

THE UPLANDS:

A VISION FOR PROSPERITY, STEWARDSHIP AND RESILIENCE

Our long-term vision for the uplands shows how farmers, government and other key stakeholders can work together to achieve a confident, sustainable future for the businesses at their heart. Prosperous, resilient and diverse family-run businesses that support environmental sustainability and quality food production, deliver healthy ecosystems and climate mitigation, and ensure the rich culture, enduring traditions, and unique heritage of our uplands form the foundation of thriving communities. To ensure we achieve our long-term vision, there are a number of key asks we can work together on now to lay the foundations for a sustainable future for our uplands.

FARMING AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

Work with us to deliver prosperous upland farm businesses that support both environmental sustainability and quality food production.

- Government decisions must recognise and support the essential infrastructure that underpins upland farming, including auction marts and the wider ancillary industries that enable farm businesses to function effectively. This includes supporting their adaption to policy changes, streamlining regulations and encouraging the uptake of new technologies.
- The upcoming Farming Profitability Review should consider the specific needs of upland farm businesses including access to grants and finance, facilitating business diversification, ensuring fairness in supply chains, and adaptation to climate change, to allow them to become more profitable, productive and sustainable.
- An impact assessment must be carried out on Environmental Land Management schemes to evaluate their effect on the productivity and economic viability of upland farm businesses.
- Defra should create longer term certainty by publishing investment plans at least over the rest of the Parliament, reducing in-year alterations and sudden changes that hinder business planning, and ensure that the systems are in place to deliver investment onto farm in an efficient and timely fashion.
- Defra should prioritise targeted funding for expert advice to ensure that any upland farmer looking to access environmental schemes has access to a knowledgeable and qualified adviser to support resilient, productive upland farms that also serve as environmental stewards.

RURAL ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY

Help us ensure we have resilient, diverse and innovative farm businesses run by farming families.

- Local planning policies need to facilitate agricultural infrastructure such as covering of farm muck stores, well designed and new livestock/farm buildings and developments associated with diversification, recognising where improvement in infrastructure can lead to improvement in production and the environment. The planning and permitted development process needs to facilitate these developments in National Landscapes, National Parks and other protected areas like Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Special Areas of Conservation.
- Future agricultural support and private finance policies need to recognise the importance of tenant farming in upland landscapes and the recommendations of the Rock Review should be implemented in full.
- The statutory duties of Natural England should be amended so they account for socio-economic issues, particularly ensuring consents issued are based on the latest evidence.
- Natural England must provide transparent, accurate baseline data for designated sites, to allow for informed decisions to be made, with a clear system for updating this information to reflect the management, climatic impacts and other factors impacting the condition of the site.
- Promote responsible upland tourism through a national campaign focused on the Countryside Code. Tackle irresponsible behaviour with stronger laws, such as on livestock worrying. Invest in infrastructure, education, and access management using funds like the Rural England Prosperity Fund, LEADER or Farming in Protected Landscapes. This will help people enjoy the countryside while protecting landscapes, wildlife, and local farming.

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

Work with us so farmers are fully recognised, valued, supported, and actively involved in shaping and delivering their futures.

- Reflecting recommendations from the Fursdon Review, government must facilitate better joined-up working across upland landscapes to strengthen governance and fair environmental outcomes.
- Upland farmers should be fully engaged in ELMs development, including any updates to SFI following its closure. Careful consideration should be given to new actions that properly reward upland farmers for environmental delivery rather than being treated as compensation, including a grassland standard that meets the needs of upland landscapes and addressing barriers to option entry such as from historic features and land designations.
- Ensure ELMs moorland actions which impact on stocking density are evidence-based, reflect the realities of upland farming, and support both environmental outcomes and the viability of farming businesses.
- Defra's Land Use Framework must be grounded in robust science which recognises uplands farming's importance as an exemplar of multi-functional land use. It should remain flexible, enabling farmers to make informed choices about delivering public goods alongside food and energy production
- Ensure all upland farmers, including those farming on common land, can access SFI and Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier as soon as they open. This must include equivalent payments for those unable to transfer immediately from legacy schemes so early adopters are not left worse off.

CULTURE, HERITAGE AND TRADITION

Work with us so the rich culture, enduring traditions, and unique heritage of our upland landscapes form the foundation of thriving, resilient communities where people are proud to live, work, and visit.

- The SFI review must consider the value of uplands farming's contributions to culture, heritage and tradition by recognising and rewarding these valuable cultural services, including traditional farming practices, landscape, skills, local customs and their industrial past.
- Defra should publish clear guidance and provide on-the-ground support to ensure common land can be easily entered into all levels of ELMs, enabling full participation by common right holders. The commons register must be accessible and up to date to support this process.
- The Department for Education/Skills England should conduct an assessment of current and future gaps in the rural skills needed to deliver government goals on environment, climate, and food security. This must include heritage skills at risk due to pressures on upland farm businesses.
- Ensure future government and stakeholder policy decisions consider the cultural and heritage value of upland landscapes, including the role of pastoral farming in designations like the Lake District's World Heritage Status.

NET ZERO, CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Help us ensure upland farm businesses deliver healthy ecosystems, climate mitigation and national environmental priorities.

- Upland peatland policy needs to be based on the latest science and recognise that peatland needs to be actively managed. Policies must balance soil protection with food production and remain simple.
- Prioritise climate adaptation in vulnerable upland areas with a clear plan aligned to the next Climate Change Risks Assessment and National Adaptation Programme to address future challenges and costs, including wildfires and drought.
- Publish clear rules and standards to enable upland farmers and buyers to confidently engage in private environmental markets, with guidance ensuring accessibility for all farm sizes, tenures, and business types.
- Funding should be considered for maintaining habitat in good condition, and guidance should be published on how farmers in designated areas (including protected landscapes and SSSIs) can access funding given current complexities and administrative burdens.