

Written evidence submitted by the Landworkers Alliance (AB42)

Landworkers' Alliance's suggested amendments to the Agriculture Bill

Proposed amendments:

- National Food Strategy
- Powers Should be Duties- "may" should be "must"
- Agroecology Amendment
- Below 5ha Farms Should be Eligible for Payments
- Local Food Amendment
- Conditions on "Delinking" of Payments to support New Entrants

1. ***The Landworkers Alliance farmers union supports the replacement of direct payments with environmental land management schemes but calls for more certainty in the Bill and more support farmers to produce healthy, affordable local food using agroecological techniques as a way to deliver public money for public goods.***
2. The Landworkers Alliance is a union representing a current membership of about 1,500 farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers. Our members focus on delivering high quality local food while simultaneously looking after the environment, landscapes, wildlife, animal welfare, community access, employment and other public goods. We represent the policy interests of agroecological small, medium and family farms and new entrants to farming. All of our policy recommendations are based on extensive consultation with our membership.
3. The Landworkers' Alliance was also instrumental building a wider set of policy suggestions called A People's Food Policy. Working with about 160 different organisations to support a food system where everybody regardless of income, status or background has secure access to enough good food at all times, without compromising on the ability of future generations to provide for themselves.
4. **Alignment with National Food Strategy** - As a union representing many innovative agroecological farmers we are pleased to see healthy soils, animal welfare, biodiversity and climate change at the front line in an Agriculture Bill. We are also pleased to see an end to the inefficiency and inequality of the current system of area-based payments. These ideas are policies for which we have been campaigning for years due to the inequity in the distribution of payments. This transition to a more equitable system of public money for public goods is long overdue.
5. However, we believe it is essential that the environmental land management system is tied to ecological food production with clear targets for local production and reducing the UK's reliance on imports whilst delivering environmental and social public goods. As a farmers' union, our core objective is to promote and improve the production of good food for local communities. Our members provide the evidence that it is entirely possible to produce the food we need using the highest levels of environmental land management through nature-friendly, high animal welfare, agroecological farming. We believe that **access to healthy local, environmentally sustainable food should be the central aim of agricultural policy.**
6. Therefore, we strongly support **Amendment 2**, already put forward for consideration, and would also like to see commitment to aligning the Agriculture Bill with our National Food Strategy. The National Food Strategy should create duties and targets for local and plans for how we make healthy, sustainably produced food affordable and accessible to people of all income levels and make clear how we will align our farming policy, outlined in the Agriculture Bill with environmental commitments, public health strategies, trade regimes and land use planning.
7. **Powers should become duties**- Overall, we are positive about the potential for this bill to support a new generation of farmers. The wording of the bill allows for the wide range schemes. But we also feel that it is too far too vague. The Bill on its own carries the danger of being under-financed. We are concerned that the key parts of the policy paper need to be carried over into the text of the bill as duties rather than powers so that there is a statutory obligation to carry out the developing support system. If the bill carries no statutory obligations, when direct payments are cut, there is the potential that the money for farming will dwindle down to peanuts. Agriculture is far too important to let that happen, so we suggest that **across the Bill you substitute "may" with "must" in all clauses.**

8. **Agroecology Amendment-** Bringing together the delivery of public goods and food production through Agroecology - After part 1 (4) add:

"The Secretary of State will give particular attention to integrating whole farm agroecological approaches, as a means of delivering the purposes listed in clause (1) (1)"

Or add "whole farm agroecological systems" to the public goods listed in clause 1(1).

