



REEN BREXIT

Setting the Bar for
a Green Brexit in
Food and Farming



We have been told that the UK's departure from the European Union presents a once in a generation chance to improve the environment:

“ Post EU exit the UK will be an environmental superpower ”

Defra Secretary Michael Gove
House of Commons
January 2019

“ Leaving the EU gives us the opportunity to improve our environment ”

Andrea Leadsom MP
Environmental Audit Committee
Evidence 25 October 2016

“ Leaving the European Union allows us to deliver... a Green Brexit ”

Defra Secretary Michael Gove
Oxford Farming Conference
January 2018

The Soil Association commissioned this report to interrogate the 'Green Brexit' claims made by government and political leaders, and identify:

- What these ambitions could mean for food and farming in the UK
- What is already possible and being achieved inside the EU
- Has the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) helped or hindered environmental ambition.

In the context of a rapidly warming climate, wildlife collapse and the public health implications of increasingly ultra-processed diets, this report identifies what the UK would need to do in order to achieve a 'Green Brexit' in food and farming and truly become an 'environmental superpower'.

Summary

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has played a significant role in shaping farming policy and practice across Europe. While the CAP has often been a barrier to more environmental farming, it would not be fair to pin all environmental shortcomings to it, nor suggest that it has been solely responsible for holding back UK progress towards more sustainable food and farming systems. Lack of domestic ambition has been as important a factor as the CAP.

Across Europe the report identifies case studies of leadership in environmental food and farming. The UK has led on areas such as agri-environment schemes, but Italy, Spain, France and Denmark are ahead of the UK in important respects.

- Dedicated support for **agroforestry** in France protects soil on farms, improves wildlife habitats and animal welfare, with benefits for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

- In France, legislation and constitutional change have encouraged an **agroecological transition** in the education sector and in food and farming systems.
- In Denmark, **public procurement** is harnessed to promote healthier and more sustainable diets, and the government is on track to meet their target of 60% organic in all public settings by 2020.
- In Spain, a mixed model of regulation and voluntary initiatives helps achieve a **fairer and more transparent food supply chain** empowering small producers.
- In Italy, government legislation and funding encourage **social farming**, where activity or work is offered on farms as a form of social support, with benefits to public health, wellbeing and viability of rural communities.

The UK can become a world-leader in environmental farming. But it must learn from and go beyond what is already being achieved elsewhere.

The foundations of a Green Brexit in food and farming



To deliver a 'Green Brexit' for food and farming in the UK, we need the right foundations in place, and the following principles should shape any action:

Farming needs a vision.

UK farming needs clear objectives for environmentally sustainable food production. This should be built on an inclusive and democratic approach to policy development, engaging farmers and civil society as food citizens.

A robust baseline is required.

The UK needs firm legislation and long-term targets to protect natural resources and enforce year-on-year net-environmental gain, independent of the political cycle and with a trade policy that reflects our high standards.

Multiple challenges must be tackled together.

The challenges of biodiversity loss, climate change, soil degradation, antibiotic resistance, dietary ill health and social inequalities must be tackled together. Farmers must not be given contradictory incentives.

Agroecological systems should be prioritised.

Addressing these challenges in a coherent manner will require that nature-friendly farming practices are adopted across the UK, and that farmers are supported with independent advice and training to transition.

A Green Brexit is not dependent on one form of Brexit.

The UK can realise its ambition of becoming an 'environmental superpower' both inside and apart from the EU.

To achieve a Green Brexit in food and farming, governments must:

- **Connect legislation on climate, biodiversity, soils and diets** - in Westminster this means cross-referencing the developing Agriculture Bill, Environment Bill, and an updated Climate Change Act that reflects the scientific consensus on a net-zero UK economy by 2050.
- **Deliver a 10 year agroecology transition plan** supporting whole-farm systems like organic and agroforestry. These should be explicitly supported in agriculture legislation and in the developing Environmental Land Management scheme, with a target for organic expansion, harnessing public procurement to shift towards healthier and more sustainable diets.
- **Commit to long-term funding beyond 2022 and a multiannual budgetary framework** that means farmers and land managers can confidently plan and invest for the future, supporting a transition towards agroecological farming systems.
- **Adopt a new definition of agricultural productivity** before any financial assistance schemes for improving productivity are made available. The Agriculture Bill and 25 Year Environment Plan should propose alternative approaches to productivity, for example measuring the nutritional quality of agricultural production.
- **Invest in independent farmer advice, collaboration and training to embed sustainability in UK farming.** This should prioritise farmer-led innovation and peer-to-peer learning; environmentally friendly approaches should be included in the curriculum of agricultural research institutes to respond to contemporary challenges.
- **Stimulate regional and local infrastructure development for sustainable food producers** while protecting them from vested market interests. This should include ensuring the purpose and remit of the Groceries Code Adjudicator supports sustainable farming practices.
- **Support and enable devolved governments to develop their own vision**, providing a legal framework to continue to develop ambitious national sustainable farming policies. At the same time, cities should be recognised as a driver of sustainable consumption and given the remit and tools to achieve this.

For a fuller look at the report, including more information about Green Brexit, please visit soilassociation.org/green-brexit

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