

Royal Cornwall Agricultural Show

Future of Farming visit note

Date: Thursday 4 June 2026

Location: Royal Cornwall Agricultural Show, Wadebridge, Cornwall

Attendees

EFRA Committee

- Mr Alistair Carmichael MP (Chair)
- Jenny Riddell-Carpenter MP
- Jayne Kirkham MP

Purpose of the visit

As part of its ongoing thematic inquiries into the Future of farming, and Food supply chain resilience and fairness, the Committee visited the Royal Cornwall Agricultural Show.

Whilst at the show, the Committee met with representatives from the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), the National Farmers' Union (NFU), Farm Cornwall, and RABI – the Farmers Charity. The Committee heard from representatives across different types of farming, and different holding sizes.

The purpose of attending the show was to hear from stakeholders about the issues for farmers and farm businesses in Cornwall and surrounding areas. Much of the discussion focused on scheme design and on specific policies impacting farmers, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

CLA Roundtable

The Committee held roundtable discussions with members of the Country Land and Business Association (CLA). The members were from different farm and business types and included both diversified estates and businesses focussed on food production.

Access to advice

The attendees highlighted the need for reliable and easily accessible advice. They felt that the Future Farm Resilience Fund (FFRF) had been helpful, but too short-lived, and farms needed access to advice consistently and over the long term, not as a one-off. They felt that the Sustainable FARM Service recommended by Minette Batters in the Farming Profitability Review would be a good option. However, they noted that it was not just about the mechanics of accessing advice, it was also about having knowledgeable people who understood farming to provide advice.

They mentioned a local charity, Farm Cornwall (see below), who had provided a lot of support for local farmers, particularly those who could not afford land agents.

One CLA member explained that they had moved from supplying one supermarket for 20 years to supply direct to market. They felt that this change had been very positive, and had allowed them to become “price makers not price takers”. However, this had been a risky strategy, and took several years to become profitable. The member felt that, although it had worked for them, not all farm businesses were in the position to move to supplying direct to market, because they needed certain skills and advice to do so, and a level of financial security to be able to take that risk.

Funding and Scheme Design

A concern around the 2026 iteration of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) was that, although the first round is largely limited to small farms, little has been done to make the scheme easier for small businesses to enter. Attendees highlighted the need to monitor what schemes are open when, and for whom, as well as the potentially complex application process.

More broadly, the attendees felt that it was hard for them to plan ahead. They argued that, without knowing what schemes would be open next year in certain terms, they struggled to make decisions about their businesses. They could not be confident what funding, if any, would be available when. They noted that popular schemes like Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) were still limited to extensions of a certain number of years at a time.

Conversely, the attendees highlighted the ‘Forest of Cornwall’ scheme, which was administered by Cornwall Council, as an example of good scheme design. The attendees said that Cornwall Council had a lot of freedom over how the scheme worked, which allowed them to work with farmers to sense check ideas. It had

funded things like application advice for the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) and innovative agroforestry. The CLA members felt that there had been flexibility and an ability to experiment which is not there in nationally administered schemes.

The CLA members gave an example of where they felt there was a need for greater farmer input in Defra policy design. The Farming and Equipment Technology Fund (FETF) has a specification which each allowable item must meet. Some of the CLA members felt that some of the requirements were too onerous, and either made an item more expensive, less appropriate, or otherwise less suitable than another similar item.

New entrants and next generation

The attendees felt that there were young people who were interested in entering farming, but that a major issue was the lack of long-term certainty. For example, attendees argued that short-term FBTs could disincentivise investment.

Attendees argued that it was difficult to recruit young people, particularly because of a lack of transport links and a lack of affordable housing in rural areas. There were also concerns that the perceived closing gap between starting wages and those of more senior staff meant that young people might see limited opportunities to meaningfully progress.

Inheritance tax remained a concern, and the attendees felt it was a significant barrier to investment.

Other issues

A major theme was the feeling that supermarkets held a lot of the power in a supply chain, in spite of the Grocery Code Adjudicator (GCA) and Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator (ASCA). Supply chain fairness was one of the biggest concerns among CLA members, who felt that farmers ultimately could not speak out against suppliers because of the power imbalance.

Another concern for CLA members was the rising cost of doing business, including National Insurance Contributions, equipment prices, and input costs.

Another example of innovative local initiatives was a local school, Camborne Science & International Academy, who had chosen to move the catering for the school in-house, specifically to promote healthy eating and eating local produce. Attendees felt this could provide a good model for promoting British produce in public procurement.

NFU Roundtable

The Committee held an informal roundtable with representatives from the National Farmers' Union (NFU) to hear from them about farming in and around Cornwall. The representatives came from farms across the county, and from a range of farm sectors and sizes.

A major concern from the attendees was that there is a lack of long-term, strategic thinking about what is expected from farmers. They felt that farmers needed a clear direction of travel, rather than short term policies which may change. The attendees noted that it was important that decisions on direction of travel were not top down, and involved 'sense checking' with farmers. The NFU also argued that the lack of legislated targets for food production make it the 'poor relation' of environmental delivery, where the targets are enshrined in law.

Much of the discussion was around the relationship between food prices at the farmgate and food prices on the supermarket shelves. One attendee argued that the high welfare and environmental standards that apply to British food do not mean that there is no cheap food produced, but that the cheap food is produced elsewhere, offshoring the issues.

Attendees also mentioned the need to protect British producers in trade deals, and ensure that markets are not flooded by imports produced to lower standards. The example of Ukrainian eggs was given; farmers remain concerned that eggs produced to a lower welfare standard can be produced and sold more cheaply, but that the quality of the eggs was lower. They also felt that more could be done to promote British exports abroad.

In light of the ongoing conflict in Iran, the NFU is calling for the application of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) to fertilisers to be paused. The attendees argued that farmers in the European Union are paid direct support, making them more able to withstand shocks like rising fertiliser prices, whereas farmers in England are less able to withstand the rise in input prices. It was argued that, to be able to compete internationally, farmers in England could not afford to absorb the increase in fertiliser prices.

One attendee was concerned that 30by30 – the goal of protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030 – was a threat to farm businesses, depending on how the policy was implemented.

The attendees felt that some of the proposals in the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy were unworkable and illogical, and needed to be reviewed.

Meeting with Farm Cornwall

Farm Cornwall are a charity supporting people working in agriculture. Their primary goal is to work with farmers to improve mental health and wellbeing, by both

building a sense of community and dealing with the underlying issues which cause stress for farmers.

They identified some of the primary stressors for farmers as being debt (specifically debt servicing in the context of fluctuating markets and input prices), bovine TB, and the difficulties in being able to afford to retire.

They have formed community groups to help people working in isolating roles find support networks, including a network for women in farming, and a network for people aged 25 - 45.

They also provide advice to farmers on a massive range of topics to help them find a way forward. Other stakeholders that the Members spoke to at the show highlighted the importance of Farm Cornwall's work, and how much the community relies on them.

Other engagements

The Chair of the Committee spoke at a breakfast event with the CLA. Questions from the audience were around inheritance tax for farm businesses, the cap on agreement value under the 2026 iteration of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), and concerns over what was expected of upland farms in the coming years.

The issue of poor mental health in farming communities was also raised, and there was discussion about the need for a sense of community to avoid isolation.

The Committee also visited the RABI stand to hear about their new app, FarmersAid, which gives instructions on first aid for ten of the most common farm accidents. The app aims to support farmers in taking action while waiting for emergency services to arrive.