



DOUBLE THE AGRICULTURE BUDGET

Briefing Document

March 2024

For the sake of our climate, biodiversity, and the future of our food system, we urgently need to adopt more environmentally-friendly practices in our farming and food production systems. However, the UK government is failing to provide farmers with adequate financial support, advice and incentive to pioneer this transition.

We want the UK government to double its current agriculture budget to support a just transition to sustainable farming, in order to:

- provide enough financial support and reassurance to conventional farmers transitioning to more sustainable farming practices
- build resilient local food systems through investment in local food infrastructure and subsidising the public procurement of local food by local authorities
- support a new generation of farmers, growers and food producers into the sector by improving access to agricultural land and providing proper training and support for new entrants.
- ensure that the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have the funds to increase their own agricultural budgets proportionally to England.

Key facts and figures

- In 2019, the UK received **£4.7 billion** of CAP funding from the EU - around 80% of which was provided as 'direct payments' under the Basic Payments Scheme in all four UK nations.
- Although the UK Government has promised to stick to this budget, it is not being adjusted to inflation so the budget is technically smaller now than it was before we left the EU.
- For 2023/24 the total UK farming budget is **£3.6 billion**, and is split between all four UK nations according to the Barnett Formula.
 - England: **£2.4 billion**
 - Scotland: **£620 million**
 - Wales: **£340 million**
 - Northern Ireland: **£330 million**
- For comparison:
 - NHS budget: **£181.7 billion** in 2022-23
 - Trident maintenance budget: **Estimated £3 billion** for 2023-24
 - Government spent somewhere between **£310 - £410 billion** on dealing with Covid-19 emergency (in the context of a climate emergency we must find the resources to support a green transition in agriculture)

Why is it the government's responsibility to support farmers?

- Food is essential to life, and so securing a food system is of paramount importance.
- The UK government has a fundamental responsibility to secure a Right to Food for citizens. This is enshrined in international human rights law and is the second of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- It is therefore the government's responsibility to ensure that the UK can feed itself in a way which does not contribute to global warming or environmental degradation.
- Since WWII governments have subsidised the production of food in a way which has focussed on high yields and production of commodity crops, relying on fossil fuels and chemical inputs, at the expense of our soils, water, biodiversity and climate.

(continued overleaf)

- Agriculture is now one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases globally. Not only do we have to change the way we farm to tackle global warming, but we also have to address the climate emergency to secure the future resilience of our food system, as climate change means that we cannot continue to rely on imports of food from countries where drought and other extreme weather are already impacting crop yields.
- The UK Government is legally required to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It cannot achieve this without enabling a green transition in agriculture.

Why agriculture needs a bigger budget

- The need to transition to using more environmentally friendly farming methods is now beyond dispute, but new environmental policies are being implemented with little regard for farming livelihoods.
- Transitioning from high input chemically-intensive production to agroecological and organic farming cannot happen overnight - soils are too depleted, business models need adapting and farm management plans need changing.
- Farmers are having to bear the cost of this transition.
- Food produced in an environmental way will inevitably incur more costs to the farmer and the consumer. Government needs to recognise this and plug the gap.
- We can have a food system that works for farmers, consumers and nature - but we need a bigger budget to support a just transition.
- Public money invested into sustainable farming and local food webs will provide longer-term benefits (and savings) on things like public health.
- There are already many farmers and food producers who are farming in a sustainable way - but they don't currently receive government support - this often constrains their efforts to provide accessible and affordable food to their communities, expand their businesses, and employ enough workers on a fair wage.

What should a bigger AG budget be spent on?

- Higher payments for the Environmental Land Management schemes
- Advice, mentoring and support networks for farmers
- Capital grants for a transition to environmental farming
- Organic conversion and maintenance payments
- More specific support packages for small farms including payments for heritage varieties, rare breeds and population crops and payments for public engagement on farms
- Accredited Training Schemes and Living-Wage Apprenticeships for agroecological farming and land work in the Green Economy
- Grants for horticultural start-ups
- Grants for new farmers to access land and equipment
- Subsidising the public procurement of locally produced food by Local Authorities for schools, hospitals and other public institutions.
- Investment in local food systems, including farmers cooperatives

This financial support must go alongside policy measures to protect farmer livelihoods

- Trade rules which stop the importation of products produced to lower standards
- Trade rules to prevent farmers in the UK being undercut by imports of products which can be produced in the UK
- Regulation of supermarkets so they can't pay farmers less than what it costs to produce quality food
- Measures to reduce corporate control over our food system allowing independent farms to produce food for our local communities.
- Planning policies to facilitate sustainable agricultural workers dwellings and business infrastructure in the countryside.