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NFU Tree Strategy





FOREWORD – RICHARD BRAMLEY, NFU ENVIRONMENT FORUM CHAIR

Trees, hedgerows, and woodlands on farms have long been principal features that give a strong sense of nature and wildlife in our beloved landscape. Our treescapes define regions and are incredibly valued and loved features by the public and farmers, who manage the landscapes on a daily basis. In many cases our trees can offer practical farmland benefits too, from acting as a boundary feature to offering shade for livestock in the summer months.

Arguably most importantly for today's generation and in light of our understanding of global climate change, our trees and hedgerows act as vital carbon storage units. The public and private focus on tree planting is unprecedented at present for this very reason, there is recognition that managing our trees and hedgerows and planting more trees is hugely important to combat climate change in the short and long term.

The NFU recognises the enormous challenge our farmers have ahead of them to step up and contribute to the nation's tree planting target. Our aspiration is for British farmers and growers to be global leaders in climate-friendly food production, alongside their role in maintaining and improving our environment. The NFU has set the ambitious goal of reaching net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across the whole of agriculture by 2040. Some of this, will be achieved through carbon sequestration measures such as growing bigger and wider hedgerows and planting trees across farm where they can, alongside managing soil to also build carbon reserves.

The Government recently published the long-awaited England Trees Action Plan (ETAP), providing the high-level strategic framework to encourage tree planting in the short and long term. Whilst the plan is well thought out, and there are a number of aspects that we can welcome, there is little reference to farmers in the driving seat. 70% of the land in England is managed by farmers, if the tree planting goals are to be achieved, we need our farmers, as custodians of the countryside, to be on board and recognised.

The NFU will continue to urge government to develop policies that will create an enabling environment, to allow farmers across England to deliver for the climate agenda, in a way that works alongside their business and primary role as food producers. The ETAP recognises agroforestry as an important component of the future grant system, but we still need to see more recognition for all trees in shaping our iconic landscape.

This is an exciting time to be a farmer. With the right policy framework trees can be part of the agricultural industry response to the climate crisis. The NFU Tree Strategy, presented here, outlines how farmers can contribute to Government's ambitions.



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The England Trees Action Plan

SUMMARY OF CONTENT

In May 2021, Government published the long-awaited England Trees Action Plan (ETAP), which provides an ambitious, long term vision for trees and woodland in England to 2050 and beyond. The ETAP aims to treble tree planting rates in England by the end of the current parliament. The intention of the ETAP is a call to action, to landowners and managers, communities, and other groups to help to meet the ambitions.

The ETAP provides the starting point for developing more detailed policies to support Government's ambitions. The NFU welcomes the inclusion in ETAP of:

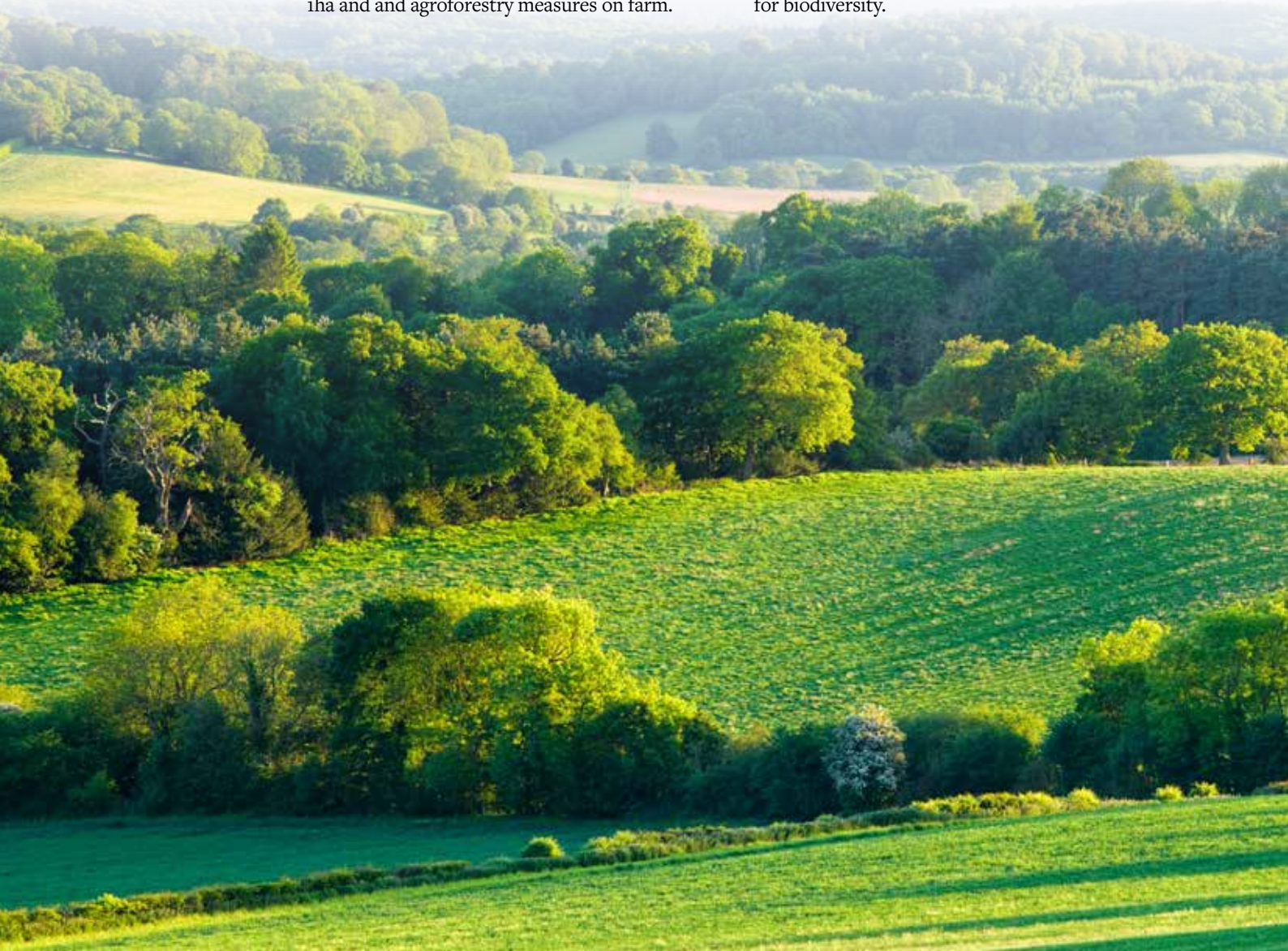
- Recognition of the “right tree in the right place” principle, which considers factors such as the tree species, appropriately sourced to match the location and the long-term objectives.
- Commitment to support our nursery sector to supply home grown saplings.
- Ambition to leverage private finance.
- Uplifted payments for government funded grants to land managers to plant trees.
- Commitment to fund small scale planting – from 1ha and agroforestry measures on farm.

