

CEN briefing: Farming

Self-sufficiency and food security

- **The UK is 60% self-sufficient on average across all food groups.** The UK is [self-sufficient](#) in grain production; the UK produces roughly an equivalent volume to what it consumes in [meat, milk, and eggs](#); the UK produces over [50% of vegetables](#) and [16% of fruit](#) consumed.
- **Self-sufficiency is not the same as food security.** Though often used interchangeably, these two terms mean different things. Self-sufficiency refers to the ability of a country to meet its own demand for food whereas food security refers to meeting domestic demand in general, which could mean through non-domestic sources.
- **Total self-sufficiency is undesirable.** Due to the diversity of food that is now available, much of which is not able to be grown in the UK, total self-sufficiency would reduce consumer choice. Secondly, total self-sufficiency will make our market more price sensitive and susceptible to shocks. The UK has just experienced the wettest 18 months since 1836. This has severely impacted domestic yields, especially of grains. Given our self-sufficiency in grain production, this will lead to higher food prices for affected goods in the coming months, such as bread. We will need to rely on imports to meet our demand. Establishing reliable and diverse trading relationships will help to bolster the UK's food security.
- **Devoting more of our land to agriculture will not necessarily increase food production.** Almost 70% of England's land is devoted to agriculture. Of this agricultural land, 20% produces just three percent of the nation's calorific intake. Not all land is equally effective at growing food. As such, better utilising this unproductive farmland for other societal objectives will not significantly impact our food security.

Nature restoration and food security

- **The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, which impacts the resilience of our agricultural sector.** Biodiversity loss and climate change are the two most serious medium- and long-term threats to [food security](#). Farmers need a healthy environment to operate profitable farm businesses. We must invest in these foundations for our long-term food security. The [intensive farming practices](#) incentivised by the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have contributed to the decline in nature in the UK and the threat posed to food security.
- **Climate change makes extreme weather events more common and efforts to prepare our land for this will be critical.** Climate change increases the likelihood and frequency of extreme weather like the rain we have experienced over the last 18 months. Biodiversity loss is a barrier to our land's ability to cope with it.
- **Regenerative farming practices enable farmers to grow food whilst protecting and enhancing the resilience of their land.** Regenerative agriculture focuses on restoring soil health and increasing farmland biodiversity to increase farmland resilience. By increasing plant variety, susceptibility to crop diseases, pests or harvest failure can be reduced. Using natural fertilisers like manure instead of artificial fertilisers, as well as the [integrated pest management](#) that increased farmland biodiversity enables, can reduce a farmer's reliance on expensive chemicals, lowering input costs.

Farming and Brexit

- **The EU's CAP was inefficient and ineffective.** The Basic Payment Scheme distributed payments based on the amount of land managed, resulting in 50% of the budget spent on just 10% of farmers, disproportionately benefiting larger landowners. CAP did little to attract new talent, improve productivity, or increase on-farm resilience to extreme weather. This has undermined the UK's long-term food security and damaged the natural environment.
- **Brexit created a once-in-a-generation opportunity to restore our farmlands' natural resilience.** The UK has seized this opportunity by creating the new Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) which reward farmers for actions to improve the quality and resilience of their land. With food already rewarded on the market, ELM schemes spend public money on the provision of public goods that the market does not reward, such as improving the quality of water and soil. The £2.4 billion farming budget was maintained in order to deliver this. There are over 55,000 ELMs agreements with farmers already in place.
- **ELMs encompasses three strands.** The first is the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) which pays farmers to adopt and maintain regenerative farming practices in order that they can protect and restore the natural environment alongside food production. The second is Countryside Stewardship which pays for more targeted action in specific locations to maximise the restoration potential of the environment. Finally, Landscape Recovery pays for bespoke, longer-term and larger-scale projects to improve the natural environment.

Other government action on farming

- **Supporting innovation in the farming sector.** In May 2024 alone the following funds were announced: £75 million to support internal drainage boards to accelerate recovery from this wet winter and upgrade their assets; £15 million Farm Gate Food Waste Fund to help ensure edible food is consumed by people rather than animals or anaerobic digesters; £50 million to reduce reliance on migrant labour through packhouse automation and improving the attractiveness of the sector; and a further £3 million to support new and mobile abattoirs.
- **Creating the Farming Recovery Fund.** Launched in January 2024, this new fund seeks to financially support farmers who have suffered uninsurable damage caused by flooding by providing grants of up to £25,000.
- **Cutting planning red tape on farms.** The government has committed to reviewing planning barriers and has made it easier to convert farm buildings into shops, to build horticultural glasshouses, slurry stores, and small on-farm reservoirs.
- **Helping farmers to get a fairer price from supermarkets.** Average profits for fresh foods are often less than 1% of the profits across the food supply chain. The government consulted on regulations to improve fairness within the egg and fresh produce supply chains.
- **Ensuring farmers enrolled in ELMs benefit from agricultural property relief.** At the Spring Budget 2024, the government announced that it was extending this inheritance tax relief so that farmers in agri-environment schemes could benefit from this financial incentive.