



Confined in Cruelty

The stark reality of UK
farming



Foreword

Four years on from Brexit and in an election year our farmers are in crisis and our food system couldn't look less secure. This is a culmination of lack of any clear policy, deliberate government inaction towards implementing a sustainable, nutritious, and healthy food strategy and farmers facing increased cost due to inflation and the impacts of our climate changing.

In this report, we ask is our farming policy putting us on the road to humane and sustainable livestock farming? Farmers, policymakers, and citizens agree that change towards financially, environmentally, and ethically sustainable farming is sorely needed. However, conventional farming is continuing to degrade the environment, failing to provide a life-worth-living for animals, and is not financially viable in a post-basic payments fiscal landscape.

It is clear that the United Kingdom needs more sustainable farming, established through the UK's net zero plans, the National Food strategy, and devolved schemes like the Environmental Land Management payments. However, what sustainable farming looks like in practice is ill defined. In some cases, the word is used to advocate for further intensification by producing more meat on less land and at cheaper prices. Truly sustainable farming, however, must work with nature, restore the soil, and reduce inputs such as animal feed, energy, and water as much as possible.

Since leaving the EU we have not seen the promises of raising and protecting our welfare standards come to fruition. New trade deals undermine our existing standards and many proposed bills such as the Animals Abroad Bill and the Kept Animals Bill were dropped with a select few issues taken forward. We are now far behind our neighbours and set to lose our standing as a world leader in animal welfare. On top of this it is clear with the increasing intensification of farming and a lack of acknowledgment on the need to reduce our consumption of animal products we are not on track to meet our net zero and environmental targets. We are instead relying on yet to be discovered future technologies to fix existing problems, whilst ignoring the tangible solutions that we have now.

In the last five years the UK has seen an increase in factory farming, particularly in chicken and pig industries, alongside a decline in more extensive and higher welfare farming like beef cattle. The number of Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR), permits has risen for both poultry and pigs by 13% and 14% respectively since 2017, equating to an increased capacity of over 22 million animals on megafarms. This cannot continue, our land cannot take it, our rivers are already awash with superbugs from intensive farm runoffs and all of this it is affecting our own health.

The intentions of our current political frameworks are not achieving the outcomes needed for a humane and sustainable transition. Rather the status quo is allowing the growth of farming systems that degrade our environment, drive deforestation, jeopardise our climate and increase animal suffering on a mass scale. This report evaluates the political frameworks that are seeking to transform our farming industry against the data of what is happening on the ground right now, producing the highest-fidelity image of the State of the Nation for farmed animals in the UK to date. We also set out what the next government needs to do to achieve the transition addressing challenges for sustainability, animal welfare, environment and food security and showing there is no future for factory farming.



Tricia Croasdell
UK Country Director
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Cover: Broiler chickens drinking, in a windowless shed on a UK factory farm.
Credit: World Animal Protection / Tracks Investigations

Methodology

Much of the research compiled in this report was conducted by Ecostorm along with reviews of policy and regulations by World Animal Protection.

This data-rich report has drawn from available figures from [Defra](#), the [Environment Agency](#) for England, [Natural Resources Wales](#), The [Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(DAERA\)](#) for Northern Ireland and [The Scottish Protection Environment Agency](#) as well as the agricultural censuses conducted by each nation annually.

We have also drawn data from, amongst others, [Environmental Permitting Regulations](#) data and the Animal and Plant Health Agency's (APHA) [SAM database](#) which records registration of livestock species, as well as from the [APHA](#) itself.

Where there have been holes in the data, we have used Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and interviews with experts, as well as drawing from NGO and industry reports to endeavour to fill these. Not all FOIs have been answered at time of this report's release. Scotland, in particular, was unable to deliver its promised FOI response detailing the number of permitted farms in the country.

Our research takes the numbers further, comparing (where possible) 2023 data with 2017 data and including overlooked data on animals kept on 'small' farms that are often excluded from official figures.

