



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
Standing up for your countryside

CPRE's Vision for the future of farming



Bill Bryson

President, Campaign to Protect Rural England

I know of no landscape anywhere that is more artfully worked than the countryside of England. Virtually every corner of the English landscape has been cropped and sown for at least seven thousand years. Where I come from, when the landscape is stunning it's because nature made it that way. In England when it's stunning, it is, more often than not, because farming made it that way.



Creating an enchanting landscape is of course only part of the achievement. Keeping it is the real trick. If farming is to provide us with environmentally sustainable food and a beautiful countryside, we will require not just more enlightened Government policies and sufficient funding, but for the farming industry to want to do the right thing for the environment. After all, there is no one else capable of managing our countryside on such a massive scale.

My own experience is that farmers love the landscape as much as anyone, and that the rest of us tend not to appreciate the pressures we put them under. We demand ever cheaper food and beautiful, accessible landscapes without often considering that farmers need to make a living.

CPRE understands what a complex entity the countryside can be. Balancing increases in food production with environmental protection and enhancement will not be easy. But the many farmers who work so hard to undo the mistakes of the past give us faith in their future commitment to improve our farmed environment and hope that this balance can be achieved. We believe it is possible for farming and our countryside to have a bright future and this vision sets out where we hope we will be in 2026.

Bill Bryson

A vision for the future of farming in 2026

In our 2026 Vision for the Countryside CPRE looked to a brighter, better future. The role of farming in helping to deliver that future is critical. This vision sets out our aspirations for a farming system that, by 2026, our centenary year, will be helping to create a more vibrant countryside, environmentally, socially and economically.

At the heart of this vision lies the debate about how we use our land. How can we manage the wide range of demands placed on our countryside? How can we address the increased pressure population growth will put on our natural resources, which could lead to calls to intensify food production?

Each action a farmer undertakes on every acre of their land has repercussions, not just for the environmental quality of that land and the economic viability of their farm, but for the countryside and society as a whole. This has always been the case. But in the future, with a growing population and diminishing resources, every action will have even greater importance.

Government policies and market pressures can often create situations where the economics of farming and environmental protection are set against one another. But policy measures, backed up by the necessary funding and political will, can work with the market to support the vital role farming plays in protecting and enhancing our landscapes and wildlife.

Increasing food production while protecting our natural resources and enhancing our environment is one of the biggest challenges we will face over the next 15 years. We need to learn from the mistakes of the past and capitalise on recent successes. It is essential that Government, the farming industry and environmental organisations work together to ensure farming can provide us with the high quality food and countryside we depend on.

This is where we want to be in 2026...



The global perspective in 2026

In 2026, farmers in most countries have found ways of producing sufficient food despite the challenges of population growth, a changing climate and increasingly scarce natural resources. Farming across the globe is bound by a set of common environmental and animal welfare standards that ensure food is produced within the capacity and resource constraints of the natural world.

Trade agreements prevent farmers benefiting economically from lower environmental or welfare standards in a particular country. They help to ensure food production does not damage the environment and that livestock are kept in good welfare conditions.

Where large-scale crop production takes place, it is managed in an environmentally sustainable way: agri-chemicals, energy and water are used as efficiently as possible, while soil resources



**LIVESTOCK
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CONDITIONS**





**WILDLIFE IS
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are protected and wildlife habitats are maintained and enhanced. Traditional farming systems and small and medium-sized farms that face economic challenges are supported through green farming and fair-trade schemes. This ensures they can continue to conserve wildlife habitats, help communities thrive and maintain the distinctive features of much-loved landscapes.

Farmers in the European Union are benefiting economically from the European Sustainable Land Management Policy, which evolved over the last two periods of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform. Now, farmers in all member states are rewarded for the full range of environmental public goods and ecosystem services they provide.

Across Europe, inter-connected wildlife habitats cover large areas of countryside, reversing the decline in the numbers of plants and animals. This helps to enhance the character of our surroundings. In England, an ambitious landscape-scale conservation strategy covers all of the countryside, successfully linking and restoring important habitats. Wildlife is increasing, including species that were once endangered or on the verge of extinction. Landscape features have been restored where they had been lost, enhancing the distinctiveness of the countryside – not just in a few National Parks and beauty spots, but wherever the character of the countryside had been degraded.

