

Food Security is National Security

An Independent Discussion Paper on the Future of British Farming

This is Version 1.0 of an evolving discussion paper. It will be updated periodically as further conversations take place across the farming sector.

Executive Summary

Over recent weeks I have taken the opportunity to speak with farm and estate managers to better understand the commercial realities facing British agriculture.

I do not come from a farming background. My career has been spent in risk management, regulation and business transformation. Rather than assuming I understood the challenges facing the sector, I chose to listen first.

Although my conversations represent only a small sample, the consistency of the themes surprised me.

This paper is therefore not intended to provide all the answers. Instead, it seeks to highlight recurring commercial challenges and propose practical ideas for discussion that may help improve the long-term resilience, profitability and competitiveness of British agriculture.

Why This Matters

Feeding a nation is one of the most important responsibilities any country has.

A resilient farming sector underpins food security, supports rural communities, protects our landscapes and contributes significantly to the national economy.

British farmers are increasingly being asked to achieve multiple objectives simultaneously: produce affordable food, improve biodiversity, reduce environmental impacts and adapt to climate change. These are not mutually exclusive ambitions, but they must also be commercially achievable.

Without profitable farms, there can be no long-term investment in innovation, sustainability or food security.

What I Heard

Over the course of my conversations, six consistent themes emerged.

1. Profitability is under sustained pressure

Every discussion returned to the same issue.

The costs of fertiliser, seed, labour, insurance and machinery have risen significantly, while commodity prices remain largely outside farmers' control.

Margins are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, forcing businesses to carefully scrutinise every investment decision.

2. Farmers are not resistant to innovation

One of my biggest misconceptions was corrected almost immediately.

The people I spoke with were actively adopting GPS guidance, precision farming and technologies that improved productivity.

Innovation is welcomed where it delivers a clear commercial return.

The challenge is not willingness to change—it is affordability.

3. Climate resilience is now a commercial challenge

Changing weather patterns are already affecting yields.

Drought, flooding and increasingly unpredictable seasons are forcing farmers to rethink crop choices, water management and investment decisions.

Adaptation has become an essential part of business planning rather than a future consideration.

4. Administrative complexity continues to increase

Government support is welcomed, but navigating it can be challenging.

Several people described grant applications as time-consuming and increasingly complex.

Larger businesses often employ specialist advisers simply to manage compliance and funding applications, adding further cost to already pressured businesses.

5. Public understanding of modern farming has fallen behind

One issue I found particularly interesting was the difference between public perception and operational reality.

Modern precision farming allows fertiliser and crop protection products to be applied with remarkable accuracy, reducing waste while maintaining yields.

Yet public debate often assumes that farming has remained unchanged.

Improving understanding of how modern agriculture operates may help build greater confidence in the sector while encouraging more informed discussion.

6. Policy certainty matters

Perhaps the strongest overall message was not a request for greater subsidy but for greater certainty.

Farming is a long-term business.

Investment decisions made today may take years or decades to deliver returns.

Frequent policy changes make long-term planning significantly more difficult.

Areas for Discussion

The following ideas are offered as practical areas for consideration rather than definitive solutions.

1. Create a Single Digital Farming Portal

Government support should be easier to access.

A single digital platform could allow farmers to register once using their existing farm details and automatically receive:

- Personalised grant eligibility.
- Upcoming application deadlines.
- Required supporting evidence.
- Compliance reminders.
- Progress tracking.
- Links to relevant guidance.

Reducing administrative complexity would allow farmers to spend more time farming and less time navigating systems.

2. Simplify Grant Processes

Government could explore:

- Longer application windows.
- Simpler application forms.
- Standardised evidence requirements.
- Earlier communication of funding opportunities.
- Clearer guidance written in plain English.

The easier support is to access, the more effective it is likely to become.

3. Measure Success by Farm Profitability

A profitable farming sector should be viewed as a national asset.

Alongside environmental outcomes and food production, Government could consider monitoring the commercial resilience of British farms as a measure of policy success.

If businesses remain profitable, they are better placed to invest in new technology, environmental improvements and future resilience.

4. Develop County Water Resilience Plans

Water is becoming an increasingly strategic resource for British agriculture.

Rather than relying on a single national solution, each county could develop a long-term agricultural water resilience plan based on local geography, farming systems and climate risks.

Such plans might consider:

- Shared reservoirs where commercially viable.
- On-farm water storage.
- Rainwater harvesting.
- Water recycling.
- Precision irrigation.
- Soil management techniques that improve water retention.
- Drought-tolerant crop varieties.

Water should be recognised as strategic infrastructure for food production, just as roads, electricity and digital connectivity support other sectors of the economy.

5. Continue Supporting Proven Innovation

The conversations I had suggested that farmers readily adopt technologies where the commercial benefits are clear.

Government support should continue prioritising innovations that demonstrably improve:

- Productivity.
- Labour efficiency.
- Water use.
- Fertiliser efficiency.
- Environmental outcomes.

The objective should be to improve both profitability and sustainability simultaneously.

6. Improve Public Understanding of Modern Agriculture

There appears to be a growing disconnect between public perception and modern farming practices.

Supporting greater public understanding of precision agriculture, responsible input use and the commercial realities facing farmers could help foster more constructive discussions about food production and environmental stewardship.

Conclusion

I wrote this paper not as a farmer, scientist or policymaker, but as someone who believes good decisions begin with listening.

The conversations I have had leave me optimistic.

British farmers are innovative, commercially minded and deeply committed to producing high-quality food while caring for the countryside.

They are not asking Government to solve every problem. Rather, they appear to be asking for a stable policy environment, simpler systems and the confidence to invest for the long term.

This paper is intended as the beginning of a conversation, not the conclusion.

I intend to continue speaking with farmers, estate managers, agronomists, researchers and rural businesses across the country to deepen my understanding of the sector.

If these observations resonate—or if I have misunderstood any of the issues—I would genuinely welcome further discussion.

Only by listening to those closest to the land can we hope to build a farming sector that is commercially resilient, environmentally responsible and capable of feeding future generations.

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