For references please refer to the full report

Photo: Broiler chickens in transportation crate. Credit: Andrew Skowron



Key findings

- 1. The UK farming system is not high welfare.** The vast majority of animals farmed in the UK are factory farmed and cannot lead a life worth living. Intensive systems are far more prevalent than typically thought and the most factory farmed species, chickens, and pigs, are on the rise. We have little data about the factory farming of cattle, this needs to change so we can accurately monitor the numbers of animals in low welfare confinement.
- 2. There is no future for factory farming.** The environmental impacts of factory farming make it incompatible with a sustainable farming future. We need to transition farms to sustainable methods and stop building and expanding factory farms to address our greatest challenges today. High livestock numbers threaten our net net-zero targets increasing greenhouse gas emissions and driving deforestation to grow feed. Our environmental health is in decline unable to take the burden of phosphate and nitrate pollution from vast quantities of animal waste. The risk of future pandemics is raised by large numbers of genetically uniform animals kept in stressful close confinement, needing the routine use of antibiotics to maintain health which increases the risk of antimicrobial resistance already responsible for over a million deaths worldwide each year.
- 3. Continued expansion of factory farming is a barrier to food system transition.** The number of animals produced in low welfare; intensive systems is growing. These factory farms are contracted by large meat producers who set the standards and breeds used. Our food system is dominated by Big Meat companies like JBS, with few incentives to adopt more sustainable and higher welfare models of production.
- 4. Livestock farming needs to be at the centre of debate around food system transition.** Right now, the focus is on producing as much as possible for the lowest price, but this is costing the environment, people and planet. We need to consume and produce less meat, the remaining animals need to be raised in equitable, humane, and sustainable systems. They have the potential to give back to the land and support local biodiversity when agroecological and regenerative practises are used.
- 5. We need to rethink food security and move away from intensive factory farming systems.** Factory farms put human health at risk and subject billions of animals to cruel and inhumane conditions. The high population density of factory farms guarantees a steady supply of industry-limiting emergent diseases, some of which can spread to humans. They are also vulnerable to external market price hikes and subject to external shocks such as animal feed shortages due to climate related crop failures, war, conflict, and changes in international trade.
- 6. The government should end the building and expansion of new and existing factory farms.** This should include not only poultry and pigs (which currently have an intensive threshold recognised by the government) but also meat, dairy cows, and fish.
- 7. We need to set government targets and incentives to reduce meat consumption in line with Henry Dimbleby's food strategy,** in order to then transition to a truly humane and sustainable food system in the UK, with no new factory farms and transition existing farms to sustainable models.
- 8. Animal Health and Welfare payments and grants should have stronger incentives to move away from confinement systems,** increase the use of higher welfare breeds and reward farmers that give animals the environment, space, and access to outdoors needed to exhibit natural behaviours.

Intensive pigs farms have increased 14% in the last 5 years.

Intensive chicken farms have increased 13% in the last five years.

280 million animals are in intensive farms in the UK an increase of 23 million since 2017.

In addition to this, many animals will be kept in smaller factory farms, which fall beneath the size required for Environmental Permits, but are still kept under intensive welfare conditions. Due to loose regulations for smaller factory farms, we are 'data blind' to these animals.

Between 2017 and 2023, total cattle numbers fell by about 370,000, while the sheep and lamb total fell by about 1.8 million. Both animals that are predominately farmed with access to pasture and higher welfare conditions.



Photo: The investigation by World Animal Protection in July and August 2022 revealed overcrowded conditions in UK broiler farms, particularly a farm with sheds each containing around 41,000 Cobb chickens. Credit: World Animal Protection / Tracks Investigations

Introduction


This report aims to answer the question, ‘is our farming policy putting us on the road to humane and sustainable livestock farming’, by reviewing the current policies surrounding farming, food, and trade, alongside establishing the current state of livestock farming in the UK and the direction of travel.

Although we think of the UK as a green and pleasant land dotted here and there with small family farms, the fact is that our food system is highly industrialised and factory farming is on the rise throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. A 2022 report found that the UK had 1,099 farms that met the US definition of a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) otherwise known as a mega-far¹. 80% of Britain’s animals live on factory farms. This includes 90% of pigs and 95% of chickens killed for meat. This report finds that factory farming is on the rise throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. In 2017, the UK had 800 USA-style “Mega Farms”, defined as a farm with over 125,000 birds, 2,000 pigs or 750 breeding sows. A 2024 report found that the UK had 1,176 farms that met the US definition of a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) or mega-farm². This rose from 800 mega farms in the UK in the first 2017 report³, itself a 26% rise in intensive factory farming over the previous six years. However, this is only the tip of the iceberg.

There are many more smaller factory farms, that fall outside this definition but rely on high yielding breeds, close confinement in barns, pens or cages and high resource inputs such as water, animal feed and energy, that exist across the country and are also on the rise.

