



A manifesto for

Food, Farming & Forestry



Landworkers' Alliance (2023)

Introduction

March 2023 saw the highest rate of food price inflation in the UK in over 45 years.¹ Household dependence on food banks hit record highs in the following months, and in July it was reported that the number of food insecure households in the UK had doubled since 2021.²

Meanwhile, and despite supply chain disruptions and a national cost-of-living crisis, food retail giants continued to generate enormous shareholder profits. In 2023, the UK's two biggest supermarkets - Tesco and Sainsbury's - issued a staggering £1.2 billion in dividends.³

2023 also bore witness to the consequences of an overreliance on food imported from abroad. Poor harvests in exporting countries, combined with labour shortages and disruptions to global supply chains meant there was a dearth of fresh produce on UK supermarket shelves; prompting many to question the dependability of the UK's food supply.

1. Office of National Statistics, Cost of living insight, September 2023

2. Food Foundation, Food Insecurity Tracking July 2023

3. Unite the Union, Food Profiteering Stastics Update June 2023

Production costs for UK farmers and food producers, however, also spiked in 2023, with costs for growers reportedly increasing by as much as 27% in the space of a year.⁴

There is a clear need to support UK farmers through these volatile and uncertain times, not only in terms of economic viability, but also for the sake of the environment, too.

In the face of multiple but intersecting crises - from global warming and biodiversity loss, to public health and inequality - the urgency to build a more equitable and resilient food, farming and land-use system that works for both people and planet has never been greater.

There is a golden opportunity, and a responsibility, for a new UK government to reboot the UK food, farming and land-use system, and implement policies that will support farmers, regenerate nature, and provide affordable, nutritious food for all.

4. NFU, The real impact of cost pressures on the horticulture sector Novemebr 2023

Our Vision

We have a vision for a UK food, farming and land-use system which is grounded in the principles and practice of agroecology, food sovereignty, and sustainable land-use.

A system in which:

1. Everyone has access to nutritious, ecologically produced and culturally appropriate food, regardless of their location, income, identity or legal status.
2. Enough food is produced in the UK to reduce reliance on volatile global supply chains and build resilience in our food system
3. Farmers and food system workers are paid fairly and earn a decent living wage
4. More people are engaged in dignified and secure work in farming, food production and land work
5. Public health is treated as a holistic issue which includes improving public access to nutritious food and nature
6. Food production and other land-based industries function within the Earth's planetary boundaries; regenerating ecosystems and mitigating the impacts of global warming.

What do we mean by 'Agroecology'?

Agroecology is an approach to farming and land management which is place-based and deeply integrated with its local ecology, landscape and human communities.

Fundamentally, agroecology is based on applying ecological concepts and principles to optimise interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment, while also encompassing the social, political and cultural elements needed for a just and equitable food system.

What do we mean by 'Food Sovereignty'?

Food sovereignty underpins a vision for a food system in which everyone has access to affordable, ecologically produced and culturally appropriate food.

A food sovereignty approach to food systems is grounded in six principles:

- 1) Food for people (not profit)
- 2) Localised food systems
- 3) Centring local control
- 4) Valuing food providers
- 5) Working with nature
- 6) Building skills and knowledge.

1. Access to Good Food for All

We have a vision for a UK food system which is grounded in a fundamental Right to Food. This would mean that everyone would have access to affordable, sustainably produced, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

The UK has already ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which enshrines a right to food within it, but further action is needed to ensure this right is realised by people living in the UK.



Credit: Clem Sandison

1.1 A legally enshrined Right to Food

A legally enshrined Right to Food would ensure that no one is denied access to nutritious, sustainably produced and culturally appropriate food based on their location, income, identity or legal status. This legislation should lay the groundwork for all future government food policy, and an independent regulatory body should be established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of policies and programmes and be responsible for holding the government accountable for infringements. **A legally enshrined Right to Food would bolster progressive policies such as:**

Universal free school meals. This would ensure that every child in both primary and secondary education has access to good food without shame or stigma.

