



Levelling up rural Britain

Introduction

If 2020 signalled the start of great change, 2021 offers us all – every part of the country, every community, every person – the chance to level up our country and ensure we build back better. We now have the opportunity to work together to create a new vision for the future of Britain that values and involves everybody, wherever they live.

Rural Britain – and the farm businesses that lie at its heart – has a crucial role to play in developing, implementing and making a success of the new green agenda. There are huge opportunities in rural areas to create jobs; to generate green economic growth; to showcase “Brand Britain” on the world stage through increased exports; and to improve the health and wellbeing of the entire nation.

We are embarking on a new era for farming following the passing into law of the Agriculture Act last year. COVID-19 has shone the brightest of lights on what we as a country have to offer as a food-producing nation and the importance of rural Britain. Farmers and growers were proud to be part of the key workforce, providing food for the nation and helping ensure that shelves remained stocked, and it was fantastic to see the British public respond so supportively to our efforts.

In a survey by OnePoll, 86% of people said they believed British farms should grow as much food as they can to provide national food security. Currently, our self-sufficiency in food production is at 64%. The same survey also showed public support for British farming is at an all-time high.

The food we produce is some of the highest quality in the world. We have seen a significant commitment to short, safe, secure farm-to-fork supply chains which, for 20 years, have been independently audited by Red Tractor Assurance – delivering, in the words of Professor Chris Elliott, the founder of the Institute for Global Food Security, one of the safest food systems in the world. Yet,

remarkably, our food is also among the most affordable in the world.

In the eyes of other agricultural exporting countries, the UK is globally renowned for being one of the most prized food markets on the planet. This is reflected in the fact that, in 2019, total foreign direct investment in UK agriculture, forestry and fishing stood at £1.65 billion. And the central reason for this is the quality raw ingredients of our food are produced here and the high value market we provide for.

We want British agriculture to be the number one supplier of choice to shoppers in the UK and across the world. To achieve this, we stand ready to partner with government to build the British food brand at home and abroad and to ensure that, wherever possible, our schools, hospitals and military have access to fresh, high quality British food.

More than any other sector on earth, agriculture has the opportunity to help bring greater changes to everyday life beyond producing the food we eat more sustainably. Natural fibres like wool can be used for a range of things, from insulating homes and buildings to replacing the plastic guards used to protect young trees; tomatoes are now being packed using the vine they are grown on, removing the need for any other packaging; new opportunities are being created through home grown and produced proteins for animal feed. Through investment and innovation, we can improve our food resilience at home and play a leading part in a revolution of sustainable food around the world.

With the hosting of the COP26 climate change summit in Glasgow later this year, we must grasp the opportunity for the UK to lead a global recovery – to be at the forefront of a race to the top on food standards, animal welfare, environmental



protection and food safety. An integrated approach to water management is crucial, so droughts and floods are not treated as separate issues. This work can be driven by new technologies and innovation that can pioneer policies on how to produce carbon neutral food.

In 2019 the NFU set an ambition for British agriculture to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040. We are ready to become a global leader in climate friendly farming, working with government to provide a global blueprint for sustainable food production, underpinning the principles of the G7 – which is due to meet in Cornwall in June – and its priorities on trade, climate change and health.

By working together to make the most of the opportunities that we have – by creating jobs, boosting green economic growth, increasing exports and improving the wellbeing of the population – we can build a better Britain and level up the entire country, so no one is disadvantaged by where they live or where their business is based.

Farming – and rural Britain – can provide solutions to many of the challenges we face, and I hope this report will inspire, invigorate and empower a new, ambitious and revolutionary approach to rural Britain and maximise the economic and social potential of the living, breathing economy that underpins 70% of our country.

Minette Batters
NFU President

Building a world class British food brand at home and abroad

We produce some of the highest quality, safest, most nutritious food in the world in this country. We can work together to reconnect people with their diets and ensure everyone has the opportunity to eat great British food, regardless of where they live or their income.

Support for, and promotion of, the Red Tractor Assurance scheme can play a central role in helping people buy British wherever they can and seeing more British food on more British plates – a widely recognised scheme that shoppers know stands for high quality, safe, traceable food produced with care and to high environmental and animal welfare standards.