Large animal units housing pigs and poultry in the UK are legally required to hold a permit under the Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR)^{iv}. EPR permits are granted by the four national environment agencies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and farmers must apply for a permit to rear pigs or poultry intensively in an installation if they have more than:¹

 **40,000**
places for poultry

 **2,000**
places for production (meat) pigs (over 30kg)

 **750**
places for sow

¹ It’s important to note that these numbers are capacity figures indicating the maximum number of livestock allowed in each livestock unit. Farms can’t go over these limits, but they might have fewer animals at times.

An increase in the number of EPR permits is a useful way of tracking the number and growth of large pig and poultry factory farms in the UK. However, there is no definition for intensive meat and dairy cattle farms which means we have a lack of data and oversight for these farms.

Using EPR permits our research shows that there has been a considerable increase in large intensive pig and poultry units across the UK since 2017:

- In 2017, there were **1,612** pig and poultry units in the UK. This equates to an increase of **13%** over the past five years of confinement units. In 2023, in the UK, there are 268 permitted pig units, and 1553 poultry, totalling **1,821 intensive pig and poultry units**.

- In 2017, there were 236 indoor intensive permitted pig units in the UK and in 2023, there are 268 EPR pig units in the UK, which is an increase of **32 across the UK, a rise of 13.5%**.
- In 2017, there were 1376 poultry units in the UK and in 2023, there are 1553, so **an increase of 12.8%**.

This shows farming is moving further towards unsustainable and inhumane factory farming models rather than towards humane and sustainable farming. But this is only part of the picture, we will explore further the level of factory farming, animal welfare and the frameworks for farming here in the UK.

Photo: Pen full of dirty fattening pigs on UK factory farm. Credit: World Animal Protection / Tracks Investigations



The problem

Factory farms sacrifice the welfare of animals and the health of the environment in favour of high yields and big profits. They require fast growing and high yielding animals and achieve this through a mixture of genetic selection and specialist concentrated feeds. Growing too quickly can cause lameness, weakened or broken bones, infections and organ failure and reproductive difficulties for the factory farmed animals.

The welfare issues with factory farming are well documented. But factory farms are also problematic in a number of other ways:

The environment

Factory farms require large quantities of finite resources, such as feed, water, energy, and medications to keep barns holding hundreds to thousands of animals running. The overuse of these resources is putting ever increasing pressure on our environment. It is also risking our access to clean water, increasing our demand for electricity and driving deforestation to secure grain, soy, and other crop production for feed, much of which is suitable for direct human consumption.

They also produce huge amounts of air, water, and soil pollution. The majority of this pollution comes from the manure of hundreds or thousands of animals in close confinement. This manure has to be stored and disposed of and is often spread on fields as fertiliser but excess manure is frequently dumped into water ways or on land which impacts the local environment. Intensive pig and poultry farms have also been linked to biodiversity damage from ammonia emissions^v and polluting waterways^{vi}, as well as to detrimental impacts on local communities^{vii} including noise and odour pollution. The manure contains large quantities of nitrates and phosphates which can cause algal blooms and dead zones in waterways, killing flora and fauna. As the manure decomposes it create green house gases such as nitrous oxide and methane that have been attributed to around 10% of livestock emissions^{viii}.

On top of this these farms concrete over land that would have been pasture or arable in order to build barns and create loading

bays and feed and slurry storage, they also increase traffic with transport of the animals to and from the farm, along with deliveries of feed, medication and farming equipment and removal of slurry/manure. Potentially harmful bacteria and zoonotic diseases are also present in the pollution from factory farms, increasing the risks for local communities^{ix}.

Climate change

The IPCC's special report on climate change (2019) estimates that 8.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions come from animal agriculture. An often-overlooked statistic is that a further 6% stems from agricultural land use change, most notably deforestation to produce animal feed. This means that over 15% of all greenhouse gas emissions are the product of our broken food system. The UK imported £3.3 billion pounds of animal feed in 2022, and is a major contributor to deforestation of the Amazon, Cerrado, and other biodiversity rich regions, to produce grain and soy-based animal feeds. Animals in factory farms, such as broiler chicken and pigs, cannot eat grass and are only fed these intensive feed products.

Broiler production is one of the main livestock industries of the UK and is still growing. The majority of the industry uses fast growing breeds which need soy-based feed due to its high protein conversion rate. This makes the UK chicken industry reliant on soy imports from South America, frequently exposed to be responsible for both legal and illegal deforestation in biodiversity rich regions such as the Amazon and Cerrado. Excessive amounts of waste or slurry from factory farms also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.