Dynamic public procurement systems. These would enable local authorities to source seasonal, nutritious and culturally appropriate food from local agroecological producers to supply schools, hospitals and other public institutions.

Funding for community kitchens. This would enable more communities - especially young people, the elderly and marginalised groups - to have access to good food and improve skills and knowledge around growing, preparing and cooking food.

1.2 Income-responsive solutions to household food insecurity

Everyone has a right to buy food and feed their families with dignity. Relying on food banks and charity however, is an undignified, short-term solution that necessitates further interventions to tackle the root causes of household food insecurity. Insecure work and insufficient income are closely tied with food insecurity, therefore, income-responsive solutions will empower households to afford the food they need for the longer term.

Increasing wages in line with inflation is essential to ensuring people have enough money to purchase good food and are not forced to rely on cheap food which is produced at the expense of farmers and the environment.

Making welfare more accessible and increasing social security payments will help to provide a living income to meet people's costs of living, including healthy food, housing, and transport.

Issuing statutory cash grants that are accessible through every local authority will help to support people in financial crisis.

1.3 An increase in peri-urban food production

Vegetables and fruit should be produced as close as possible to the people who will eat them so that the produce they're eating is fresh, and packaging, transport and refrigeration needs are minimised. Urban and peri-urban food production not only enables shorter supply chains, but offers people in cities the opportunity to grow their own food. We have a vision for a 'Food Zones' approach to urban fruit and vegetable supply, in which the majority of produce is sourced from urban, peri-urban and rural hinterland production, with minimal produce supplemented through national, European and global supply chains where appropriate.

Local authorities should be required to have a food strategy and related policies that incorporate opportunities for identifying and expanding urban and peri-urban agroecological farms and market gardens.

Mapping existing urban and peri-urban land and assets available for farming and food system infrastructure will help local authorities to identify opportunities for urban and peri-urban food production. This information should be made publicly available.

Local authorities should implement a process for matching up available land with new entrant farmers

and community organisations, including local agricultural colleges, community gardens and allotment organisations.

Community Wealth Building and local economic strategies should include ambitions to increase peri-urban food production.



2. A Resilient UK Food Supply

The UK currently imports around half of its food from overseas, with the greatest deficit being vegetables (46% imported) and fruit (84% imported), many of which are grown in countries whose agricultural systems are becoming increasingly vulnerable to global warming.

With proper investment to boost UK production and support localised food systems, alongside robust trade rules which protect UK farmers, we can build a more secure and resilient food system.



2.1 Horticulture Strategy

To meet the UK's demand for fruit and vegetables a massive scaling up of horticultural production is required. We have a vision for every village, town and city to be supplied by a dense network of agroecological market gardens and farms supported by an ELMS scheme for horticulture which is sufficiently resourced to incentivise conventional growers to transition to more sustainable farming practices.



Replacing the Fruit and Vegetable Aid Scheme carried over from the European Union, offers an opportunity to support a much wider range of growers. Eligibility for the scheme should be extended to enable growers who also sell through multiple local routes to market to benefit from the F&V Aid Scheme to join, thereby encouraging a more localised and regionalised approach to production and distribution.

Reconfiguring the Farm Equipment and Technology Fund to allow greater flexibility on how capital grants are spent. Highly productive horticultural holdings can be established on relatively small areas of land, but require significant capital investment in infrastructure and equipment, such as glasshouses or polytunnels, fencing, irrigation, and machinery.

Establishing a Horticulture Capital Grants Scheme will help meet the needs of horticulturalists who often lack the resources or secure tenure to invest in the infrastructure needed to run an efficient and successful enterprise. The availability of capital grants, such as those available through the Scottish RPA Capital Grants Schemes, would enable more market gardens to develop. The schemes would also provide extra support for existing businesses, wanting to increase capacity, and community-based social enterprises.

2.2 Trade policy

We have a vision for trade in which international trade agreements protect British farmers and producers so that they are able to continue to produce food to high standards, and which also respect the sovereignty of farmers and food producers overseas. Food that can be produced in the UK should be produced and consumed here, and exported only when it is ecologically and socially beneficial to do so.

