

Hands on the Land

New Entrants in Agriculture



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Encouraging a new generation of landworkers

The Landworkers' Alliance believes that the UK needs a large scale increase in both new entrant farmers and agricultural labourers for four key reasons.

- **The UK currently produces only 60% of the food we consumeⁱ. To increase our national food self sufficiency, we need more people working on the land as producers.**
- **A transition to agroecological practices such as organics, small scale horticulture and high welfare livestock production are needed to ensure sustainable food production for future generations. These are labour intensive methods, requiring more people in agriculture.**
- **The short supply chains and local markets favoured by new entrants rejuvenate rural communities socially and culturally as well as economically.**
- **New entrants maintain the competitiveness of the agricultural sector.**

A calculation carried out by the Land magazine estimated that the UK needs 157,000 more farmers and farm workers in order to maximise domestic production from agroecological farmsⁱⁱ.



There is a new generation of farmers ready and willing to rejuvenate our food system. Many are interested in new models of farming such as organic farming, alternative agri-food networks, and innovative small-holdings. Farming represents an important way of life for new entrants who seek fulfilling employment. They want to earn a living, but they want to do so in a way that reflects a connection with the land, and a love of working outdoors; the deep satisfaction of a hard day's work, and the joy of growing healthy food for their families and communities. Interest in farming is growing, sparking increased enrollment in agricultural colleges, on training courses, and schemes such as the Worldwide Opportunities On Organic Farms programme. New entrants bring with them a wealth of resources gained outside of farming, including skills, networks and financial capital. New entrants are often better at IT, accessing information and creating diverse alternative marketing streams. This wave of innovation has the potential to revolutionise production, marketing and management practices- finding creative ways to make farming work in the face of low economic returns from 'conventional agriculture'. Many are young, but new entrants can be of all ages, some highly educated, some from farming families, or from volunteer work on other farms. But what they have in common is that they are committed to a life on the land.

With the average age of farmers in the UK at 59, we desperately need to give new entrants our full support. We need to increase the number of entrepreneurs who farm and build profitable businesses that can respond to the industry's changing economic environment. Once established, new farms contribute to local economies and sustainable land management in both rural and urban communities. Providing support for businesses in the critical early stages will make it easier for new entrants to create viable businesses in the long term, and will help to change the face of agriculture in the UK.

"It's become apparent to young people just how important a healthy, sustainable food culture is to society. We are a generation that has grown up with the challenges of climate change, globalisation and inequality. For many of us, food production and associated industries represent an inherently positive response to these challenges. The UK needs to have enough people engaged in agriculture with the right skills, land, and resources to create a better food system. Young farmers are our future!"

Ele Saltmarsh- young farmer and researcher

Kickstarting the Renaissance

Three steps to support new entrants to farming

1 Increase Access to Land

The rising capital value of agricultural land and its limited availability is a major barrier to new entrants. Of 2,205 farmers under the age of 40 across the EU member states, 61% considered lack of availability of land for purchase to be the greatest barrier for new entrantsⁱⁱⁱ. A large number of land buyers are primarily interested in the investment potential of agricultural land, associated subsidy payments and tax reliefs, a trend that drives the prices of land upwards, far beyond their value for agricultural production. Since the introduction of area-based payments in 2005, UK land prices have increased from an average of £2,500/acre to over £7,000/acre today. To stem this trend, the government should carry out a study into the lack of availability of land, investigating the effect of subsidies and inheritance tax on the spiraling cost of land. The sell-off of county farms, the first rung on the farming ladder, should also be halted.

Additionally, the exorbitant value of land with housing means that most of the farm houses and barns in the countryside are bought up by wealthy people, often not engaged in agricultural activity. It is extraordinarily hard for smallholders to afford housing associated with farms. Instead they need to gain planning permission to build a house or place mobile homes on their land, to enable them to manage their livestock and crops. Many young people find the most accessible route into farming is contracting, which is vital to the countryside, yet they often have problems affording housing so they should also be eligible for agricultural workers dwellings. There should also be more legislation making it secure for farmers to rent land on long term (at least 20 year) tenancies.