“Budgets for green farming schemes should be matched to the true value to society of all that the countryside provides, ensuring that the countryside becomes more beautiful, more valued and richer in flora and fauna.”

From CPRE's 2026 Vision for the Countryside



Farming in England in 2026

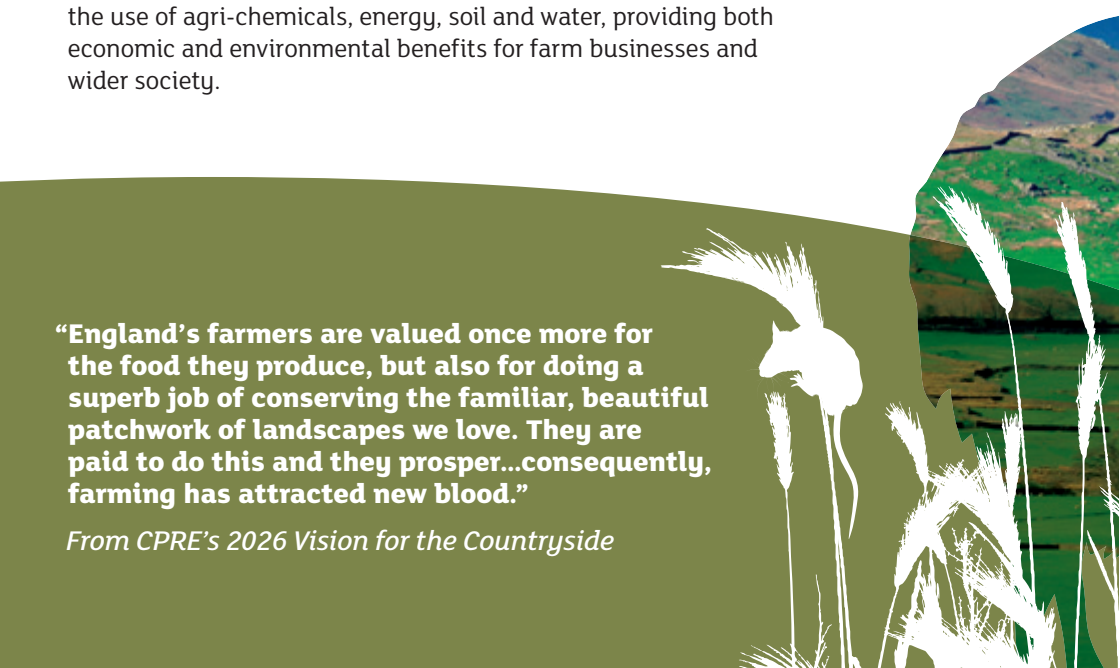
Following a comprehensive public debate on how to meet the growing demand for food without damaging the environment, Government policy in 2026 ensures that food is nutritious, affordable and produced to high environmental standards. The Government's Farming, Food and Environment Strategy has now been in place for over a decade.

This means there has been a long-term, integrated approach to increasing food production sustainably. Policies for farming, the environment and the supply of food, including planning, transport and energy policies, help reconcile the needs of the farming industry and the environment. The strategy has also helped to eliminate nearly all food waste from the production, processing and retail chain.

Policy measures help all farming sectors to take into account economic, social and environmental sustainability considerations. Farmers use integrated farm management systems that optimise the use of agri-chemicals, energy, soil and water, providing both economic and environmental benefits for farm businesses and wider society.



**FOOD IS
PRODUCED TO HIGH
ENVIRONMENTAL
STANDARDS**



“England’s farmers are valued once more for the food they produce, but also for doing a superb job of conserving the familiar, beautiful patchwork of landscapes we love. They are paid to do this and they prosper...consequently, farming has attracted new blood.”

From CPRE's 2026 Vision for the Countryside



**THE UK GROWS
AROUND 50% OF
ORCHARD FRUIT
PURCHASED**

Most meat and dairy products come from livestock that spend much of the year outside, grazing on pastures rich in wildlife. These conservation pastures provide pollen and nectar for insects – and the meat and milk tastes better too. They also play an important role in combating climate change, both by absorbing and storing carbon, and by containing plant species that reduce methane emissions from livestock. People choose to eat less meat – but it is of a much higher quality.

The UK grows around 50% of the orchard fruit that is purchased, which comes mainly from replanted orchards. Many of these are wood-pasture systems: livestock and poultry graze underneath the trees so meat and eggs can be produced on the same land. The animals are housed in structures designed and sited to blend with the character of the local landscape.