Championing our great British food at home is a great start. The massive success of the procurement work done during the 2012 London Olympics to celebrate the fantastic diversity and quality of British food shows how it can work. Serving more local British food in our hospitals, our schools and in the armed forces would be a huge vote of support for British food. We want to engage with government departments and work with them to open up all routes to market for British food. Not only can this benefit the economy, but reconnecting people with where the raw ingredients of their food comes from could also have an impact on their health.

Making the most of overseas markets post-Brexit is also crucial. The food and drink sector is already working closely with the government to grow export markets. There is more than £60 million of farmer investment in the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board through levies. Industry is ready to partner with government to build our global ambition and increase the British food brand identity across the world, and government should be investing time and effort overseas and showing global leadership to help us achieve this.



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Climate smart farming leading the world



The new Agriculture Act means we now have a clear opportunity for British farming to become a global leader in sustainable, climate-friendly food production.

Agriculture and horticulture are dynamic, forward-looking industries. Farmers and growers are ready to adopt new technology to become more productive while reducing environmental impact and contributing to the country's collective ambition to become net zero.

The ability to use all the tools available to us to increase our food production, while reducing our impact, will have economic as well as environmental benefits and reinforce our ambition as a global leader. This includes new breeding techniques, which have the potential to play an important role in the challenge of issues like improving disease resistance. Such innovations will not

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be the answer to all the challenges we face but could help improve productivity and drive green growth in the rural economy and beyond.

Working in partnership on integrated water management is also central to this – ensuring the agri-food sector is recognised as an essential user of water and has secure access to supplies in times of drought, making sure productive agricultural farmland is properly valued and protected from floods, and ensuring any natural flood management

initiatives are appropriately incentivised and that farmers are involved at every stage of their development.

To ensure our farmers can utilise advances and become world leaders in climate friendly farming we want to support the government's progressive approach to the adoption of new technologies, and its pro-science agenda. Maintaining Britain's agricultural science base through research and development facilities and education will ensure Britain's food and farming sector continues to be world-leading.

Opening up rural Britain for business

While farming is at the core of the countryside, rural Britain provides so much more for the country through tourism and diversified farm businesses.

Around 65% of all farm businesses in England also run other enterprises – such as farm shops, wedding venues and B&Bs – which generated £740 million for the UK economy in 2018/19, while in 2019, 18.5% of all money spent on holiday trips in England was spent in the countryside – just over £2 billion¹.

Funding from the EU played an important role in helping farmers develop enterprises which contribute to local value-added food production, tourism, rural infrastructure development and diversification activities which, in turn, drive regional green economic growth. The announcement that funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will at least match that funding is welcome, as is the commitment that a portion of the fund will go to the areas that will benefit most, including rural communities.

The role of domestic food production and the development of local agri-food businesses has to be a key component for any approach to a green recovery and any future structural funding should be designed together with rural businesses to ensure they too can mobilise that replacement funding.

To enable farm businesses to achieve their potential it is vital that they can maximise the value of raw ingredients they produce. The dairy sector is a prime example of this, with cheese, cream and yogurt all value-added products, with fantastic export opportunities as well as delivering more for the home market. The growth in microbreweries is another example, providing opportunities for barley and hops growers.

Creating business conditions that make financial commitments in processing plants in rural areas attractive would help to drive further green economic growth and support the potential of the food and farming sectors to contribute more as well as provide more employment opportunities for people living in rural Britain.



AROUND
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OTHER ENTERPRISES
WHICH GENERATED
**£740
MILLION**
FOR THE UK
ECONOMY IN
2018/19

1. SOURCE: The GB Tourist 2019 Annual Report, VisitEngland/Kantar

SOURCE: Farm Accounts In England: Results from the Farm Business Survey 2018/19, Defra/National Statistics, December 2019

Green growth for all via country-wide connectivity

The coronavirus pandemic has fundamentally changed the way many people work. The ability to be able to do business wherever you are no matter what business you are in has only served to highlight the importance of quality broadband and mobile phone coverage across the whole country.

Poor connectivity has put rural areas at a disadvantage. Reliable coverage and connections will benefit farming, British food production, and wider rural businesses. Better broadband will increase the potential of people being able to run other successful businesses in rural areas, which will attract more people to live and work there and boost rural economies.

A high standard of rural connectivity is essential to take full advantage of new technologies. Lack of digital connectivity acts as a constraint to capital investment. If British farming is to become more

competitive in an increasingly uncertain and turbulent time, then access to this essential infrastructure is of paramount importance.

