

Land Business Update

Week commencing 10 February 2025

Farming & food

EU's draft 'Vision for Agriculture & Food' provides roadmap for farm policy

It is always interesting to see what other countries are doing and a leaked draft of the EU's policy, which is still subject to change before it is officially published and then negotiated, has a number of main themes:

- Direct payments – will continue but be simplified and move away 'from conditions to incentives'.
- Correction of current imbalances in the food chain - with increased transparency of costs and profits.
- More commercial lending (for investment) into the farming and food sector.
- Young farmers are fundamental to sector's future – with (and it may only be my reading) a focus on them driving interest and change to organic and agroecological farming practises, carbon farming, nature credits and renewable energy production.
- Generational renewal and attracting young blood – with a specific strategy on this in 2027 that includes access to land, retirement schemes and tax incentives.
- Reducing strategic dependencies – for example on imported foods, including protein for animal feed, and some raw materials and fertiliser imports.

Natural capital & environment

Environment Baseline pilot project under way

This [fascinating £3m AHDB and QMS project](#) is taking measurements on 170 farms in England, Scotland and Wales (out of 500 that applied) to build up an environmental picture of them. The baseline will include above and below ground carbon, the impact of farming methods and land uses on emissions, carbon stocks, biodiversity, run off risk and soil health (including nutrient testing). An initial stage will use LiDAR scanning from a plane or drone to estimate above-ground carbon stocks in their hedges and trees and provide run-off water maps. The long-term aim is to create a nationwide accurate standardised dataset across most farm sectors that reports the emissions and environmental impacts of agriculture. Some of the participating farmers have said that they want it to produce 'road maps' of what they can do to reduce their emissions and others that they hoped the data could be used as the baseline against which they might be paid a premium for food produced in an environmentally sustainable way.

New agri-environment scheme for designated landscapes in Wales

The new scheme, called Ffermio Bro, echoes the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) scheme in England and will become part of the collaborative layer of the forthcoming Sustainable Farming Scheme. It will enable collaboration between land managers and National Parks and National Landscapes bodies. It is expected to start in 2025. Snowdonia National Park Authority has started advertising for Ffermio Bro advisors already!

Some good news - bird numbers rise in Scotland despite climate change

The latest NatureScot report surveyed 66 terrestrial species and found numbers rising for 36 species between 1994 and 2023. The populations of seven species remained stable. Woodland species saw the largest increase – up by more than 50% - with chiffchaff, great spotted woodpecker and blackcap all rising significantly. Farmland bird species increased by 7% over the 30-year period, largely due to increases in areas with predominantly grassland farming, where the index increased by 22%. Upland bird populations fell by the most (-20%) and the report links it to factors including climate change, forest expansion and changes in management practices such as grazing and predator control. Breeding numbers of curlew declined by more than 60% and breeding farmland waders including oystercatchers and lapwing also declined significantly. You can get involved in trying to reverse it through the [Working for Waders](#) project. NatureScot said that the report clearly shows that breeding bird populations are dependent on a species' ability to adapt to climate and habitat changes.



MPs fight for water company fines to go to Water Restoration Fund

MPs are seeking an amendment to the Water (Special Measures) Bill to ensure that fines paid by water companies that pollute rivers are ringfenced by law to be spent on restoring water quality in rivers, including by rivers charities. Campaigners are concerned that the Treasury is trying to subsume the fines, estimated at @ £11m, into its general revenue.

Eight toothed spruce bark beetle (Ips) and Sitka Spruce

The beetle is a major pest of Norway Spruce. New research, by Forest Research and Rothamsted Research, has found that the beetle is similarly attracted to Sitka Spruce. S&P comment: it is hard to assess the risk to the industry as the beetles are currently in the dry south-east of England and the majority of Sitka Spruce is in the wet north-west of Great Britain. We will keep a watching brief on the latest research and areas affected by the beetles. The researchers are now investigating how susceptible live Sitka trees are. Our advice remains to be vigilant, check the health of trees regularly, identify stressed, fallen and snapped trees and remove them. Please contact [Simon Hart](#) in our forestry team if you would like to discuss this.

Rural economy & property

Wales's first Timber Industrial Strategy

The Welsh Government is consulting on it, which includes sector capacity, timber security, climate change and more. The [consultation](#) closes on 16 April.

Government planning to spend an additional £250m on flood defences over the next two years

The additional spending would bring the total to £2.65bn, which it says is a record amount. It will be focussed on maintenance of existing flood defences, rather than projects in new areas of risk. The Environment Agency has warned that one in four properties in England will be at risk from flooding by 2050, which is an increase to 8m properties, after it updated its modelling to factor in the effects of climate change.

Natural flood management evidence directory updated – accessible summaries available

The Environment Agency has updated this useful [directory](#). The main document is over 200 pages long but there are some [really accessible summary documents](#) - with plenty of pictures so you can see some of the activities and results – for rivers and flood plains, woodlands, tackling run off and coasts. I really like the simple (and very honest) layout that shows, for different actions, what is known and unknown in terms of the benefits with some examples.

Natural flood management being mainstreamed by the Environment Agency

In part due to the stronger evidence, the Environment Agency says it is 'mainstreaming' the use of natural flood management alongside the use of traditional engineered defences (although the funding is minute compared with spending on traditional engineered solutions). It cites the five-year Littlestock Brook trial on the River Evenlode in Oxfordshire which tested a number of measures including woody dams, creating new water courses and new woodland planting, which showed reductions in the height of flood waters of up to 55% across all the storms analysed. It will also store over 8,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide. Another project at Salmons Brook in Enfield, north London, which combined woodland planting, channel width reduction and installing bunds, could reduce flood flows by 50% and peak water levels by 10-30cm during once-in-a-25-year storms. Lots of food for thought.

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