Moreover, factory farming is driving deforestation* in South America, through its reliance on soya^x imported to the UK for animal feed impacted environments far beyond the UK.

Human Health

Factory farming is accelerating the loss of some of our most vital lifesaving medications - antibiotics. At the same time, increasing the risk of disease spread and the emergence of new zoonotic diseases. Both are down to the conditions on farms, thousands of genetically similar animals kept in cramped conditions, surrounded by their own waste, routinely mutilated, and bred to grow too fast and big, produce ever larger litters, even more milk, pushing their bodies past their physical limits. These are perfect conditions for disease and infection to start, spread and adapt.

To keep animals alive in these conditions antibiotics are given to whole herds to prevent inevitable illness, each time these

medications are used it increases opportunities for bacteria to gain and spread resistance, rendering these medications useless to fight the illnesses the bacteria cause. A recent report by World Animal Protection estimated nearly 2000 deaths a year in the UK are associated with the overuse of antibiotics in farming^{xii}.

An estimated 60% of known infectious diseases and up to 75% of new or emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic in origin (have transferred from animals to humans)^{xiii}. Many of the most recent pandemics, such as avian flu and swine flu, are associated with intensive poultry and pig production systems with poor animal welfare and animal husbandry standards^{xiv}.

Photo: Thousands of broiler chickens crammed inside a windowless shed on a UK factory farm. Credit: World Animal Protection / Tracks Investigations



The solution

The solution is to identify systems-change level food solutions which work for animal health, the environment, and serve to reduce expensive inputs for farmers.

