

The Landworkers' Alliance's Top Five Demands for the New 2025 Government



In the first 6 months of 2025, we want the new government to...

1. Double the Agriculture Budget

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 reassurance to pioneer this transition.

We want the UK government to **double its current spending to support a 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 by an equivalent level.

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
- Defra spending for England 2022-2023 was [£2.23 billion](#)
- Defra have committed to spending £2.4 billion for the coming year (still not big enough)
- NFU [modelling](#) estimates that that £4 billion a year is needed to support an agricultural policy that supports productivity, the environment and the economic stability of farming businesses
- Similarly, [research](#) commissioned by, RSPB, The National Trusts and The Wildlife Trusts revealed that £4.4 billion a year is needed to invest in nature-friendly farming to meet legally binding commitments
- 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.
- 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 we need 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 should go alongside policy measures to regulate markets and 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.

2. Introduce a Capital Grants Scheme for horticulture start-ups

Our overreliance on imports has time and time again proved - through Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and from the impacts of global warming - that we must boost UK food security and invest in home-grown produce. To do so the UK government needs to support and incentivise the establishment of more agroecological organic horticultural enterprises and market gardens. A more flexible, user-friendly capital grants scheme is one way in which the government could facilitate the market garden renaissance that the LWA is calling for.

Key facts and figures

- The UK currently imports 45% of vegetables and 83% of fruit
- UK production of fruit and vegetables has been declining since 2015, with the area used for edible horticulture having dropped by nearly 20,000ha in this time
- The UK spends £2.7billion per year on imported fruit and vegetables, much of which comes from water scarce countries like Spain and Morocco

- Horticulture units can generate significant income, between £29,000 and £67,000 per hectare, much more than the English Farm average of £613.5 per hectare or the Welsh farm average of £163 per hectare.

Why we need a horticulture Capital Grants Scheme

- Small scale market gardens provide so much in terms of benefits to community, physical and mental health, nature, rural regeneration and education, but access to sufficient capital to begin new enterprises presents a significant barrier for many wanting to enter the sector.
- Purchasing and establishing infrastructure such as machinery, polytunnels, irrigation systems and packing sheds are a necessary prerequisite to setting up an efficient small-scale horticulture enterprise or market garden, but they present significant upfront costs for which many new entrants lack the finances.
- Existing schemes, such as the Farm Equipment and Technology Fund only allow purchase of a very limited range of equipment and are focussed on innovative technology, rather than the basic equipment and infrastructure needed by new entrants. Furthermore, the cost of equipment available through these schemes combined with the fact that only 40% grants are available, excludes those with limited investment capital.
- A more flexible scheme, that allowed the purchase of good quality second hand equipment and any equipment that could be used in commercial horticulture would have a positive impact on existing enterprises wanting to increase production, as well as start-up businesses.
- At present even larger, established farms are struggling to reinvest in basic equipment, due to extremely slim profit margins leaving insufficient to reinvest for the future. This is not due to poor business management, but the unfair pricing practices of many retailers.

3. Develop the New Entrants Support Scheme to explicitly address access to land

The future of the UK's food system rests upon the next generation of farmers, growers and food producers - but access to land presents a significant barrier to new entrants looking to establish or scale up their farming enterprises. This is largely because of a) inflated land prices as a result of farmland speculation, b) consolidation of farmland ownership whereby a minority of wealthy landowners own large farms and smaller holdings are in decline, and c) a loss of publicly owned land through the sale of county farms.

Key facts and figures

- Average age of a farmer in the UK is 59
- Half of England is owned by less than 1% of the population
- In England, farms under 100 hectares have halved in number in the last 60 years, and the number of small holdings has also plummeted from around 160,000 in 1950 to less than 30,000 (2020 figure)

- In a survey of over 150 new entrant landworkers wanting to establish or scale-up their agroecological farming enterprises, 61% cited access to land as a significant barrier
- The acreage of County Farms (council-owned farms) in England has more than halved since 1977.
- In 2000 the average price for an acre of farmland in England was £3,500 - this figure has now risen to a record of £10,800/acre (2023 statistic)

Why access to land must be addressed in the New Entrants Support Scheme

- Whereas the initial pilot phase of Defra's New Entrant Support Scheme focussed on improving the business skill of prospective farmers and new entrants, there is a real need to focus on access to land.
- Without secure access to land, new entrants will be unwilling to risk investing their own capital in necessary infrastructure and will be unable to secure business development loans. Hence they will either operate below optimal efficiency, or not start enterprises in the first place.

Types of the initiatives the scheme could include:

- **Land-matching services** to bring together landowners wanting to rent land, with those seeking land
- **Farmstart schemes**
- **Guidance for landowners and tenants on rents** in return for particular levels of infrastructure provision and security, to incentivise investment by landowner or tenant in thriving, productive businesses.
- **Exploring opportunities for setting up farms and food-growing projects on council-owned land**, including splitting council farms into smaller units and providing agricultural workers accommodation.
- **Making the "Lump Sum Payment Scheme", by which landowners can cash in their BPS entitlements in one go, conditional** upon making the land available for a new entrant with fresh entitlements for SFI and other ELMS initiatives.

4. Introduce a 'Green Economy Apprenticeship Scheme' which includes agroecological farming and food production

A common challenge for new entrants wanting to pursue a career in agroecological farming and food production is a lack of accredited training programmes, and a lack of relevant apprenticeship schemes that pay a living wage.

For this reason we are calling **for a new Green Economy Apprenticeship Scheme** which would include opportunities in the agroecological farming sector. This will open up access to those wanting to pursue a career in agroecological farming and food production and provide them with a living wage to support themselves as they learn and acquire the necessary skills.

5. Commit to procuring 50% of public food from local organic producers

In order to ensure that everyone has access to nutritious, fresh and sustainable produced food, public institutions like schools, hospitals, prisons and care homes should procure organic food that is produced locally. Not only would this have huge benefits to public health, but it would also open up stable routes to market for smaller-scale organic growers.

However, due to years of austerity and public spending cuts councils have had their budgets stripped, forcing them to procure low-cost food. Central government therefore needs to step in and support local authorities to procure local organic food, through:

- Subsidies that bridge the gap between current costs of procuring cheap food and the cost of procuring nutritious, local, organic produce
- Supporting local authorities to explore dynamic public procurement schemes which will allow smaller-scale local producers to access contracts

Key facts and figures

- The UK Government has already committed to ensuring that 50% of all food purchased by the public sector is locally produced and sustainable. We need to hold them to this promise.
- The public sector spends about £2.4bn per year on procuring food and catering services. If half of this budget was spent on procuring food locally this money would be kept within local economies.
- If local authorities subsidised the difference in price between local organic and imported non-organic veg, so that every primary school child in the UK was provided with two portions of organic veg with every school meal, this would provide a secure market for 2000 new market gardens, while substituting for more than 10% of the £2.7 billion that the UK currently spends on imported vegetables.