9. An agroecology amendment would require the emerging schemes to incentivise farming techniques across whole farm systems, that deliver environmental benefits, alongside edge of field measures and wildlife zones. We would like to see the concept of Agroecology incorporated as a guiding principle. This is necessary to encourage payments which support whole farm systems rather than the edge of field measures or set asides and there is a mandate to improve our farming systems as a whole. Agroecology also brings in the social dimensions. This would give the Bill a bit more direction in transforming the farming system, in a way that delivers the public goods listed in clause 1.
10. The UN FAO provides the following definition of agroecology: *'Agroecology is based on applying ecological concepts and principles to optimize interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while taking into consideration the social aspects that need to be addressed for a sustainable and fair food system. By building synergies, agroecology can support food production and food security and nutrition while restoring the ecosystem services and biodiversity that are essential for sustainable agriculture. Agroecology can play an important role in building resilience and adapting to climate change.'*
11. Examples of whole farm agroecological systems are mixed farming, community supported agriculture, organic farming, pasture-fed livestock and other whole farm sustainable farming techniques that work together with measures to encourage wildlife and restore nature. Adding Agroecology as a guiding principle is not naming one single system, it is an overarching principle which can cover a multitude of approaches, systems and programmes. (one of which would be organic, but there are many others). It mostly ensures that the emerging support systems transform whole farm systems.
12. It is true that you *could* support agroecology, including organic under the current powers, but there is nothing in the Bill that provides some legislative mandate about what systems will be supported to deliver the goods and we want something more explicit in the Bill that sets a clear direction of travel. Current Government might be thinking along these lines in the emerging systems, but when there is a change in Government, the emerging support systems may change. Adding this into the Bill ensures that the country maintains a strong focus on an agriculture that enhances the environment and society, building a better farming system over the time span of the Bill- which might be generations.
13. **The Benefits of Agroecology-** Agroecology is regenerative of biodiversity, soils and the environment. Studies have shown that agricultural producers using agroecological practices such as crop diversification, maintaining local genetic diversity, animal integration, soil organic management, water conservation and harvesting are more resilient. Agroecological methods can produce comparable or superior yields at lower cost with greater profitability, and sustain diverse and nutritious diets. Agroecology is regenerative of biodiversity, soils and the environment. Studies have shown that agricultural producers using agroecological practices such as crop diversification, maintaining local genetic diversity, animal integration, soil organic management, water conservation and harvesting are more resilient.
14. Agroecological land use plays a fundamental role in mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. When managed in a way that promotes soil health, biodiverse plant growth, and trees, then agricultural lands have the capacity to sequester CO₂ from the atmosphere. Soil quality is integral to this. Fertile, well-structured soils have a much higher capacity to sequester CO₂ than degraded soils. In addition, agroecological farming methods practiced worldwide have been shown to be much more resilient in the face of severe weather like storms and droughts, and major pests and diseases.
15. Agroecological farming reduces emissions from the food system by:
- Promoting soil that holds carbon

- Incorporating trees and nature into agricultural systems
- Reducing imported animal feeds that may have been grown on land that should have been forests
- Eliminating atmospheric pollution from nitrate fertilizers and slurry
- Managing livestock in a climate friendly way to reduce methane
- Localising food supply chains to reduce transport, waste, packaging and refrigeration

16. We suggest that the UK make a bold commitment to Agroecology to deal with the climate and nature emergency we are facing, to improve farmer livelihoods, and to align with the National Food Strategy.

17. **Ensuring support for small farms-** The money promised for new entrants and environmental land management must materialise in a form suitable for small farms, horticulture and community agriculture. There should be no minimum claim area to ensure that active farmers are eligible for support - regardless of the size of their holding. To ensure there is no minimum claim area section 1 of the bill should specify:

“In framing any financial assistance scheme, the Secretary of State must have regard to ensuring the scheme can be accessed by farms smaller than 5ha, including horticulture units.”

18. **Local food Amendment-** The Agriculture Bill provides an opportunity for government invest at scale in local food, creating thousands of good jobs, promoting health and well-being, enhancing our food culture and reputation, and making our food system more resilient and sustainable. We encourage an amendment to be included in clause 2 similar to this one.

(c) supporting supply chain infrastructure for the purpose of assisting in the sale of agri-food products which are locally produced and sold by micro-enterprises or community enterprises

““Locally produced and sold,” means produced and offered for sale direct to the consumer within 100 miles of the point of primary production.”

“Micro enterprises” means non-subsidiary, independent businesses with fewer than 10 employees.

“Community enterprises” means businesses run by a charity, social enterprise, not-for-profit or co-operative organisation which is owned by, endorsed by, or engaging directly with local people. “

19. Examples are start-up and improvement for both rural and peri-urban community integrated farms, local processing and marketing initiatives, local food co-operatives, regional seed networks, equipment sharing initiatives, humane small abattoirs, and local supply chains facilities, including markets and online local food delivery systems. Local food systems suffer from decades of underinvestment, so there is a real need for sustained government backing for the sector. Many of the businesses involved – whether producers, processors, independent retailers or caterers – are small, with limited management and financial capacity for collaboration and sector development.

20. **The Benefits of Local Food-** Local food systems deliver benefits on a scale that extends from the local to the global; many of which align strongly with governmental policy priorities. Local food bolsters the UK in the face of uncertain trade deals and volatile global prices, while reducing the deficit through import substitution for domestic produce.

21. The role played by local farms, in boosting rural and national economies, and building economic resilience should not be underestimated. Producers gain a higher share of the retail pound, thus making smaller enterprises more profitable, while the capacity of locally owned and operated businesses to circulate and return money spent in their operations within the local economy creates a multiplier effect. For every £1 invested in local food, £6-8 is returned to society. Over 50% of this is retained in the local economy, compared to 15-30% of the money spent in non-local enterprises(<http://www.nourishscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Local-Food-Economy-Report.pdf>)

22. Additionally, local food systems encourage enterprise development and diversification, creating new jobs and teaching people new skills. A five-year national study on Mapping Local Food Webs estimated that 103,000 jobs (full and part-time) across England could be attributed to the local food

economy, with 61,000 flowing directly from local food sales. Spending in local food outlets supports an average of one job for every £46,000 of annual turnover; compared to one job per £138,000 to £144,000 of turnover at three major national chains (<https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/farming-and-food/local-foods/item/2897-from-field-to-fork>).

