

World class policies for world class farming

European Parliament Elections 2009
UK Farming Unions' Manifesto



Message from the Presidents



Peter Kendall
President NFU

Farming and food production are critically important for the future of Europe's economy and environment. Whilst the farming industry faces some of the same short term challenges of economic downturn and the credit crunch, we passionately believe that the long term prospects for our sector are bright.



Jim McLaren
President NFU Scotland

The challenges faced by a growing world population and the impact of climate change will place new demands on our industry and will require that European farming continues to produce sustainably *and* increases productivity. This way we will ensure that UK and European agriculture delivers on all fronts in the future.



Graham Furey
President Ulster Farmers' Union

The European Parliament has a vital role to play in helping us to make this happen. European policies and legislation play a major part in shaping the framework in which farming operates. This framework will need to adapt to allow farming to thrive. We therefore look forward to working closely with MEPs for the next Parliamentary term and beyond.



Dai Davies
President NFU Cymru

The vital role of the European Parliament

UK MEPs must work to ensure that the positions taken by the European Parliament are defensible on the ground and with their farming constituents.

MEPs have for many years played a central role in formulating policy which impacts on UK farmers and growers. This involvement in agricultural matters will only increase. It is, therefore, more important than ever that MEPs listen and engage with UK farmers at home and in Brussels.

Science and technology

The European Parliament must ensure that sound science is the foundation on which all European policies are based.

Research and development (R&D) are crucial to ensure that we can increase production and improve our environmental performance. The severe consequences of cuts over the past 20 years in publicly funded agricultural science have been felt across the EU.

It is essential that we work collectively to reverse this trend at an EU level. Strong investment in science, including through the European Framework Programme, is crucial. Indeed, going further, the review of the EU budget which begins later this year provides an opportunity to establish research into agricultural production as a top priority for budgetary expenditure.

Technology transfer is vital. The farming industry will take the fruits of R&D and put them into practice on farms. However, our ability to do this is too often constrained by a lack of bravery on the part of politicians to face up to scientific progress. Sound science is the foundation on which all policies, both national and European, should be based and it is essential that the Parliament takes note of advice from the EU's advisory bodies, especially the European Food Safety Authority, when determining policies.

Better regulation

The European Parliament must ensure that policies relating to agriculture are necessary, applicable, practical, and have been subject to rigorous impact assessments.

Unfortunately, there are numerous examples of legislation agreed at European level that are outdated, disproportionate and are not based on science. For example, despite the fact that UK rivers are showing a declining trend in nitrate concentration, the Nitrates Directive, agreed in 1992, continues to be ruthlessly enforced. There are further examples of costly legislation that merit re-examination at EU level such as:

- the Animal By-Products Regulation;
- EU rules governing Transmissible Spongiform Encephelopathies;
- the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) Directive; and
- the Regulation on the identification and registration of sheep.

Future legislation must incorporate sunset clauses to allow outdated legislation to be reviewed and even revoked if it no longer adheres to the best available scientific advice.

Most recently we have seen new legislation on pesticides agreed without a proper and rigorous impact assessment, in short without any consideration for the effect it could have on farming and food production. This is simply unacceptable. The European Parliament must champion the need for full regulatory impact assessments at every stage of EU decision making. This would allow those decision makers to take proper account of the impacts that their proposals will have, rather than relying on bias or outdated assessments.

While it is understandable that the European Parliament strives to raise our environmental standards, MEPs must always remember there is a balance to be struck. If higher European standards simply mean that production is exported, this benefits neither the global environment, the European consumer nor the European economy.

The future of the Common Agricultural Policy

The European Parliament must recognise agricultural production's wider contribution to society and ensure the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is truly common across the EU.

UK farmers have embraced the massive changes made to the CAP in recent years, breaking the link between EU support payments and production (all support payments are 'decoupled' in the UK) giving farmers the freedom to respond to market signals. In addition, a greater proportion of the total budget is now being devoted to rural development measures that recognise the critical contribution made by active farmers to their rural communities.

How the CAP is paid for will be a central element of the upcoming EU budget discussions. Questions will be asked about the size of the CAP relative to the wider budget and society's expectations. We believe that EU farming is of the utmost strategic importance to deliver EU and world food security. Our main concern is to ensure that the CAP remains a common policy and that distortions between EU member states are eliminated. We are particularly concerned to avoid any renationalisation of the CAP which could result in further distortions between member states and erode the potential of the UK to produce food to such a high standard.

Imbalance in the supply chain

The European Parliament should take action to protect consumers by demanding a proactively enforced grocery supply chain code of practice.

We are pleased that the European Parliament has recognised the damaging effects that the imbalance of power in the supply chain can have in its Written Declaration on the abuse of power by large supermarkets in the EU¹. Importantly, what is now clear is that this abuse does not just affect suppliers but also damages consumer welfare.

Farmers are increasingly subject to volatile market forces and, more than ever before, want to see an end to short-termism and unreasonable behaviour in the food supply chain. The absence of fair contracts, the lack of forward planning and the transfer of excessive risk and costs to suppliers does little to inspire confidence amongst farmers and growers to innovate and invest for the future and damages their ability to deliver environmental improvements. If practices were to change then consumers would also benefit from increased choice, better value and even lower food prices that fair dealing could deliver.

