

The Natural Choice

What the Natural Environment White Paper means for land managers

In England the landscapes we love and our native biodiversity have been shaped by the decisions of land managers over thousands of years. Over 70% of the land is farmed. Farmers and land managers are the stewards of the countryside and play a vital role in achieving society's ambitions for water, wildlife, healthy soil and food production.



The Government wants to inspire action in all sections of society, so that this can be the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than it inherited. We cannot achieve this without the support of farmers and land managers across the country.

What is a White Paper?

A White Paper is a statement by Government of its vision on a key policy issue, setting out the long term direction of travel. This White Paper responds to compelling new evidence about the state of our natural environment.

Why do we need one now?

Concern for the environment is not new and most farmers are already involved in schemes to support environmental land management. Progress has been made in recent

years but we are still a long way from being able to claim that the job is done. The 2010 Lawton review, *Making Space for Nature*, reported that the natural environment in England is very fragmented and can't respond effectively to new pressures such as climate change and population growth.

The National Ecosystem Assessment, published in June 2011, shows how changes to the benefits we get from nature have been driven by changes in society over the past 60 years. In the period following the Second World War, food production increased dramatically, but many other benefits we get from natural systems declined, particularly those related to air, water and soil quality. For part of this period, successive governments incentivised land managers to increase food production in ways that put pressures on the environment.

What does this mean for land managers?

We need a competitive farming and food industry which contributes towards global food security. However, we also need to manage the impacts that food production has on the natural environment. In the long-term, food security depends on tackling the environmental impacts of production.

We recognise that potential tensions exist between improving the environment and increasing food production, and we see farmers and land managers as key to resolving this. The White Paper commits to working with the industry and environmental partners to reconcile the goals of improving the environment and increasing food production.

The primary responsibility for how land is managed lies with farmers and land managers themselves. The measures set out in the White Paper aim to make it easier for land managers to get involved in setting environmental objectives on and around their land.

Supporting action at the right scale

We know that action to date has tended to take place on too small a scale and to overlook crucial linkages across the landscape. We also know that a focus on a single environmental outcome to the exclusion of others (e.g. soil quality, water quality, landscape character, endangered species) and competing advice on different environmental outcomes creates unnecessary confusion and additional burdens for those working on the ground.

Action joined up at a local level can frequently deliver multiple benefits. For instance, creating wetlands can help bring significant benefits for water quality, biodiversity and flood management, while management of upland peat habitats can store carbon, clean drinking water, and improve habitats downstream.

To make this kind of joined-up action possible, the White Paper sets out how we will encourage local partnerships to create new **Nature Improvement Areas** (NIAs) where there are opportunities to improve the quality of the natural environment on a significant scale. We will set up a competition to identify 12 initial areas and will provide **£7.5 million** to support this. New **Local Nature Partnerships** will bring land managers together with local authorities, businesses and conservation organisations to lead integrated projects to connect and restore nature.

New economic opportunities for land managers

Much of the work which land managers do to protect and improve the environment has a financial value, not all of which has previously been reflected in the market place.

We want to work with land managers to explore the potential for developing new markets for 'ecosystems services'. These are additional ways to reward action to improve the environment for public benefit. This is already happening in some areas, for example, a water company might pay a farmer for protecting the ability of uplands to naturally clean and filter water.

The White Paper also announces a new 'biodiversity offsetting' pilot. Biodiversity offsetting is where a developer secures habitat expansion or restoration to compensate for losses caused by development. There are emerging opportunities for landowners to provide and manage such habitat.

What will Government do differently?

We recognise that Government needs to be clear about our expectations of farmers and land managers, and to provide more joined-up support and advice. We will:

- work with the farming industry to reconcile the goals of improving the environment and increasing food production;
 - improve the way government bodies work together so they provide more coherent advice and are easier to work with;
 - carry out a full review of how we provide both advice and incentives for farmers and land managers, to create an approach that is clearer, more joined-up; and yields better environmental results;
 - work with farmers and land managers to develop a new approach to Environmental Stewardship that increases the focus on results, including the possibility of allowing greater flexibility within agreements;
- establish a Task Force bringing together representatives from across the supply chain to advise on how best to overcome the barriers to reducing peat use;
 - continue to call for ambitious reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, which should promote a strong industry better placed to deliver environmental outcomes.