Higher import standards on animal welfare, production and labour conditions would ensure that UK farmers and producers aren't undercut by lower standard imports.

Seasonal tariffs should be applied to imported produce which can be grown in the UK. These tariffs should be applied incrementally as the domestic production comes into season to protect farmers when supply increases locally.

Ecological footprint tariffs or border tax adjustments should be used to disincentivise produce with a high ecological and carbon footprint, including from production, transport and packaging.

2.3 Localised food systems

In order to improve the UK's food security and create new economic opportunities for farmers, rather than looking towards new trade agreements, government should be investing in localised and regional food systems and opening up new routes to market for farmers via short supply chains. Not only will more localised food systems help but they will also create more job opportunities for local communities.

Set a national target for localised supply chains to have 30% of market share of food retail by 2050. This target would then feed into local food strategies and be implemented on a regional level.

Local Food Infrastructure Fund to provide government-level financial support for local food infrastructure such as regional processing facilities, abattoirs, and outdoor markets. This could be modelled on the Canadian Local Food Infrastructure Fund.

Invest in food hubs to give producers options to sell outside the dominant supermarket supply chain and make it easier for communities to access locally produced food.

3.

Fairness in the Supply Chain

The UK's food system is dominated by food retail giants who are not offering producers a fair deal. The vast majority of market share is concentrated in the hands of just a handful of supermarkets, meaning they are able to set their prices against their competitors, which ultimately results in the lowering of farm gate prices and squeezing wages along the supply chain.

We recognise that supermarkets will continue to play a role in food retail in the UK, but we have a vision for supply chains in which farmers are paid a fair price for their produce and all workers earn a living wage.



Credit: Nigel Akehurst

3.1 Redistribute corporate food profits to ensure better wages for farmers

We envision a food system in which supermarkets' primary function is to provide affordable, nutritious and sustainably produced food, and in which shareholder profits are not generated at the expense of farmer livelihoods, workers wages and community wellbeing.

Legislation should be introduced which requires supermarkets to pay extra to fund worker wage increases. This could follow a model such as the Fair Food Programme in the USA.

A National Living Wage for farmers should be funded by higher tax rates on the corporate windfall profits of supermarkets and large food manufacturers.

An Agricultural Wages Board should be re-introduced in which farmworkers' representatives, farmers' organisations, and retailers can jointly negotiate the pricing, resourcing, and worker pay of the agricultural sector, chaired by the state. This board should seek to redistribute value from large retailers towards supporting farmers and farmworkers.

3.2 Regulate supermarkets

The UK's food system should be a fair playing ground for producers and retailers of all sizes, and so to ensure a diversity of supply chains which support smaller producers, supermarkets must be regulated fairly.

Planning policy should be used to limit the proliferation of supermarkets. UK Government, through HM Planning Inspectorate, should support Local Authorities in refusing planning permission to supermarkets in cases where the local food economy will be undermined by unfair competition.

Competition laws should not be relaxed for large food retailers, and government should actively seek to reverse the loss of market share by smaller retailers.

The Grocery Code Adjudicator remit should be extended to include market relationships along the supply chain, not just between supermarkets and their direct suppliers.

A government regulatory body should be established to ensure fair pricing of products, akin to the Milk Marketing Board. This would ensure that farmers are paid a fair amount for their produce.

3.3 Secure rights for migrant workers

Since Brexit the UK government has been forced to recognise the essential contribution of seasonal migrant farmworkers to UK horticulture through the establishment of the Seasonal Worker Scheme (SWS). However, this migration route is restrictive and often costly for workers, and as a result has built-in design flaws which increase the risk of exploitation and forced labour. Debts incurred in recruitment and visa sponsorships tied to specific employers are major drivers of forced labour. With robust policy to uphold and protect the rights of migrant workers the UK could lead as a global example of welcoming and rewarding migrant labour and the important role it plays in our food system.