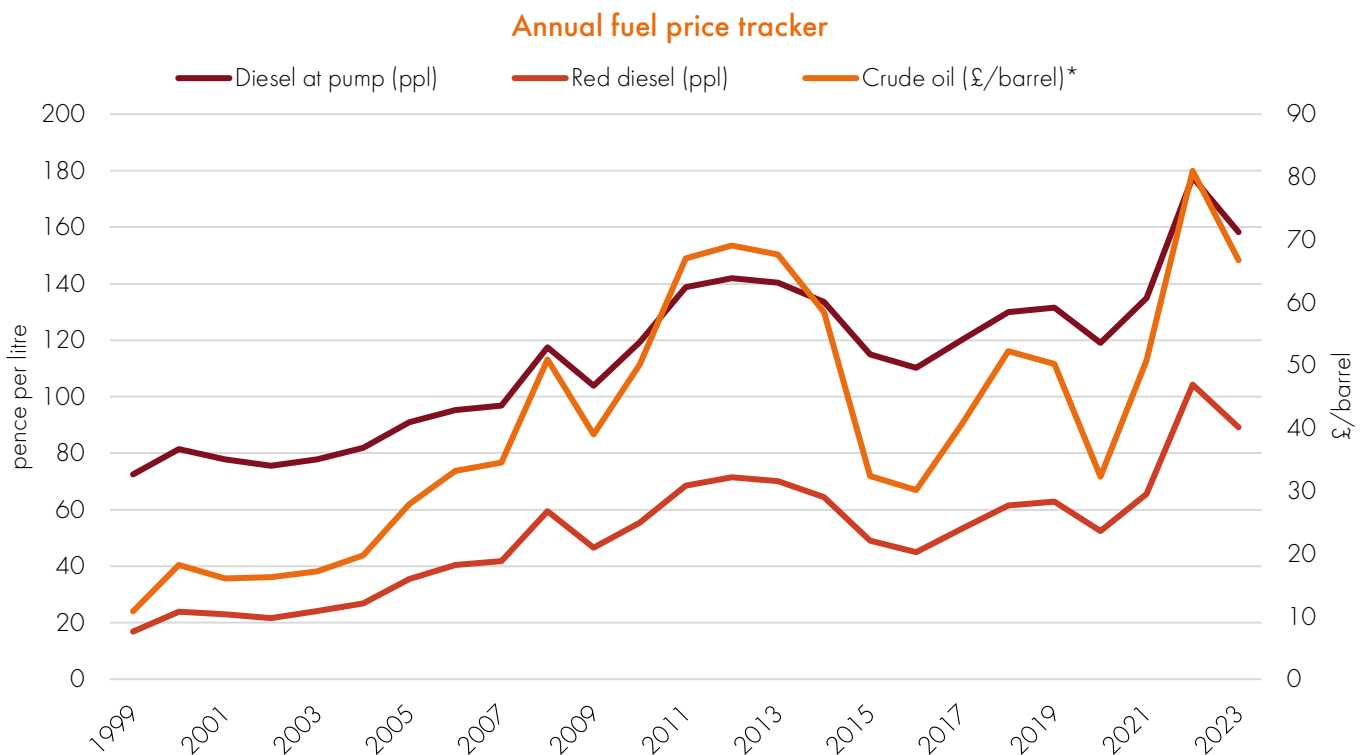
Farmers

Nature-friendly farming is regenerative, circular, low waste, agroecological, low input, resilient, locally contextual and diverse^{xv}. It seeks to achieve a balance between farm productivity and meeting climate and biodiversity goals by mitigating or removing the hidden costs of industrial agricultural production.

Farm businesses are extremely vulnerable to market forces, and are currently facing historic cost increases and volatility. Diesel, fertilizer, and pesticides, reached all-time high in 2022, and remain at historic levels along with price hikes for grains used in animal feed. The more inputs a farm depends on, the more pressure a farm faces from market forces beyond their control. Reducing dependence on any inputs, including medicines for animals, can vastly increase the sustainability and resilience of the farm business.

Henry Dimbleby sets out nature-friendly visions for a sustainable food system in his independent review. So-called 'sustainable intensification' utilises emerging technology to increase agricultural productivity without inflicting increased environmental damage. This allows land to be set-aside for rewilding and other projects necessary to meet climate, biodiversity and environmental objectives. Alternatively, the agro-ecology movement advocates for nature-friendly farming that works with nature rather than against it, reducing inputs like pesticides and fertilisers, reducing tillage to improve soil quality, and creating habitats which benefit nature. Henry Dimbleby's review posits a third '3 compartment model', blending both approaches to achieve the most beneficial trade off between agricultural yield and environmental gains.

An essential part of this is a payment scheme which pays farmers for producing environmental benefits, rather than just for owning land (like under BPS).