Europe is the home of some world class retailers. We are not against success or profit. We simply want to see a food supply chain where there is a fair share of risk and reward.

Given the operation of a single market and the increasing cross-border nature of major retailers, we believe that it is appropriate to consider what common rules of engagement should be put in place across the EU. We believe that the Parliament should take inspiration from proposals in the UK to introduce a strengthened grocery supply chain code of practice policed by an ombudsman.

Promoting consumer choice

The European Parliament must promote policies that empower the consumer through clear country of origin labelling and enable them to recognise the high standards achieved by our farming industry.

Consumers are increasingly looking for 'value with values' which includes making choices on food origin, welfare and the environment. UK agriculture can deliver on all of these but consumers must be provided with clear information so that they can make informed choices.

Recent research commissioned by the NFU highlighted that 74% of food shoppers² support the listing of the country of origin on the pack. Mandatory country of origin labelling on all fresh and semi processed foods is therefore vital to ensure consumers are not being misled.

Both farmers and consumers recognise the importance and benefits of high standards of animal health and welfare. Inferior standards should not be tolerated. For both consumers and UK agriculture it is important that we promote our high standards and that EU policy makers acknowledge the additional measures undertaken by farmers in comparison to those in third countries.



The environment matters

The European Parliament must acknowledge that regulation is sometimes not the best means by which environmental improvements can be delivered.

Farmers maintain, protect and enhance a vast part of the UK's landscape and biodiversity. Agriculture is also part of the solution to addressing climate change, which is one of the EU's and the world's most pressing issues.

UK farmers and growers are proud to share responsibility and offer strong leadership to deliver environmental improvements. For example, UK horticultural businesses which signed up to the NFU climate change levy scheme have reduced their CO₂ emissions by over 270,000 tonnes since 2006. This is equivalent to taking nearly 100,000 cars off the road for a year. Effective industry partnerships are also producing good results on pesticide stewardship, catchment sensitive farming projects to improve water quality and in specific sectors such as dairy.



Industry-led solutions that harness the natural enthusiasm that farmers have for their land are key to delivering environmental benefit. Voluntary approaches, with farmers working in partnership with both regulators and environmental groups should be seen as a credible alternative to regulation when considering how best to address environmental impacts.

However, it is regrettable that some decision makers believe that broad brush EU legislation is always the best way to deliver environmental benefits with neither proper consideration of those benefits nor regard for the impact on producers. On many occasions UK farmers have been forced to fight against impractical, burdensome legislation that duplicates what is already in place. Most recent examples include the proposed Soil Directive, the Pesticides Thematic Strategy and the IPPC Directive.

Less Favoured Areas

The European Parliament must ensure that only areas facing legitimate and real handicaps to agricultural production are designated Less Favoured Areas (LFAs).

Our uplands and remote areas are some of Europe's most beautiful and diverse landscapes, shaped and cared for by farmers against what can be overwhelming odds. To sustain both the landscape and agriculture in these areas it is essential that they continue to retain LFA status.

The current LFA designation system truly reflects the real handicaps faced by farmers in these areas. As a result any proposed changes under the upcoming review must ensure that only active farmers facing legitimate hardship should be eligible, with special consideration for where farming underpins the economic, environmental and social dimensions of rural life.

A proven partnership

The UK farming industry recognises that it must take ownership of many of the challenges it faces. It has already taken big strides in responding to market signals through CAP reform, embracing new technology and improving environmental performance. If this is to continue we need the support of policy makers at home and in the EU institutions.

The UK farming unions will continue to work closely and aim to extend our links with MEPs over the new Parliamentary term.

Footnotes:

- 1 European Parliament 0088/2007, *Written Declaration on Investigating and Remediating the Abuse of Power by Large Supermarkets Operating in the European Union.*
- 2 The Meat and Livestock Commission (2008) *Supermarket Meat Retailing. A special report prepared on behalf of the NFU.*



World class policies for world class farming

- UK MEPs must work to ensure that the positions taken by the European Parliament are defensible on the ground.
- The European Parliament must defend sound science.
- The European Parliament must ensure that policies are necessary, applicable, practical and subject to impact assessments.
- The European Parliament must recognise agricultural production's wider contribution to society and ensure the CAP is truly common across the EU.
- The European Parliament should take action to protect consumers by demanding a grocery supply chain code of practice.
- The European Parliament must promote policies that recognise the high standards achieved by our farming industry.
- The European Parliament must acknowledge that regulation is sometimes not the best means for environmental improvements.
- The European Parliament must ensure that only areas facing real handicaps to agricultural production are designated Less Favoured Areas.

British Agriculture Bureau (BAB)
6th floor
61 rue de Trèves
1040 Brussels
Belgium

Tel: 0032 (0)2 285 05 80
Fax: 0032 (0)2 230 39 28
Email: bab@nfuonline.com

BAB represents the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales, NFU Scotland and the Ulster Farmers' Union.

For more information log on to:
www.nfuonline.com
www.nfu-cymru.org.uk
www.nfus.org.uk
www.ufuni.org