A revised Seasonal Worker Visa Scheme. Charges for visa applications should be abolished, and visa holders should not face any up-front costs for their journey. Workers should not be tied to specific scheme operators and the farms their visa sponsor supplies to, and a mechanism should be established for workers to change their visa sponsor and transfer to any farm participating in the SWS. The 6 month time limit should also be abolished and workers should be allowed to stay in the UK for as long as agricultural work is available to them. Paths to settlement and citizenship should be opened in order to permanently secure a stable agricultural workforce.

Funding for labour market enforcement should be increased to ensure regular inspections of SWS workplaces. There should be a separation of immigration enforcement from labour market enforcement so that all workers can safely report abuse regardless of immigration status, and abusive practices should be explicitly banned.

4. More Jobs, Better Livelihoods

We have a vision for a food and farming system in which more people are engaged in rewarding, dignified and secure work, producing good food for their local communities.

Agroecological farms have been found to have higher employment levels than conventional farms, however, new entrants into agroecological farming face numerous barriers and challenges; from access to land, to access to capital and training.



4.1 Education and Training

The majority of agricultural education in the UK focuses heavily on 'conventional' farming. Change is needed from the school curriculum through further and higher education and continuous professional development. The New Entrant Support Scheme is a perfect opportunity to invest in agroecological training and education.

Public funding for institutions which combine classroom learning and qualifications with on-farm training would ensure more people would be able to access these comprehensive agroecological training courses.

Invest in mentoring schemes which are invaluable in guiding new entrants through the early years after start-up. The funding model of Wales' Farming Connect and Scotland's Farm Advisory Service offer good examples for what might be possible in England.

Fund internships in the green economy. The DWP's Kickstart Scheme enabled many farming businesses to offer paid work-based training. Government should consider a replacement to this scheme which focuses on jobs in the green economy, including agroecological farming and sustainable forestry.

4.2 Access to Land

We envisage a future in which anyone with the skills and dedication can set up an ecologically and financially sustainable farm business; where security of tenure enables tenant farmers to invest in their soil and infrastructure; and pre-existing wealth is no longer a prerequisite for accessing land to grow food.

Support Farm Incubators, which allow new entrants to start new businesses in a supported environment with shared infrastructure, equipment, market access, peer support and training. Government should take inspiration from France's RENATA network of 58 farm incubators, which is 50% publicly funded.

Support land-matching services to help new entrants access land whilst allowing retirement-age farmers to take a step back, while also maintaining a degree of involvement. The Scottish Land Matching Service and Wales' Start to Farm are both examples of long term publicly funded land matching services which include legal support.

Publicly owned land could provide a first step for new entrant farmers to produce food for the local area. County Farms could be used to support multiple small enterprises with shared infrastructure, and could be used to produce food for local schools and hospitals. However, they are all too often sold off to private buyers by resource stretched local authorities. Protection could be readily achieved by amending Section 8 of the 1925 Allotments Act so that County Farms are made subject to the same protections as statutory allotments.



4.3 Financial support

We see a future where those seeking to set up ecologically sustainable farming businesses can access the finance they need to start up and become economically sustainable, and where the public goods they provide are properly recognised and access to finance is no longer a barrier.

Low interest land-purchase loans for new entrants could operate a modified 'help to buy' scheme for new entrants looking to start agroecological businesses; with business plans forming part of the application process and loan rates contingent on active farming.

Issuing business grants and loans for new entrants, which are contingent on maintaining certain environmental standards whilst producing food. The Real Farming Trust's Loans for Enlightened Agriculture Programme, is an excellent example of how to combine loans, grants and mentoring to those with the highest ecological and social standards; but they cannot meet the high demand for their products. Government should take inspiration from this, to see how a publicly funded scheme based on a similar model could meet this demand.

4.4 Housing and Planning

A progressive planning system could promote a living, working countryside where ecologically sustainable businesses thrive and create green jobs. Planning rules should proactively support the establishment of agroecological farms and low-impact housing for landworkers, and planning authorities should not discriminate against small farms and should have good knowledge of the needs of small mixed farms and horticulture enterprises.

Professional development training for planning officers would build understanding about the value and viability of small-scale, agroecological enterprises, and their need for infrastructure and on-site accommodation, as well as supplementary planning guidance on the same topic.