Other on-farm developments, like farm diversification enterprises, have become less contentious: the planning system ensures they provide economic and environmental benefits, contributing to the character of the countryside and the quality of life of local communities.



The economics of farming in 2026

In 2026, international trade and financial agreements have helped to weaken the influence of speculators in agricultural commodity markets. Price spikes are less severe, helping to reduce market volatility.

This means farmers in all sectors are less susceptible to boom-and-bust cycles and the profitability see-saw that existed between livestock and arable farmers. Consequently, they can plan their businesses for the longer term.

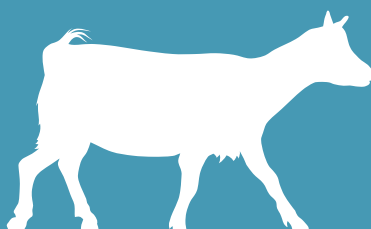
The number of farmers in England has stabilised and there has been a sustained increase in the number of younger people taking up careers in farming. Those starting out are supported through measures that help them take on tenancies for publicly or community-owned farms. Many have studied at centres of sustainable agricultural innovation and excellence in the country's agricultural colleges, and are introducing innovative land management practices that have increased food production and benefited the environment.

Farms don't just grow food crops: with concerted public and private investment in research and development and market incentives, a vibrant bio-economy has developed. Native crops provide raw materials including bio-composites for many areas of manufacturing and biomass for energy. The area of land growing non-food and bioenergy crops is carefully monitored as part of the Government's Farming, Food and Environment Strategy.



"We eat more local food and we eat better. Interest in local foods goes beyond the individual consumer – schools, hospitals and care homes also favour local foods and local suppliers."

From CPRE's 2026 Vision for the Countryside



Government policies on public sourcing and procurement, have encouraged greater self-sufficiency in a variety of foods. Nearly all publicly procured food for schools, hospitals and prisons is sourced from farmers in the UK, and more than half is locally sourced. Procurement policies aren't just based on price, but take into account a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits. Local food enterprises are thriving, benefiting from changes to Government policy and the growth in farming cooperatives. Even in supermarkets more than 10% of the food sold is locally sourced within 30 miles. This has boosted the incomes of farmers in all sectors.



The Office of the Food Retailing Adjudicator has wide-ranging powers to scrutinise and enforce fair trade in the food supply chain. These enable it to investigate proactively, and require changes to unfair practices and contracts brought to its attention by farmers, trade organisations, NGOs and other businesses in the supply chain. It has powers to levy fines where necessary.

There is continued public reluctance to eat GM foods and concern about the impact of GM crops on the environment and many farmers who don't wish to grow them. At the same time there is much greater use of biological controls, for example beneficial insects, to help combat pests and diseases.

A photograph of a man with grey hair, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt, sitting at a desk and working on a laptop. He is looking down at the screen. In the background, there are metal railings and the heads of several cows, suggesting a farm or agricultural setting. The image is partially obscured by white, torn-paper-like shapes.

**FARMERS CAN PLAN
THEIR BUSINESSES FOR
THE LONGER TERM**

Farming and the environment in 2026

Green farming schemes have made enormous advances. Wildlife is once again thriving and landscape features – including our hedgerows – have been restored and are looked after better.

This has been helped by CAP reforms, which have redirected EU funding towards rewarding farmers for enhancing the environment and providing ecosystem services such as clean water. Meanwhile, a European Landscape Directive that aims to maintain and restore distinctive landscapes across Europe has made the character of the countryside a key issue.

People recognise that farmland plays a variety of important roles: not just in producing food and non-food crops, but in managing water flows, storing carbon and providing wildlife habitat. The revised Agricultural Land Classification and Protection system and the National Soil Strategy recognise different areas' particular characteristics. Our soil contains more organic matter, and is more fertile and less susceptible to erosion by wind and water.

Targets for improving water quality in lakes, rivers and streams have been met, and pollution incidents are rare. On the river banks and in the water, wildlife thrives, thanks to much better management of water resources at the river basin and landscape level.