- Recognition of unmanaged farm woodlands, and the need to incentivise management.
- More and better advice / guidance.
- Reviewing the guidance on the tax treatment of trees and woodlands.

From the NFU's perspective ETAP had:

- Little reference to farming, despite the fact farmers are crucial to delivering the targets.
- Makes little provision for agricultural tenants to play a fuller role in tree or woodland planting
- Not referenced permanency element of tree planting.
- Committed to ELMs funding for woodland creation and management, which the NFU believes would benefit from a separate scheme to ELMs due to woodland complexity.

The ETAP is “just the beginning” and Government has committed to continuous engagement and work with stakeholders to implement the actions. The NFU will continue to work to get more recognition for trees across the countryside, shaping our iconic landscapes, contributing to the carbon agenda and delivering for biodiversity.



NFU Tree Strategy

Trees and hedgerows will play an important role in the years ahead to achieve Net Zero and deliver multiple benefits to the farm business, society, and the environment. In the following pages the NFU sets out its Tree Strategy. We recognise that the increased public, private and governmental focus on tree planting as a climate change solution. Farmers are well placed, if the policy environment is enabling, to deliver on this front. Our Strategy highlights the key opportunities for the farming industry going forward, but critically identifies the existing barriers that prevent our industry from fully engaging. We outline those barriers in this strategy, and we urge government, on the back of launching the ETAP, to address these policy areas and in turn, create a more enabling environment that leads to increased uptake.

The Government has a commitment to planting 11 million trees in the 25 Year Environment Plan and has a manifesto commitment to plant 30,000 hectares per annum by 2025, of which England's contribution will be 7,000 hectares.

Closer to home, trees in woodlands, the wider landscape and hedgerows will play a significant role in helping the NFU deliver its own ambition to meet Net Zero by 2040.

This NFU Tree Strategy covers England only, encompassing woodland creation, agroforestry, trees in the wider landscape and hedgerow planting and management. It complements the NFU's Net Zero roadmap.

NFU key policy asks:

THE NFU...

- Stresses the need to consider factors such as the tree species, appropriate sourcing to match the location and the long-term objectives- the "right tree in the right place."
- Would like to see incentives to bring existing woodlands back into management and this should be a priority over new plantings.
- Stresses the need that land managers that decide to plant trees must have made that decision voluntarily.
- Urges the government to address key existing policy barriers, crucially the existing tenancy clauses which prevent 30% of our agricultural land from engaging in tree planting.
- Believes Government should reconsider the permanency element of planting trees which is currently a barrier. Where tree planting is permanent land use change, Government must ensure that incentives compensate for the permanent loss in capital value of the land.
- Would like to see increased recognition and incentives for trees outside of woodlands. These contribute enormously to our natural environment and landscape features. They act as important carbon sinks.
- Believes there is a need for a separate Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs) offer for commercial forestry and large woodlands, recognising the complexity of forestry delivery.