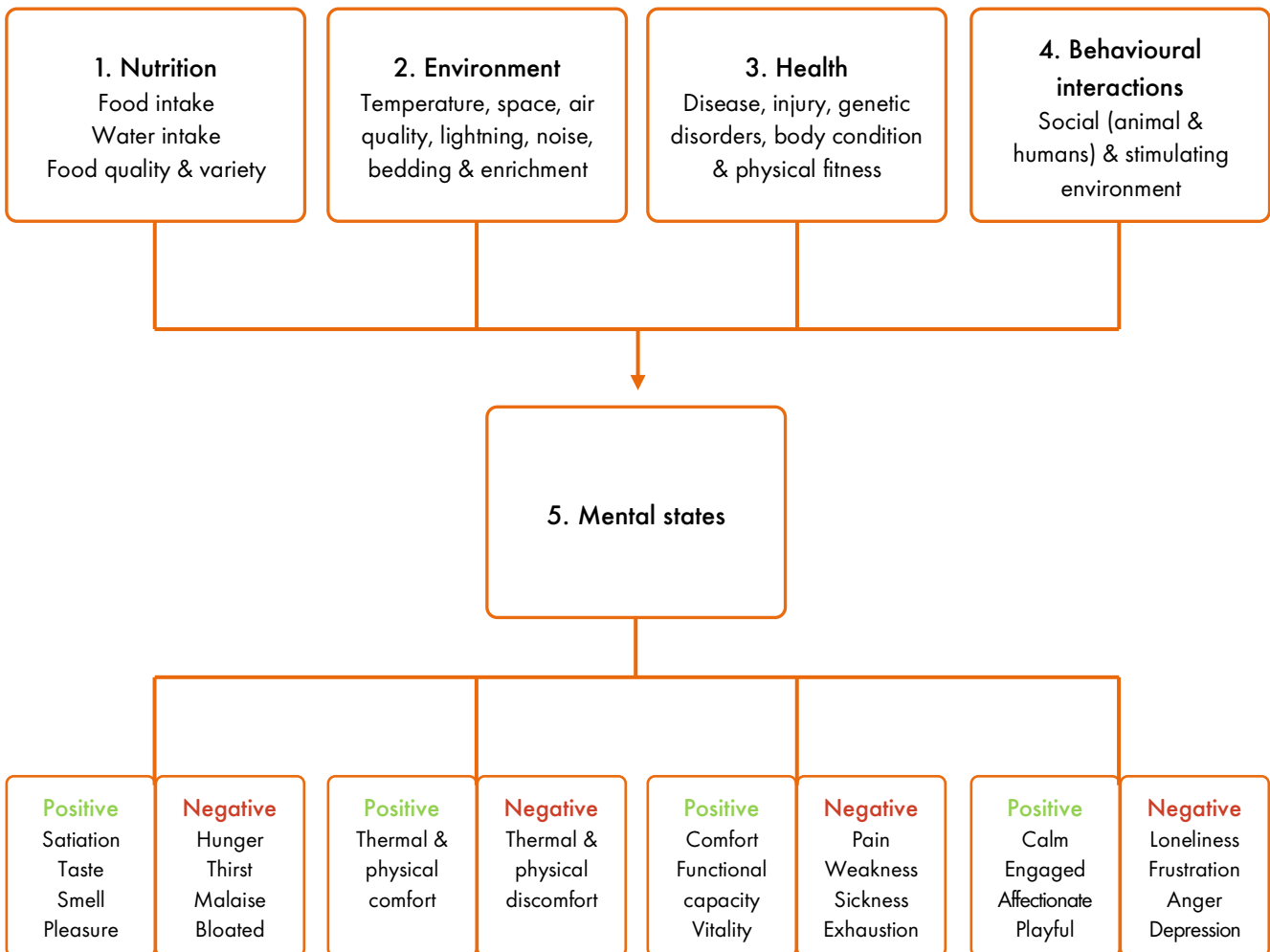
Source: Defra, DECC, OPEC

Animal welfare

The Five Domains model is a scientific framework designed to assess animal welfare. The model consists of four physical/functional domains and the fifth domain, mental state. This fifth domain represents the animal's experience of the four physical/function domains and defines their 'welfare state'. For example, if an animal has access to a wide variety of foods they may experience the pleasures of different tastes, smells, and textures – a positive welfare state. Conversely, if an animal has restricted food access, they may experience boredom due to a lack of stimulation or even hunger – a negative welfare state. An animal's daily experiences continuously contribute to their overall welfare. Just like humans, it's normal for animals to experience

some negative experiences (e.g., thirst), but the goal is to ensure that negative experiences are solved (e.g., by access to clean and unlimited water sources) so that an animal's overall welfare is positive. The Five Domains model emphasises an animal's mental state and ability to have positive experiences. It highlights that emotional needs are equally important as physical needs, and that physical needs can impact emotions.

By designing farms with these domains in mind, we can raise animals which thrive, expressing their natural behaviors in their built environment allowing them to live good lives. When combined with sustainable practises, it has the potential to create a farming system that works for all.



Climate change

Whatever model of a sustainable food system is envisioned, the role of livestock production poses particular challenges, due to our extraordinary appetite for meat and dairy and their relative inefficiency in meeting our nutritional needs. Animal source food supplies only 32% of our calories and 48% of our protein, yet 85% of the UK's total agricultural land footprint at home and abroad is committed to grazing and crops grown for animal feed, the vast majority of which supports the intensive farming of pigs and poultry. Over 40% of the UK's arable land and 50% of our wheat harvest is dedicated to animal feed, with a further 850,000 ha abroad used for soy meal alone, mostly in areas at high risk for deforestation and associated increased net carbon emissions and biodiversity loss^{xvi}.

Shifting to sustainable animal protein production and achieving sustainable diets in all cases requires large reductions in meat production and consumption, estimated by the Committee for Climate Change of between 20-50% by 2050. Agro-ecological models accommodate livestock 'raised in a high welfare, resource-efficient way, through pasture-based systems integrated, where appropriate, with crop production' and exclude intensive livestock production in factory farms. 'Sustainable intensification' meanwhile, relies on significantly reducing the potential for these high-welfare, nature positive systems, instead focusing on the further intensification of factory farming systems that have developed at the expense of animal welfare and environmental health.

At the intersection of animal welfare and sustainability, factory farming is simply incompatible with a sustainable food system. The answer is simply less, but better, meat.

Photo: Aerial view of fire being used to clear rainforest land in Brazil to grow agricultural crops such as soy. Credit: World Animal Protection



UK farming policy

Since leaving the EU the UK has progressed many policies that influence the direction of livestock farming in the UK. These policies are driven by the concept of public money for public good, sustainability and environmental protection or restoration and the net zero agenda.