**GREEN FARMING
SCHEMES HAVE
MADE ENORMOUS
ADVANCES**


Arable farming in 2026

NEARLY ALL ARABLE FARMERS use innovative crop management and precision farming techniques that ensure the most efficient and effective use of fertilisers and other agri-chemicals. This makes them profitable while benefiting the environment. A new arable crop certification labelling scheme provides assurance that bread, cereals and other foods, as well as non-food products are produced from arable crops grown to high environmental sustainability standards. Farmers who take part in the scheme benefit from a price premium that recognises the additional environmental measures they are taking.


Dairy farming in 2026

FAIRER MILK PRICES for dairy farmers, brought about both by consumer action and the Office of the Food Retailing Adjudicator, have reversed the decline in traditional, pasture-based dairy farms, and has made them more profitable. This has removed the economic case for intensive indoor “super dairies.”

Horticulture in 2026



THERE HAS BEEN A MASSIVE INCREASE in the number of community-based horticultural enterprises supplying local vegetables, salad and fruit. Polytunnels have become much less contentious after being brought into a planning system which controls their cumulative impacts on the landscape: where there are more of them, they are more sensitively sited. A small number of large-scale, zero-carbon horticultural enterprises exist close to urban areas, mainly to meet the year-round demand for some types of crops.



“Many more adults and children visit the countryside and when they do, they see more animals outdoors. The wildflowers, birds and insects and mammals that had so dwindled over the previous 70 years have returned in a rush of sights, sounds and smells.”

From CPRE's 2026 Vision for the Countryside

Pig and poultry farming in 2026

NOW THAT COMPULSORY WELFARE STANDARDS for pigs and poultry are the same everywhere in Europe and are strictly enforced, producers in the UK who introduced high standards decades ago are benefiting. Most pigs and poultry are free range and reared outdoors, which is what the majority of consumers demand.

Beef and sheep farming and the uplands in 2026

IN 2026, both upland and lowland beef and sheep farmers have benefited from additional support from rural development measures and agri-environment schemes. These recognise the essential ecosystem services this sector provides, in particular maintaining habitats and landscape character. Problems with both under- and over-grazing have been successfully overcome.


Farming in upland areas has capitalised on the environmental and cultural services it provides. It has become profitable not only because of the high quality food it produces, but also because farmers are rewarded for managing water flows to the lowlands, both in times of drought and flood, and storing of greenhouse gases in peat soils. Some parts of the uplands have been replanted with native woodland.

“While farmland still dominates England’s countryside, there is much more woodland, rich in wildlife.”

From CPRE’s 2026 Vision for the Countryside



Bioenergy in 2026



**THERE IS MUCH
BETTER USE OF
BY-PRODUCTS
FROM TIMBER
PROCESSING**

NEARLY ALL FARMS IN ENGLAND are producing renewable energy through sensitively designed small-scale renewable energy schemes, including anaerobic digestion plants which generate energy from farm waste. The Woodfuel Strategy is now a huge success, thanks to the replanting of substantial areas of native woodland and investment in the necessary rural infrastructure.

There is much better use of by-products from timber processing in forests and coppiced woodland, all supplying small-scale biomass plants that generate heat and power. Although biomass and other non-food crops are now an important part of the farming industry, careful consideration is given to where they are grown, avoiding prime agricultural land which is needed for food crops. Bioenergy crops play a part in maintaining landscape character and important habitats.



**BOTH UPLAND AND LOWLAND
BEEF AND SHEEP FARMERS
HAVE BENEFITED FROM
ADDITIONAL SUPPORT**

We will achieve our vision by...



Campaigning independently and in coalition to push for fairer trade agreements that recognise the value of environmentally sustainable production and a reformed CAP that rewards farmers for the full range of environmental public goods and services they provide.



Standing up for the producers, processors, suppliers and retailers in local food networks and lobbying for a joined-up approach to farming, food and environmental policy that helps farmers prosper and guarantees supplies of high quality, environmentally sustainable food.



Supporting environmentally sustainable farming that enhances landscape character, and campaigning against the unfair practices of large food processors and retailers and the trend towards the industrialisation of our farmed landscapes by large agri-businesses.



Pressing for more resources for agri-environment schemes, and championing landscape character across all areas of rural policy.



Lobbying for changes to policy and the introduction of support measures that help all the farming sectors become more sustainable, environmentally, socially and economically.





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**Campaign to Protect
Rural England
128 Southwark Street
London SE1 0SW**

T 020 7981 2800

F 020 7981 2899

info@cpre.org.uk

www.cpre.org.uk



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