23. When food is sold locally, a much higher proportion of produce is used and food waste decreases substantially, supporting governmental targets to reduce waste, increase recycling, and to create more environmentally- friendly businesses. This is in addition to the high animal welfare standards observed on local farms, as well as the increased biodiversity of both crops as well as wild species.
24. Reducing the cross-haulage of food amount during both import and export reduces transportation, and thereby carbon emissions, in line with commitments to the Paris Climate Change Agreement.
25. Local food also facilitates access to fresh, healthy, affordable food for all. The health benefits of local food have the potential to reduce the strain on NHS services, with the production of fresher, more nutritious, and affordable food that is directly accessible to local communities bringing agricultural policy into line with Public Health England's 2016 Tackling Obesity Strategy.
26. In a country facing an 'epidemic of loneliness' there are also myriad benefits associated with the community aspect of local food; whether simply increased interaction with local vendors, increased community involvement with organisation of farmers markets and local events, or even the physical and mental satisfaction derived from volunteering at local farms and community supported agricultural schemes. Many people in the UK are disconnected from their food and unaware of how and where the food they eat – and its ingredients – are produced.
27. **Supporting New Entrants via conditions on delinked payments-** The Agriculture Bill states that during the Transition period (2021-2027) when BPS payments will be phased out, payments will be delinked from the land, meaning that there will be no requirement to farm the land in order to receive these payments. Furthermore, farmers who want to retire can request to have their remaining BPS payments in a lump sum to enable them to exit from farming (sub-clause 7, p6). The justification for these measures is that they will help new entrants get into the sector, while giving existing farmers flexibility to plan for the future (Health and Harmony, para 54-57, p16).
28. There is a strong risk with this arrangement that farmers will take the money and hold onto their farms due to enjoying the farm lifestyle or having emotional ties to the land. The reason many older farmers have not retired is because they can't see any other life for themselves than farming. For this policy to usefully make land available for a new generation, there must be a requirement that land is made available through a range of mechanisms. This does not necessarily mean land must be sold, but receipt of the lump sum must be made conditional upon implementation of one of a menu of arrangements outlined below to make land available to new entrants or to encourage transition to a more sustainable way of farming.
29. Farmers and their families have varying objectives and aspirations for their retirement. While some may want to sell up and pass the capital released from their farm to their heirs, others may want to retain some level of involvement in farming. Furthermore, farmers have a wealth of skills, knowledge about their land which any successor as the manager for that farm would benefit from learning. The menu of options outlined below suggests ways in which access can be made for new entrants whilst meeting the needs of retiring farmers and their families. The benefit of these proposals is that farmers would be able to retire with dignity, if they so wish, while their skills and knowledge of both farming and their particular land would be passed on to a new generation.
30. We strongly believe that without a mechanism committing farmers to making their land available to a new generation through one of these options, the "Golden Parachute" proposal is unjust and a politically unacceptable use of public funds, since it would go to farmers who may already have a large capital asset in their farm and house. It is clearly stated in "Health and Harmony" that the purpose of both delinking payments and providing the "one-off lump sum payment is to help new entrants get into the sector. It is therefore essential that the lump sum option is conditional upon farmers making a commitment to making their land and skills available to the new generation. The percentage of the lump sum provided could also be calibrated according to whether they leave their

land to new entrants, or to new entrants specifically seeking to manage the land in a more sustainable way, using agroecology or organic farming.

31. **Delinking Amendment** We propose that the Agriculture Bill is amended to make receipt of the lump sum conditional upon one of the following options being implemented, to ensure that land is genuinely made available for new entrants or the money used to actively improve the farm holding within the purposes of the Bill.

- A Share Farming Partnership
- Rental to New Entrants
- Community Land Trusts
- Transition to more Ecological or Productive Farming

In the immediate term, the main action would be to amend the Ag. Bill, to ensure that the lump sum payment was made conditional by replacing **B) Section 7, sub clause 7 Power to provide for phasing out direct payments and delinked payments (page 6)** with

part (7) Regulations under this section may make provision for or in connection with the payment of a lump sum (at the request of a person entitled to direct payments) in lieu of any direct payments to which that person would otherwise be entitled with respect to two or more years of the agricultural transition period for England. Payment of the lump sum to be conditional upon the lump sum being used for:

- (a) transitioning the farm to a farming system that delivers the purposes outlined in section 1.1 or*
- (b) improving the productivity of the farm or*
- (c) the farmland, for which the entitlements are held, being made available to rent or buy, or via a share-farming arrangement, to new entrants or a community land trusts.*

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