

FARMING, FLOODING AND THE FUTURE

The December 2015 floods were marked not just by the extent of flooding to homes, property and agricultural land but also by the damage to infrastructure caused by a succession of storms bringing heavy rain. While the December 2015 floods were locally devastating, they were just the latest in a continuing series of extreme weather events that have taken place over the past few years.

The UK farming sector contributes some £108 billion to the economy through its capacity to produce high quality food. The Agri-food sector as a whole employs 13% of the UK's population. But UK farming also delivers a range of environmental benefits, maintains landscapes, and helps protect critical infrastructure.

It is estimated that the costs of the 2007 and 2013/14 floods on agricultural businesses were £50m and £19m respectively. The final costs of the 2015 floods are still unknown. However, it is crucial that these costs reflect both the direct financial impacts on individual agricultural businesses as well as the wider economic impacts on local employment, infrastructure and utilities.

Agriculture is often at the mercy of extreme and changeable weather. Whilst current funding prioritises concentrations of people and property, farmers experience a lack of maintenance of watercourses and coastal channels and reduced maintenance of banks and flood defence assets.

The result is more frequent, more extensive and longer duration flooding. This is an unsustainable

and inequitable outcome, which causes damage to farming businesses and rural communities.

The NFU's preferred approach is for government to establish a long-term, strategic plan for flood and coastal risk management. This plan must be designed to cope with extreme events, take a whole catchment approach to management decisions and intervention. Consideration should also be given to the impacts of infrastructure and development on agricultural land.

Crucially, the importance and contribution of our food and farming sectors to the economy must not be overlooked; some of our most productive and highest value agricultural land is in the floodplain or coastal regions, vulnerable to flooding and deserves to be protected.

In order to ensure that this plan can be enacted and delivered, actions and measures to address flood risk must be properly funded and the allocation for any funding must be transparent.

We recognise that farming has a key role to play in flood management. Where farmers provide a service in mitigating flood risk to help protect others this must be a coherent, planned component of total catchment management, for which farmers must be fairly compensated.

In short, the government's strategy to manage future flood risk must be to Plan, Protect & Pay.



PRINCIPLE POLICY ASKS



Plan

Long term planning for Flood and Coastal Risk Management:

A long-term, strategic and planned approach is needed to manage flood and coastal risk in the future.

Local decision making:

More decisions should be made at a local level, where they will be better informed, and can ensure collaboration between all stakeholders.

Increased catchment - based decisions:

Decisions should be made on a catchment basis and funding should follow. These should be based on scientific knowledge and consider the increased frequency of extreme weather events.



Protect

Improved modelling for flood risk:

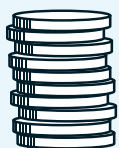
Systems for predicting flood events must be brought up to date in light of recent storm weather events.

Proper assessment of the value of agriculture:

Decisions to invest in flood defences must be based on the value of the assets protected. Crucially, they must include a proper assessment of the value of agricultural land to the nation, now and in the future, taking into consideration the multi-layered, locally dependent costs of flooding to agricultural land.

Better communications on flood risk:

Systems for communicating with those affected must reach the most remote communities, providing sufficient time for response.



Pay

Sufficient and transparent funding:

Flooding and water management in river and coastal areas must be properly funded to protect urban and rural businesses, infrastructure and communities. Government spending must be transparent, and the artificial distinction between capital and maintenance expenditure removed.

Appropriate resourcing during maintenance withdrawal:

The Government Agencies must be properly resourced to work with local groups during withdrawal of river maintenance. This may either be through the extension or establishment of new Internal Drainage Boards or other local solutions, including putting assets in good condition before they are handed over to future management.

Natural Flood Management establishment:

Where agricultural land is part of the solution to flooding as part of total catchment management, such as natural flood management or flood water storage, this must be planned, agreed and paid for.