Remove the 5 hectare threshold for agricultural permitted development rights, and replace it with a requirement for evidence of an existing or proposed business.

Make it easier for farmers, market gardeners and foresters to get consent to live on their land in Rural Workers Dwellings, and ensure the rural worker occupancy condition remains. The test for “essential need” should account for lack of affordable rural housing.

Develop a One Planet Development Policy for England to permit new ecologically beneficial small holdings, based on the learnings from over a decade of this policy in Wales.

4.5 A just transition strategy for food and agriculture

We recognise that a transition to more ecological and ethical farming practices and shorter supply chains will require a government strategy to support workers employed in precarious fossil-fuel based and high-input agricultural industries and enable them to find secure employment in other more sustainable sectors.

Government should support unions to develop clear strategies for transitioning away from jobs in industrial agriculture, such as in intensive livestock farming and agrichemical manufacturing, towards jobs in the green economy such as agroecological farming, forestry and land work.

5. Healthy Communities

Health is a fundamental human right, and it is the government’s responsibility to implement preventative policies and provide accessible programmes that improve the public’s physical and mental health.

According to the National Food Strategy every year the Government spends billions of pounds on treating dietary related ill health. However, a more strategic approach to public health which recognises that access to nutritious food and nature are fundamentally linked to people’s health and wellbeing could provide opportunities for more efficient and cost-effective healthcare policies.



5.1 Cross-departmental strategy

The current approach to healthcare policy remains largely in isolation from policies around food, farming and the environment. We're advocating for a more cross-departmental approach which would enable a government-wide concerted effort to address the UK's multiple health crises.

Research the potential for cross-departmental collaboration between Defra and the Ministry of Health which could allow relatively modest short-term investment in food and farming to result in huge long-term savings on future health care costs.

Maximise the impact of the Healthy Start Scheme by expanding eligibility to all families on Universal Credit and equivalent benefits with children under 5 years old, as recommended in the National Food Strategy, and committing to a promotional campaign to increase uptake.

Publically funded and supported social prescribing. Agroecological market gardeners, farmers and foresters are well placed to offer valuable social prescribing services. However, proper funding, infrastructure and staff training are essential for the community groups, farms and gardens who are hosting those who benefit from social prescribing.



5.2 Public engagement on farms and access to nature

In order to improve public health, farms should be supported to provide their local communities not only with fresh and nutritious food but also access to nature and wildlife, and opportunities to build skills and knowledge around where their food comes from, how its grown, and how to prepare and cook it.

Public engagement on farms is a public good and should be enhanced in the Environmental Land Management Schemes, due to its power to transform people's relationship with food, farming and the countryside. Farmers and landowners should be paid to offer a range of public engagement options.

Introduce a Right to Roam which respects farming livelihoods. If landowners are paid for nature recovery it should be a requirement that the public has greater access. However, this access must be supported by educational schemes to increase public understanding of the need to protect wildlife and farm animals from disturbance, especially during breeding season.

Support community-owned land to host educational and leisure activities, such as open days, school visits, farm stays and courses to build relationships between the public and farmers.

People from marginalised backgrounds and with specific health issues should be supported to access nature. Incentives should be offered to farmers to encourage such groups onto farms.

Urban and peri-urban green belt land should be prioritised for payments for public engagement and access as these are the areas closest to where the UK's majority-urban population live.

6. Healthy Planet

High-input industrial farming is a key driver of global warming, land-use change and biodiversity loss.

There is an urgent need to transition to more nature-friendly agroecological farming and land-management systems which produce enough food while also regenerating soils, creating habitats for wildlife and mitigating global warming.

With ambitious policies that build on the emerging Environmental Land Management schemes in England and provide reassurance and sufficient incentive to farmers, we believe this transition will be possible.



Credit: Clem Sandison

6.1 Supporting farmers to adopt agroecological farming practices

It is essential that the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) continues to be developed in England to provide certainty and support for farmers as they transition away from BPS payments. The principle of paying ‘public money for public goods’ is important, and all farmers and growers who are delivering public goods should benefit from ELMS, regardless of how much land they manage.