“A start up grant has the potential to make a huge difference to new entrant producers. If you’re just starting out, being able to access suitable land and afford the right infrastructure is critical to the success of your business. Removing such a hurdle for new entrants is a step towards creating a more productive, vibrant and resilient agricultural sector.”

Dave Washington- new entrant

2 Aid Startup Costs

A considerable challenge for young people entering agriculture, who do not have inherited or earned wealth to draw upon, is leveraging the capital needed for the land and infrastructure to invest in a commercial farm business. The Landworkers’ Alliance proposes Young Farmers Start Up and New Entrants Capital Grants Schemes, similar to those started in Scotland in 2015, be rolled out across the UK.

The Schemes would be aimed at all start up farmers, to support establishment of resources central to core agricultural activities, such as the acquisition or rental of land, livestock, buildings, and equipment. Allocation would be linked to the delivery of business plan objectives; businesses must demonstrate future standard outputs and suitable agricultural experience. The Scottish New Entrants Start Up Scheme gives up to €70,000 - a healthy boost!

Public spending of £70 m per year (just 2% of the current agricultural budget) on a New Entrants Start Up Scheme could kick start 1,000 new local food businesses each year with a potential multiplier affect of contributing £420 m to both rural and urban economies^{iv}.



i. Agriculture in the UK [2015]. Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs
ii. Hamer, E (2012) Can Britain Farm Itself?. The Land Magazine. Issue 12, p24.28.
iii. Exchange Programmes for Young Farmers, Executive Summary [Nov 2015]. M-J Zondag et al, European Commission
iv. Creative Industries Economic Estimates [Jan 2016]. Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport. Figures are based on the estimate that for every £1 invested in a creative industry (which includes local food industries) it has the effect of generating £6 in increased economic activity.

3 Support Training Schemes

Training schemes help farmers to use both traditional knowledge and new discoveries to get their farms started efficiently. Many new entrants do not come from an agricultural background, meaning that though the enthusiasm is there, they don't know how to get started. This is coupled with a gradual loss of traditional knowledge as aging farmers find it hard to connect to apprentices.

Farmer-to-farmer training through farm start programmes enable skills to be shared and spreads collective approaches to solving problems to farmers of all ages from across the UK. Apprenticeships allow longer-term training, with the trainer receiving help to pay trainees, and the trainee gaining knowledge.

Both new and established farmers would benefit from governmental support, such as re-establishment of the past Defra fund allowing all farmers with a holding number to undertake a short training course, a farmer to farmer study tour, or a paid apprenticeship.



Land Trusts such as the Ecological Land Cooperative purchase parcels of land to be leased in small plots to farmers looking to get a foothold on the land. Land trusts tackle many of the barriers to new entrants to farming by providing basic infrastructure and planning permission on the plots. The trust is able to select leaseholders to ensure that their smallholdings are run sustainably and are economically stable.

www.ecologicaland.coop



The Kindling Trust and Manchester Veg People are working to grow a new generation of sustainable growers and increase access to fresh healthy food for all. Their Farm Start programme encourages and support new entrants into farming through access to affordable land, shared equipment, training and access to fair markets. But they face huge challenges keeping the programme going. Their impact could be ten fold with supportive public policies on a range of issues from land access and planning, to funding for training programmes.

www.kindling.org.uk/farmstart

Policy proposals

1. Increase access to land

1.1 Introduce governmental regulation of the land market, including a change to inheritance tax rules, to bring down the price of agricultural land

1.2 Immediately halt all selloffs of remaining county farms

1.3 Support the establishment of Land Trusts

1.4 Reform the planning system to enable agricultural workers access to affordable housing in rural areas

2 Increase support for new entrants to establish themselves

2.1 Introduce a Young Farmers Start Up and a New Entrants Capital Grant Scheme to the whole of the UK based on the existing Scottish Rural Development Programmes

3 Dedicated funding should be used to support agricultural training and apprenticeships

3.1 Provide public funding to support Farm Start training and skills development

3.2 Fund apprenticeship schemes, allowing apprentices to be paid a living wage

