All government departments should ensure that their **procurement processes prioritise buying local food** direct from British farmers where possible, giving preference to those with high standards of environmental sustainability and animal welfare.

Additional points

The Agriculture Bill sets a new vision for balancing food production and conservation. To achieve this change, farmers and especially new entrants to the sector must be supported through the change. It is important that farmers are able to influence the design of new Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) to ensure that it works in practice.

ELMS should adopt a whole farm approach which balances the demands of food production and environmental sustainability. They must be flexible enough to allow variation appropriate to

different landscapes, regions and types of farm. Cherry picking of the aims in Clause 1(1) may be positive in facilitating this whole farm flexible approach while a strong baseline would prevent abuse.

Profit and productivity can be increased by an environmentally sustainable approach. Profit margins are increased by turning over less productive areas of land to nature and encouraging pollinators. Likewise reducing livestock numbers on less productive areas of land improves the yield from the land and ensures long term productivity.

NFFN welcomes the provisions in the Bill to increase fairness and transparency in the supply chain. These will allow farmers to be more active in managing their land and producing according to need and demand in order to secure a fair reward from the marketplace. Society should support farmers to create a better system by encouraging them to use the best technology and providing more information to allow them to make targeted improvements to their land management plans.

Hundreds of farmers are already leading the way on sustainable farming – the NFFN is a voice for these farmers in a public debate which is dominated by perceptions of farming vs the environment. Farmers are custodians and managers of the land for future generations. The Network supports the Agriculture Bill's vision of a more sustainable balance between nature and food production.

Who We Are

The Nature Friendly Farming Network are a group of farmers who have come together to champion a way of farming which is sustainable and good for nature. We come from a range of backgrounds big and small, organic and conventional. We are passionate about ensuring that our countryside is productive and bursting with wildlife.

The landscape in the UK is shaped by farming. Yet not all change in recent times has been desirable; soils have been depleted, water courses degraded, and nature has struggled to cope with the pace of change. We have seen declines in over 600 farmland species over the last 50 years. However, many farms are bucking this trend. Soils are being restored, nature is thriving and if more follow this lead we can reverse these declines. With over 70% of the UK being farmland, we need to act now to deliver for wildlife at a landscape scale.

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