Almost every respondent to the 2020 NFU Digital Technology Survey said access to reliable broadband and a mobile signal was essential for their business, yet less than half felt their mobile signal was sufficient for their business needs, while

only 40% of farmers felt their broadband speeds were sufficient.

To help rural communities get access to broadband, we want the Shared Rural Network to remain a priority and to be completed by 2025. This would mean all communities can have access to good mobile signal, which can also be used for mobile broadband while communities wait for fibre broadband.

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SOURCE: NFU 2020 Digital Technology Survey, February 2021

A safer, cleaner, greener rural Britain



Farms, and wider rural communities, have increasingly become the targets of criminals in recent years and this has left rural residents feeling more vulnerable. Crimes like hare coursing, fly-tipping on farmland, dog attacks on livestock and theft of large and small machinery have much wider knock-on effects on the farm business.

NFU Mutual's theft claim figures for 2019 revealed that rural crime cost the UK £54.3 million – the highest cost recorded in eight years. Meanwhile, local authorities dealt with over one million fly-tipping incidents in 2018/19.

The National Rural Crime Network's Fair Funding for Rural Policing report, published in June 2016, said fixed costs were higher among rural police forces which cannot benefit from economies of scale because they serve more dispersed, low density populations. It stated this equated to £32.1 million across the ten smallest forces (by population) – the equivalent of over 600 officers. Meanwhile, the Rural Services Network estimated that in 2018/19 rural areas received £167.01 per head of population in police funding compared to £206.20 in urban areas – equivalent to a 23.5% difference.

Rural crime must be treated as a priority issue for rural communities. A cross-departmental rural crime task force would support a co-ordinated governmental approach to ensure coordination between government departments, government agencies, Police & Crime Commissioners, Chief Constables and local authorities to address the failures in dealing with rural crime.

So far, 170 councils have banned the release of sky lanterns on their land and there should be an ambition to make this a nationwide ban. These objects pose a large fire risk and can cause suffering for, or even kill, farm animals and wildlife.



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SOURCE: NFU Mutual Rural Crime Report 2020, August 2020

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SOURCE: Join our campaign to ban sky lanterns, NFU Countryside website, December 2020

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Enjoying and celebrating the wellbeing benefits of rural Britain

People have always enjoyed visiting rural Britain. For the last 12 months, visiting the countryside has been the only recreation and exercise many people have been able to do.

Connecting people with rural areas on their doorstep that they may never have visited before can have a long-term legacy of greater appreciation, valuing and use of the countryside, as well as boosting health and wellbeing.

Many popular rural tourist spots are working farmland, an iconic patchwork of food and farming landscapes with many farmers working hard to maintain footpaths and public rights of way so visitors can enjoy our beautiful, iconic countryside.

As part of a two-way levelling up agenda, we recognise and continue to actively promote the enormous benefits to people's wellbeing of getting out and enjoying the countryside and farmed landscapes. We know access to rural areas for exercise and enjoyment, and the opportunities provided by rural tourism, are something the whole country can benefit from and we continue to work closely with Defra and Natural England (NE) to ensure the safety of everyone using public access rights in the countryside.

Farmers want people to engage with where their food comes from. It remains of huge importance that this access and engagement is achieved in a responsible way and the fact that much of this land is a working environment

is recognised, and respected, by the public and decision-makers alike.

One of the key lessons learned from the COVID-19 outbreak has been the importance of people adhering to the Countryside Code when they visit the countryside for exercise or recreation and for the Code itself to be updated so it remains relevant to a 21st century audience.

Because of the contribution green access makes to the physical and mental wellbeing of the nation, farmers' efforts to maintain, create or enhance public rights of way as part of a modern network should be rewarded as part of new government farm funding schemes, provided they recognise the value, and preserve the integrity, of land used for food production.

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Making a positive difference through planning reform



Farming provides local food and supports local food chains, provides jobs and supports people to live and work locally, and to use local services. Thriving farm businesses are at the heart of many rural communities.

But too often the planning system can act to make the rural economy less sustainable – preventing farm modernisation, diversification and home building for farm workers. In some cases, blanket environmental requirements mean that development is refused: a perverse outcome when development would make a farm business more sustainable, reduce its environmental footprint, create jobs, and promote green growth across the sector.

A sympathetic and symbiotic relationship is crucial. If farm businesses are allowed to build the right buildings, and do it in a way that is sympathetic to the local environment, it can reduce the impacts of production and help in our collective goal to achieve net zero. Newer glasshouses could help to produce more of our own fruit and veg, at a time when the nation's

health and wellbeing has never been more important.