Remove the 5ha eligibility threshold which currently prevents small scale agroecological growers from applying for ELMS. Subsidy claims should be tied to evidence of commercial trading to ensure payments are only available to small-scale commercial enterprises rather than hobby farmers and gardeners.

Payments for agrobiodiversity to support a transition away from monocultures and specialised breeds towards more diverse and resilient farming systems.

A specific set of measures for market gardens which are more intensive than other forms of agriculture. Conventional horticulture will require higher payment rates in ELMS than

broad-acre agriculture to incentivise participation, while small scale market gardens will require non-area based payments to compensate for the multiple layers of public goods delivered within a small area.

6.2 Seed legislation

There is a great opportunity, but also a responsibility, to align new seed policy with a wider vision for UK agriculture with particular focus on climate change and loss of biodiversity. A Plant Varieties and Seed Strategy should enable breeding efforts to revive landraces and develop diverse and locally adapted plant populations, recognising that farmers and seed saving networks play an extremely important role.

Modification of uniformity and conformity tests to allow the marketing of non-uniform varieties and populations.

Simplification of testing requirements for agroecological biodiverse seed to be listed on the varieties register. Proportionate regulation needs to reflect the differences both in terms of size, economic importance, and also levels of risk, between industrial scale agriculture, small to medium scale low input agro-ecological and organic production and the home garden sector.

R&D funding for the breeding of agrobiodiverse seed. This could be through grants for seed houses and research programmes and specific incentives in public money for public goods payment schemes.

Regulation and restriction of genetically modified and gene edited crop production to prevent cross pollination of GM to organic seed production and organic farmers.

6.3 A bigger and more ecological forestry sector

There is an opportunity for the UK to combine ambitious tree planting targets with the creation of a thriving ecological forestry and woodland industry. This would require a properly trained workforce and would minimise our land -use footprint overseas, helping the UK to become more self-sufficient in timber products and meet net zero targets.

Higher standards on timber imports to support the UK forestry and timber industry and proper monitoring of certification schemes so that only the most sustainably produced timber and pulp products are allowed to enter the UK.

Set ambitious targets for woodland creation and ensure these woodlands have planting and management plans that provide for multiple uses into the future, including short-term softwood production to meet demand.

A comprehensive and fully funded Forestry and Woodland Worker Training Programme to build a woodland and forestry workforce and ensure new woodlands are planted and managed responsibly and effectively.



6.4 Less but better meat

In order to take meaningful steps to mitigate global warming and transition to sustainable land-use we envision a 50% reduction in UK meat consumption. To reconcile animal welfare, nutrition, and environmental needs, we need to transition to a smaller-scale livestock sector which makes the most of food waste, by-products and biomass inedible to humans, and which prioritises UK cropland for growing food for human consumption.

A moratorium on all new intensive pig and poultry farms combined with more government support for smaller-scale sustainable livestock farms.

Incentives for keeping native and rare breed livestock which are better suited to smaller-scale low input systems.

Explore sustainable animal feed alternatives. Develop policies to increase the sustainable supply of animal feed derived from co-products, insects and food waste.

A strategy to double UK pulse production and provide a sustainable domestic plant-based protein supply to alleviate pressures on overseas land-use.

6.5 Overseas finance for agroecology

The UK should focus overseas development investment on building resilience through investing in local infrastructure and capacity building to support local food supply chains and small scale, diverse agriculture and forestry systems. Supporting global food sovereignty must be a unified aim across foreign investment, development funds, trade policy and our role within international institutions.

Directing finance from the Climate Adaptation and Loss and Damage packages and from the UKs commitments at the Convention on Biodiversity towards supporting agroecological training overseas.

Supporting local food initiatives overseas to promote culturally appropriate food self-sufficiency, rather than investing in corporations which destroy local food systems.

Prioritising small and family farms and local governance models that enable small producers and communities to retain profits and control, such as through cooperative ownership models.



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Website: landworkersalliance.org.uk

Email: info@landworkersalliance.org.uk

Front cover image credits clockwise from bottom left:

OrganicLea

Oli Rodker

Clem Sandison

The Kindling Trust