



Vision

“The Commercial Farmers Group’s vision is for a competitive and resilient UK agricultural industry after the UK leaves the EU, producing safe, affordable and sustainable products to meet the needs of customers, consumers and the environment.”

Context

Despite the simple vision statement, we recognise there are political and social as well as commercial forces which affect agriculture and the rural economy. Similarly, how we farm has a far wider reach than just our farming community. For example, further reductions in current food self-sufficiency (c. 60%) could damage the UK balance of payments, exploit environments in other countries and increase risks to our food supply in a volatile world.

Farming is a long term industry. To be competitive it must be: resilient against shocks (eg, economic, financial, disease); more likely to reinvest; better able to provide a good working environment and career opportunities for UK residents; more able to contribute more to the UK’s GDP and give greater choice, value, safety and food security for consumers. It also needs to be more environmentally positive and less likely to require financial support.

The CFG aim is towards producing agricultural goods (eg food, fibre, energy) with reducing direct payments alongside appropriate and proportionate regulation, with public money primarily directed towards the delivery of public goods. In the long term, with production decoupled from any subsidy and excessive regulation, farmers would be better-placed to compete in a global marketplace.

Furthermore, many food processors and retailers should be – and in fact are – concerned about future supply chains, with most recognising the importance of consistent, reliable and trusted sourcing of food from UK farmers which is easily traceable back to UK farms through farm and quality assurance schemes.

Competitive advantages of UK farming

1. Good soils and climate which produce some of the highest yields of crops and herbage in the world.
2. Close proximity to ports, and affluent and growing populations.
3. UK land tenure systems and contract farming opportunities.
4. Commercial farmers who are quick to adopt new technologies and techniques.
5. Availability of a skilled workforce.
6. Some of the best quality standards, most robust food safety and highest levels of animal welfare in the world.

Current challenges to UK competitiveness

1. Lack of science-based policy and poor linkage between Research & Development and technology transfer: the Agri-Tech Strategy is focused on technology companies, but this can only ever be part of the solution and does not fully address the gap between research and farm productivity.
2. The Common Agricultural Policy's proactive backing of inefficient farming, distortion of the market and land costs, and failure to effectively support the delivery of public goods.
3. Lack of awareness of career opportunities within the farming and food industry at both school level and upon leaving further education.
4. The manner in which regulation is implemented with a resulting heavy and costly workload on farm.
5. Potential loss of seasonal, casual and permanent manual (low skill) workforce from outside the UK.

The way forward

1. Within the emerging 25-year strategy for the farming and food industry, a series of achievable, measurable five-year/shorter-term plans.
2. Smarter regulation with a genuine emphasis on earned recognition and evidenced outcomes rather than compliance with process.
3. Environmental policy that recognises the active management required to achieve many environmental benefits.
4. Increased and better-directed funding for applied research, development and extension to increase productivity and mitigate changing climate.
5. A cost-effective plan to support the delivery of public goods, including development of rural infrastructures and flood defences, and continuing improvement of the environment.
6. Creation of new UK export markets for both commodity and added-value goods through a targeted, measurable and UK government-led strategy.
7. Recognition of the positive benefits of scale, technology and modern farming systems in increasing productivity and providing beneficial contribution to the environment.
8. Policy which considers the whole food supply chain.
9. Promotion of the breadth and depth of career opportunities in agriculture at schools, colleges and universities and through work experience, apprenticeships and practical farm management training.
10. A sustainable plan to ensure key sectors within UK farming can continue to access seasonal and casual labour from overseas.

To achieve the above, the CFG is not asking for increased financial support for agriculture, but for the reallocation of funds that were part of the CAP to meet the challenges ahead.