The government's planning White Paper provides the perfect opportunity to introduce reform that makes a difference, cuts costs and complexity, and allows much needed farm development to be delivered on the ground. It also gives government the chance to demonstrate how it can ensure renewal and growth can be sustained in rural areas in the long term.

A new direction of travel for our planning system is very welcome. We want to work with government to help develop a new framework that promotes more economic and social activity. Encouraging people to live and work locally, and building more affordable rural housing, will ensure people can integrate into rural communities signalling a Britain growing more diverse local economies, and in turn helping to boost the local and national economy.

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Inspiring STEM learning through agriculture

Agriculture has a unique ability to engage children in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) learning outside the classroom and inspire children who prefer a more hands-on approach to learning.

NFU Education was established in 2017 as part of the NFU's drive to reconnect children with rural life, develop their understanding of farming, and increase their awareness of their food from field-to-fork. Its bespoke education initiatives and free teaching resources use farming as a topic to teach these core subjects in an innovative way.

The NFU's two competitions focused around STEM learning – Farmvention and Farming STEMterprise – have proved hugely popular with pupils and teachers alike. This has demonstrated that food and farming can help to bring

the core STEM subjects to life for many children. Resources have been adapted to a virtual model to help parents and teachers with learning during lockdown, with more than 75,000 pupils taking part in NFU Education's Science Week lessons.

This is just the beginning. It is crucial to engage children in these subjects, which will become even more important in the future. As well as inspiring a generation of children to learn vital STEM subjects and reconnecting young people with

where their food comes from, it could also create the next generation of Britain's farmers and growers.

Government has the opportunity to recognise and promote the role that farming can play in teaching vital STEM subjects for the benefit of the next generation and also in inspiring interest in working in Britain's all-important food industry and future generations of scientists, engineers and mathematicians.

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Empowering a British workforce



Farming as an industry is continually changing. It is a dynamic sector where new technologies are being adopted all the time. These new technologies offer a range of exciting career opportunities for young people from both rural and urban areas.

The seismic changes of the past 12 months ably demonstrate the farming sector's ability to flex and adapt. Working hand in hand with government we have created and promoted jobs and opportunities for people in agriculture. Pick for Britain, which saw a fantastic response from the public giving people the chance to work on farms, and the government's KickStart scheme, which is designed to get young people into long-term employment by funding six-month work placements with the aim of creating fully funded new jobs, are just two examples. More collaboration like this has the potential to open up careers and job opportunities in the food and farming sector to a home audience like never before.

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Agricultural colleges also play a crucial role in developing the farmers of tomorrow. Focused funding and facilities will enable farming and food production to develop and grow.

As new technologies become available, it is also crucial that there is a professional skills pathway available that recognises, and addresses, the skills and training and development needs of the sector and its workforce. The NFU is part of the project group that is developing the Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture, a body being

set up to attract and retain talent from a wide range of backgrounds. It will act as an umbrella, co-ordinating existing skills and training provision across England.

It is also vital that rural businesses are able to attract and retain the workforce they need. Levelling up rural services, like public transport, access to services, including high speed internet and medical provision, will give greater scope for people to live and work in both urban and rural areas, relieving pressure on our cities and offering a greater sense of well-being.

Rural proofing global Britain

Policy areas should be viewed through many lenses, but the rural lens is an important one. Rural areas – and the communities and businesses within them – have much to contribute to the economic and physical wellbeing of the country.

Empowering rural areas to be part of discussions and decision making, developing policy and major national capital spend projects, will lead to a true levelling up of rural and urban Britain.

This rural voice must be expressed by people who are living and working in the countryside and know what the real impact will be on homes, livelihoods and services. They must also be engaged at an early stage in the process so they feel valued and that their voices can have genuine influence on decisions. While

projects may well provide an overall benefit for the national economy, it is important that any impact on rural areas is not marginalised or ignored to ensure real value can be added by the people and businesses in these areas.

As decision-making becomes more localised it is important that rural communities are close to, and involved in, those decision-making processes. Small and medium sized businesses are

the backbone of our food industry and innovation is their lifeblood. Empowering rural areas will also have economic benefits by enabling them to take advantage of opportunities to develop.

Rural proofing all primary legislation will help to ensure it has a positive effect on rural life, the rural economy, and help contribute to our shared goals of national prosperity and a greener economy.

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