Payments

As part of the agricultural transition new schemes aiming to use public money for public goods are being brought in across all four devolved nations. These schemes are at various stages with England's currently the most developed so we will focus on these in this report as a marker of the direction of travel.

The Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs)^{xvii} replaced the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in England after Brexit. CAP payments were largely criticised as subsidising landownership rather than focusing on farming practises and outcomes.

ELMs aims to use public money to reward farmers and land managers for environmentally sustainable actions, including reducing emissions and expanding the carbon sequestration potential of land.

Three environmental land management schemes have been introduced: the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), Local Nature Recovery (LNR) and Landscape Recovery (LR). The SFI is open to all farmers and will incentivise low carbon practices, for example, soil and nutrient management. LNR funds actions that support local nature recovery and deliver local environmental priorities. The LR scheme funds long-term land use change projects such as large-scale tree planting, and peatland restoration projects. Net zero is stated as a key priority of the three schemes.

The standards have the potential to aid transformation and encourage regenerative practises across already extensive farms, however the incentives do not go as far as to aid the transformation of intensive factory farms to extensive farming models, something that would need significant investment to remove factory farm structures or transform those structures to non-livestock farming. For intensive farms that have invested in large scale barns, concreted loading bays and slurry silos the measures aim to contain pollution and emissions from excessive levels of manure, such as new silos, rather than removing these structures and lowering stocking densities. Many of the environmental measures require land to still be functioning pasture to be

implemented. A key area of the scheme that needs to be improved is the integration of animal welfare, not just for livestock farms but also in relation to impacts on local wildlife.

There is not currently uptake across all farms and many farmers and landowners have found it confusing and difficult, it remains to be seen if they reach their desired targets for uptake. In January 2024 it was reported that just 224 payments^{xviii} had been made to date under the SFI scheme with many agricultural bodies claiming that the uncertain future of the scheme under different leaders has also been a deterrent. That same week an increase in payments was announced to incentivise greater uptake and in response to criticism that payments were not enough to support farmers^{xix}.

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway^{xx} is under development with many potential payments for welfare measures starting in the next few years. The Annual Health and Welfare Review was launched in 2023 as part of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and comprises of fully funded vet visits for farms. Equipment and Technology Grants launched in spring 2023, offering farmers grants towards the cost of a list of more than 100 items that improve animal health and welfare.

Net-zero agenda

The UK's net-zero target is written into law as an amendment to the Climate Change Act (2008)^{xxi} and the strategy^{xxii} to achieve net zero by 2050 covers many areas of UK industry including agriculture. It not only sets targets for green house gas reductions across industries but also set targets for carbon off setting called greenhouse gas removals (GGR), something that would require significant changes to land use management across the UK. Agriculture is considered by this strategy as one the hardest sectors to decarbonise and is referenced throughout as having residual emissions that require GGR. Innovation is once again a priority, meaning not all of the necessary technologies and practices needed to achieve net zero within this strategies framework currently exist. The strategy commits £100 million for innovation in GGR which includes planting trees and carbon capture and storage technologies and presents its third scenario of net-zero relying heavily on these innovations from 2040 onwards and references a new Farming Innovation Programme. It states that the majority of emissions from agriculture are from livestock and nutrient management and that agriculture is currently responsible for 11% of greenhouse gas emissions overall but Northern Ireland is responsible for a higher-than-average proportion at 29%.

The reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in farming is sought through 'more efficient farm practices', this usually means movement towards industrialisation of livestock farming despite these farming models requiring high energy inputs (acknowledged earlier in the strategy) and inefficient use of land for growing animal feed crops. It fails to acknowledge our responsibility for carbon emissions from deforestation and animal feed crop production overseas despite the fact that the majority of animal feed commodities are imported. This approach is at odds with transitioning to a nature friendly and high welfare livestock system for the UK and ignores the environmental damage caused by factory farming across the UK.

Food strategies

UK agri-food and seafood sectors create over £120 billion of value for the economy every year and employ over 4 million people. Food strategies, like regulations, are devolved however, England's food strategy covers many areas that apply nationally. In 2018, the UK government asked Henry Dimbleby, the co-founder of restaurant chain Leon and a non-executive director of Defra, to carry out a comprehensive review of our food system - 'the independent review.^{xxiii}' He was asked to design recommendations so that our food system: "Delivers safe, healthy, affordable food; regardless of where (people) live or how much they earn" and "restores and enhances the natural

environment for the next generation in this country." The scope focused on England but considers England's relationship with the devolved administrations (DAs), the European Union (EU) and other trading partners.

