

HOW CAN YOU SPEAK TO YOUR MP ABOUT FARMING?



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Climate Friendly Agriculture: why does it matter?

Over 70% of British land is farmed. This land is vital to our food production and our responsibilities to steward our natural land and wildlife. Additionally, our commitments to reduce our carbon emissions and reverse nature loss will necessitate us changing and adapting our farming and food production practices.

From the use of certain pesticides and their effect on the British countryside, the contribution of cattle on our greenhouse gas production, and the way our land use can threaten wildlife, our agricultural industry has a wide and deep impact on our climate and our natural ecosystems. Not only this, our farming practices have significant implications on the longevity of our food production. Rising temperatures, wetter weather and declining soil health will have long term impacts on our farmers abilities to continue to grow British crops and rear British livestock. Therefore it's important for us to support and incentivise farmers to use land responsibly, and in a way that maintains our countryside and farmland for the present and for the future.

A background on Farming in the UK

Agriculture has been a core part of the British economy, culture, and landscape for centuries, and 71% of UK land is still used for agriculture. Even today, with our growing reliance on imports to support increasing demand, 60% of all our food in the UK is sourced domestically. As well as feeding the country, farmers oversee the majority of our rural land and, by extension, our country's natural life and national ecosystems. Unfortunately, intensive farming practices have significantly contributed to nature loss in the UK as well as being a major contributor to our climate emissions. To ensure we change these practices and protect climate and nature at the same time, farmers need significant support to change practices while also protecting their livelihoods.

The UK government have recognised the value of farming in achieving our Net Zero targets, and outlined agricultural aims in our 2023 Net Zero growth plan. They want to see a reduction in farming emissions by 12%, while maintaining or increasing key performance figures, such as an increase of 11% of milk production while reducing the overall number of cows by 21%. The government currently incentivise doing more climate-friendly farming through programmes like the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Countryside Stewardship.





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Co-Benefits: More sustainable farming

If you live in a rural area, there's a good chance your MP is keen to get to know more about farming in their area, if they don't know a lot already! They may already understand the importance of sustainable farming, but if not, don't worry. You can also try to promote some of the co-benefits to help to galvanise their support. These are the benefits to other important issues in your local area that do not directly relate to climate and nature protection, but can also improve other parts of communities, local areas, and even the wider economy.

A better deal for farmers

Many farmers are keen to farm more sustainably and to better protect local wildlife, but struggle to because of pressures to increase their yield to maintain economic viability and meet local demand. By better incentivising sustainable farming measures, through farm payments such as the Sustainable Farming Incentive, farmers are not forced to choose between sustainable farming methods, and competitive short term yields. However, the Sustainable Farming Incentive needs to be stronger, better funded and better targeted toward key areas of nature protection and sustainable farming practices. This will not only help to better develop our natural landscape, but also provide more areas of income for farmers nationwide. If your MP is keen to support farmers in their constituency, they may be more influenced by a focus on the benefits to farmers from financial incentives for sustainable practices.

Sustainable Farming for improved life in rural areas

In the long term, sustainable farming creates more resilient, robust, and long-term economic stability for farmers and, by extension, creates stronger rural economies via new jobs and increased income to suppliers and local markets. Additionally, reduced use of farming chemicals, pesticides, and intensive farming will create improved local biodiversity, air quality, and water quality. All these things will improve the lived experience of many local rural communities by developing local natural spaces, and improving the health of local communities. Combined, these policies can lead to healthier, happier, wealthier rural communities with better access to beautiful and clean green spaces. This is a great prospect for MP's of rural areas looking to create better health and wellbeing for their constituents.

Remember, get creative! You should always try to research your MP beforehand and then tailor your approach to them. Approaching your MP through the issues that they care about is the best way to have a constructive conversation about the issues you care about and will help you to create common ground.



What can we do now?

Systemic change is needed to allow farmers to produce more sustainably and meet the demand for creating high yields while protecting local nature and the climate. This needs to come through government-funded schemes and initiatives that fund farmers to use their land sustainably. Government funding for farmers is not a new idea, as the government currently provide funding to farmers to ensure they are able to financially continue their work even when external factors damage or reduce their crop yield. These funds include investing in some nature and climate-friendly farming through schemes like the Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI) and Countryside Stewardship (Higher Tier). However, funds like the SFI need to be made stronger and more targeted, and more funding needs to be made available for higher-tier stewardship and landscape recovery. Additionally, the government need to seek non-biased advice to support a shift to more sustainable farming practices, allowing for future funds to be better crafted and targeted.

The government are currently looking to tighten their spending, and therefore haven't committed to maintaining the agricultural budget of 2.4 billion a year that they were handed by the previous government. No only is it vital for sustaining farmland, but also uplifting rural economies and creating a stronger foundation for domestic food production in the long-term. Instead of reducing this budget, evidence shows the government should instead be doubling it (to £6 billion) and better developing the scheme to target key areas of development that ensure climate and nature friendly farming becomes the norm.

You could ask your MP to meet with you on your farm or with local farmers from the community to discuss the importance of funding for sustainable farming techniques and encourage them to support maintaining and the development of the agricultural budget to become the £6 billion needed.

You could also ask your MP to submit a question to the Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs asking them how they aim to maintain and develop further funding for sustainable farming practices.

If you live outside of England, your devolved administration will have control over most areas of farming policy. The Welsh Senedd, Scottish Parliament, and Northern Irish Assembly control legislation for sustainable regulations, nature-based farming payments, and some parts of international trade regulations. You can find out more information about meeting your MSP, MS, or MLA on the [resource hub](#), as well as information on which topics its best to speak to your different representatives about.





What can we do now?

Funding for improved farming standards and nature friendly practices won't make as much impact if we are importing food from countries without these practices, and undermining our farmers in the process. Since leaving the European Union in 2019, the previous and current government have been set the task of forming new trade deals to ensure we can meet national demand for certain foods and products. However, as [sustainable farming advocates](#) point out, without robust trading standards on the environmental, animal welfare and climate standards on these trades, we are undermining our nature-friendly farmers and exporting our environmental damage overseas.

The standards of farming of countries that we trade with internationally should meet domestic standards, and be enforced adequately. We should be aiming not only to support our country's farmers, but to also be an international leader in farming standards worldwide. However, these standards are needed urgently, before further trade deals are formed without them. Otherwise local farmers risk being undercut by international competitors with lower environmental standards.

You could invite your MP to meet to discuss the environmental regulations in place for British farmers and to advocate for these regulations in our international trade as well.

You could also ask your MP to submit a written question to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs Steve Reed OBE MP, asking what environmental regulations the new government intend to put in place regarding any future international trade of food.



Through connected action across the UK, we can build a community fighting for stronger government action on the issues that matter most for people and the planet. If you want to get involved, reach out to [The Climate Coalition](#) and [Hope for the Future](#) today.

