



A NATURE-POSITIVE PATHWAY TO DECARBONISE UK AGRICULTURE AND LAND USE

COUNTRY FOCUS – ENGLAND/UK

UK landscapes, and the way that our food is produced and consumed, need to transform urgently in order to help meet net zero, restore nature and reduce our global environmental footprint. Simply put, there is no way to meet our climate and nature commitments as one, without coming together to radically reshape our food system.

WWF has set out an overarching vision for what the agriculture and land use sectors in the UK can achieve this decade to put us on a low emission, high nature journey towards net zero food production and consumption.¹ In taking the actions we recommend, based on independent analysis, we see a credible and positive pathway for the UK as a whole to:

- **Reduce UK direct agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 35% by 2030 and 51% by 2050 on 2018 levels**
- **Switch UK land from a net source of emissions to a net sink by 2040 at the very latest**
- **Halt and reverse the loss of UK nature by 2030**
- **Cut UK farming's carbon footprint relating to soy feed and fertiliser manufacture by at least 31% by 2030 and 57% by 2050 on 2018 levels**

In England, agriculture can be broadly generalised as a split between livestock grazing, mainly in the west and uplands, and croppable land, mainly in the east. While many farmers and growers are already leading a transition to climate and nature friendly production methods, they are operating in a fragmented regulatory space not yet aligned with net zero or restoring biodiversity. This fragmentation extends to the food system as a whole, and the Government's response to the National Food Strategy in 2022 will be an important early sign that it is serious about being a world leader in tackling climate and nature impacts of our food system as a whole.

The UK Government's Net Zero Strategy² set out weak targets and unambitious emissions reductions plans for the English agriculture, land use and food sectors, with little clarity on the action to meet them. This criticism was reinforced by the Climate Change Committee.³ With the UK holding the Presidency of the COP26 climate summit into 2022, the Government urgently needs to fill in the gaps and set out a proper vision and plan for decarbonising the agriculture and land use sectors.

To help the agriculture and land use sectors be at the heart of tackling climate change and restoring nature at home and abroad, the Government should urgently:

1. Bring forward an ambitious domestic Agriculture and Land Use Decarbonisation Strategy, which contains a fully articulated vision for 1.5°C - aligned and nature-rich landscapes. This would set the direction for:

- a. Clear objectives for the Environmental Land Management (E.L.M.) scheme to reduce emissions and capture carbon through large scale recovery of natural ecosystems and regenerative farming. This should be aided by extending Defra's advisory support and Catchment Sensitive Farming programmes to include advice on GHG reductions.
- b. A comprehensive package of measures to halve nitrogen waste by 2030, using planned air pollution regulations as an opportunity to apply this holistic approach to nitrogen/nutrient sources and impacts.
- c. A National Land Use Framework to guide Local Nature Recovery Strategies on opportunities and trade-offs for tackling climate change, helping farmers and communities to bring together and shape implement food, climate and nature policy in a streamlined way.
- d. Investment to support innovation for farm-level actions to reduce enteric methane, demand for animal feed and emissions from manure management, as the three key sources of agricultural emissions.
- e. Strengthening the ban on the extraction of peat for horticulture and removing loopholes that allow for rotational burning on peatlands, while providing new protections for other key natural carbon stores such as saltmarshes and ancient woodland.
- f. Action to lead consumer shifts in diets that support farmers through a just transition to regenerative agriculture and reductions in methane and nitrogen.

2. Accelerate efforts to significantly reduce the footprint of England's food sector at home and abroad by:

- a. Setting legally binding 2030 and 2050 reduction targets for England's food sector global footprint that contribute to achieving a 75% reduction in the UK's wider global footprint by 2030. These should align and support the Government's legal commitments to reverse the decline of nature by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050. All food sector policy should be integrated to ensure these targets are met.

- b. Introducing a set of core environmental standards that apply equally to food produced in the UK and imported from overseas, guaranteeing new trade deals do not lead to an offshoring of our environmental footprint and the UK is sourcing from sustainable supply chains
- c. Updating public procurement standards in England (the Government Buying Standards for Food) to align with an updated, sustainable National Reference Diet and empower and task a statutory body to regulate this.
- d. Delivering on the UK Government's COP26 pledge to align the UK finance sector with net zero through forthcoming net zero transition plans, including by changing climate accounting to account for and report on overseas embedded emissions.
- e. Developing standardised metrics and frameworks as part of mandating food businesses to report on their environmental impacts, specifically to:
 - i) develop coherent environmental impact reporting metrics, including for Scope 3 emissions, by 2025, underpinned by a National Food Systems Data programme, based on the HESTIA Platform;
 - ii) implement a standard food eco-labelling system by 2025 based on these metrics; and
 - iii) require all food businesses to report on food loss and waste by 2025, and large food businesses to report on their food product sales figures by 2023 and environmental impact by 2025. A statutory body should be tasked to regulate these. This will support businesses to contribute to halving the environmental impact of UK shopping baskets by 2030.

3. Use the UK's leadership role from COP26 to bring food to the table at COP27, by:

- a. Updating the UK's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) action plan to strengthen actions to reduce agricultural emissions.
- b. Working with other countries to agree a common decision at COP27 for agriculture through the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture⁴, in line with keeping 1.5°C of global warming within reach.
- c. Supporting the "Nitrogen4NetZero Initiative"⁵ and signing and promoting the UN Colombo Declaration on halving nitrogen waste from all sources by 2030.⁶

¹ [Link](#) to overall pathway report

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-strategy> (accessed December 2021)

³ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/independent-assessment-the-uks-net-zero-strategy/> (accessed December 2021)

⁴ <https://unfccc.int/topics/land-use/workstreams/agriculture> (accessed December 2021)

⁵ <https://www.inms.international/nitrogen4netzero> (accessed December 2021)

⁶ https://www.inms.international/sites/inms.international/files/Colombo%20Declaration_Final.pdf (accessed December 2021)