The key recommendations from Henry Dimbleby's report were largely ignored in the government's subsequent food strategy^{xxiv}. There is no mention of a need to reduce meat consumption and production. Investment falls short of the recommended £1 billion and there is a reliance on innovation to meet targets and improve sustainability.

The proposed measures in England's food strategy and the UK's net zero strategy do not go far enough to effectively transform our food system aiming instead to keep current production steady, ignoring the need for a dietary shift and move towards nature friendly farming. In many cases are actively encouraging maintaining current production or the expansion of industries that are currently profitable but are ultimately unsustainable, damaging to the environment and harmful to the animals farmed. The emphasis on innovation and future technologies means that current issues are not being addressed and current solutions are not being utilised. The government has missed many opportunities for meaningful policy and also fails to consolidate the regulations, policy and payment schemes into a coherent and consistent plan to incentivise and facilitate the needed transformation of our food system.

Photo: Two pigs at Planton Farm, a regenerative livestock farm in the Shropshire hills. Credit: World Animal Protection





Photo: A sow with a hernia laying down on bare concrete slats on a UK factory farm. Credit: World Animal Protect

Conclusions

Right now, the UK's regulations and policies are inconsistent and do not go far enough to ensure a truly humane and sustainable transition for the UK's livestock systems. We regularly state we are a world leader, but in reality this means being slightly ahead on a few areas rather than truly leading. We need to be early adopters of food strategies that work towards food security without further damage to our environment and contributing to the climate emergency. We should be a first mover for establishing an equitable, humane, and sustainable farming system that encompasses nature friendly farming and gives all animals involved good lives.

Unfortunately, the lowest standard farming methods are increasing with intensive chicken and pig production steadily growing. Areas of livestock farming such as cattle and sheep that have higher welfare standards and a greater potential to transition to regenerative agroecological farming methods are in decline. A clear indication that regulatory framework for livestock farming is not succeeding in raising welfare or achieving sustainable nature friendly farming.

Some things that hold us back are the misconception that we are far ahead of our neighbours in terms of animal welfare and health. In fact, we are steadily falling behind with many countries going further on banning cages, setting meat reduction targets and an EU wide ban on the routine overuse of antibiotics.

Another is the use of language that is open to interpretation. For instance, the word 'sustainable' is often used when referring to intensive farming methods as these use less land. However, it should be used for nature and environmentally friendly farming practices and the public will assume this is the kind of farming being referred to. Another word with no legal definition is 'regenerative', without a legal definition or threshold this can be widely used across multiple different methods of farming with varying levels of impact on soil health, biodiversity or the local environment, and welfare is often a secondary consideration.

Solutions

We need to rethink food security and move away from intensive factory farming systems that put human health at risk, subject billions of animals to cruel and inhumane conditions, are vulnerable to external market price hikes and subject to external shocks such as animal feed shortages due to climate related crop failures, war and conflict and changes in international trade. Factory farming while using less land for the animals themselves, uses more energy and water than extensive, regenerative, and mixed farming models. It also externalises land use and deforestation issues through imports of animal feed crops. The government should end the building and expansion of new and existing factory farms. This should include not only poultry and pigs (which currently have an intensive threshold recognised by the government) but also meat, dairy cows, and fish.

In order to then transition to a truly equitable, humane, and sustainable food system in the UK we need to set government targets and incentives to reduce meat consumption in line with Henry Dimbleby's food strategy. This would unlikely reduce livestock in the UK in the short term but would decrease imports through initiatives ensuring national and local government procurement (including schools, hospitals, prisons, and local councils) moves to sourcing food locally where possible and increasing plant-based sources of protein.

Animal Health and Welfare payments and grants will incrementally improve welfare and/or health of farmed animals,

however these payments have the potential to support meaningful transformation in the long term. As this scheme is still in development we recommend strengthening incentives that move away from confinement systems, increase the use of higher welfare breeds and reward farmers that give animals the environment, space, and access to outdoors needed to exhibit natural behaviours.

We are calling on the government to:

- Ban the building of new and expansion of existing factory farms.
- Use animal health and welfare payments to help existing farms move away from cages and high yield low welfare breeds.
- Recognise the need for a reduction in meat consumption in line with Henry Dimbleby's independent food strategy recommendations.
- Define what sustainable and regenerative farming is.
- Set a definition for intensive meat and dairy cattle farming.
- Centralise and release farming data based on farming system rather than numbers.


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