



**Written evidence submitted by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee
(FOF0006)**

**Read out: Chair at Oxford farming conference in a representative capacity, 9
January 2025**

The Chair, supported by the secretariat, attended the Oxford Farming Conference on 9 January 2025. The conference provided an opportunity to meet with key committee stakeholders and hear from expert speakers on a variety of agricultural topics.

The Secretary of State addressed the Oxford Conference, announcing a series of reforms including:

- Reiterating Labour's 50% public procurement manifesto promise, with the introduction of monitoring where public sector food comes from.
- A consultation on national planning reforms to make it easier to build farm buildings, barns and other infrastructure, due to launch in Spring.
- The launch of the ADOPT (Accelerating Development of Practices and Technologies) fund in Spring as part of the Farming Innovation Programme.
- Working with Ofgem to help free up capacity for electricity generation in rural areas.
- The Defra Secretary also reiterated the government's commitment to "uphold and protect our high environmental and animal welfare standards in future trade deals".

The full speech can be found [here](#).

The acknowledgement of planning reforms needed for diversification, including renewable energy, and a commitment to support food security, was welcomed by industry bodies such as the NFU. The Wildlife Trust responded, "the UK Government must not lose sight of the fact that supporting farmers to bring back nature goes hand in hand with growing food."



Devolved Ministers also addressed the audience in a session chaired by Charlotte Smith. Andrew Muir, Northern Ireland Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, DAERA, Huw Irranca-Davies, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Welsh Government and Jim Fairlie, Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, Scottish Government presented and took part in a question and answer session to provide the Devolved perspectives on the issues facing their respective agricultural sectors.

We also heard from producers talking about their response to changing farm policies. Phil Jarvis, Land & Estates Director, Albanwise Ltd and Neil Heseltine, Hill Top Farm. There was support on the principle of ELMS, particularly SFI, but concern regarding the uncertainty that producers face in light of the recent Autumn Budget announcements on the acceleration of the reduction in direct payments and reforms to inheritance tax.

Sessions attended included:

Partner Event: Growing Kent & Medway and Digital Dairy Chain "Place-based investment in food and farming innovation: What works?"

What are the critical components of an effective model of regional investment for innovating our food systems? As policy shifts towards place-based investment for public services, what makes regional funding for innovation in food and farming successful? Hear from Growing Kent & Medway and Digital Dairy Chain.

Session 1 Overview - Policy: enabling opportunity

Agricultural policy is in transition, in a world requiring increased food production, with demanding environmental priorities. This creates challenges for governments and farmers, yet also opportunities. This session will cover the major farming political updates at domestic and international levels and showcase how farming businesses are responding to these changing drivers.

Agricultural Transition: The Politics - Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Steve Reed will address the OFC25 audience before taking questions from the floor



Agricultural Transition: The Politics - Devolved Ministers

Chaired by Charlotte Smith, the Devolved Ministers will each address OFC, followed by a panel discussion and questions. This includes Andrew Muir, Northern Ireland Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, DAERA, Huw Irranca-Davies, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Welsh Government and Jim Fairlie, Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, Scottish Government.

Responding to Changing Policies

We hear from three speakers about how their work has developed positive solutions and opportunities for the agricultural and rural sector, despite facing challenges. Phil Jarvis, Land & Estates Director, Albanwise Ltd, Neil Heseltine, Hill Top Farm and Lisbeth Henricksen, Executive Director, SEGES Innovation APS Denmark.

Nourishing the Nation – unlocking the potential of British produce

How is one leading organisation, dedicated to food policy, shaping the future. We hear from Anna Taylor, Executive Director at The Food Foundation, and chief independent adviser to Henry Dimbleby for the National Food Strategy.

Please see [here](#) for the full programme of events.

It is proposed that the Chair and other interested Members attend the duration of the next Oxford Farming Conference which is due to take place 7 - 9 January 2026 focused on the theme of Growing Resilience.