Almost one-third of the
3.2 million
hectares
of the UK's forests and
woodlands are on farmland



CASE STUDY



JAMIE DEWHURST – NURSERY GROWER, WEST MIDLANDS

Since forming in 2002, G&A Growers have expanded their business to supply 13 million saplings annually, hugely surpassing their initial 5 million target. Jamie's Warwickshire site provides the perfect soil and conditions for growing well balanced trees. The operation is also largest supplier of Hawthorn in Europe.

Mr Dewhurst explained his thoughts on increasing demand for saplings, "Over the past 25-30 years there has been a consistent decrease in demand with many producers either retiring with no successors or ceasing production. This created an opportunity for my business to grow. It is only now in the past 12 months that the sector is seeing an upward turn in demand. In the next few years I expect continuous growth, given the focus on tree planting as a means of combatting climate change."



The 'right tree in the right place'

The NFU welcomes the ETAP's focus on the **right tree in the right place**, both now and in a changing climate. This includes ensuring:

- Our best and most versatile land is not planted with trees, recognising the importance of food production. However, any proposal to change the use of land from agriculture should be fully assessed.
- Farmers are able to readily access sound, scientifically correct advice, training provision and clear guidance from experts.
- Support for new plantings and encourage British sourced and grown saplings supporting our nursery sector.
- Through incentives bringing existing woodlands back into sustainable management.

We must plant "the right tree in the right place" both now and in a changing climate. Farmers need to consider a range of issues to ensure it makes sound business sense in the short and long term. Considerations include planting objective, tree species appropriately sourced to match the location, local climate, soil type, exposure and desired outcome. Planting trees in many cases is a permanent decision.

We must learn from mistakes of the past, such as planting trees on peatland, which damages the carbon storage, and fully assess any proposals to change the use of land from agriculture, recognising the importance of food production. Planting should be done in communication with knowledgeable and trusted advisers, supported by improved clear guidance for farmers. The long term objectives of tree planting must be fully understood but also to inform a sensible and planned approach to meeting tree planting targets. Finally, the NFU supports British sourced and grown saplings as a biosecurity defence and welcomes the commitment that government will be providing support to our domestic nursery sector. It is crucial our nursery growers are equipped with the infrastructure, labour and policies that allow the increased demand to be from Great Britain.

Whilst the NFU recognises the need for sensible tree planting, we must ensure we are managing our existing treescapes optimally before this is the focus. In 2019, less than 60% of England's existing woodlands were in active management. Managed woodlands deliver more for wildlife and carbon storage and the NFU therefore believes bringing more woodland into management should be a priority over new plantings.

Existing barriers identified

The NFU recognises that for **farmers to voluntarily engage, policy barriers need to be addressed** to ensure that...

- Government offers incentives for and recognises the importance of trees outside of woodlands found in the wider landscape, including hedges, lone trees, and small-scale tree planting on farm, rewarding the public benefits they deliver.
- The permanency element of planting new woodland is reviewed, as currently this presents a major barrier to the land manager and landowner community.
- The existing taxation regime no longer presents a barrier to engagement.
- There is a separate Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs) offer for commercial forestry and large woodlands, recognising the complexity of forestry delivery.

The NFU has identified various policy barriers that government should address, to enable farmers to engage with tree planting alongside the active farm business. It is important that any interest or engagement amongst the land manager community in planting trees of any kind is done so voluntarily. First and foremost, farmers are food and fibre producers, and planting and managing trees requires a different skillset.

There is an urgent need for government to recognise that **every tree counts!** Government needs to develop and offer more accessible grant schemes to fund trees in the wider landscape in the broadest sense. This includes agroforestry type measures, hedges through to single and small groups and trees on farm that work with the farm business. The NFU looks forward to working with Defra and the Forestry Commission to develop the ETAP proposals with practical farming in mind.

Currently, planting new woodland can present a major barrier to engagement amongst farmers as it poses a permanent land use change, tying the land up in perpetuity. The requirement that areas of forestry and woodland cannot be returned to agriculture means farmers are put off from planting. It is restrictive to younger generations. Finally, the taxation treatment of woodlands can be another barrier initial tree planting.

Woodland creation at a large scale and commercial forestry are incredibly complex and require a specific skillset. The NFU strongly believes that both areas would benefit from a separate scheme with its own budget to the anticipated ELMs.



Farmers maintain 411,600 km of hedgerows in England and Wales, a length which is enough to wrap round the earth's equator more than 10 times

CASE STUDY

PHIL JARVIS' LEGACY AT THE ALLERTON PROJECT, EAST MIDLANDS

Phil planted trees with grazing livestock in mind when he was head of farming at the Allerton Project, leaving behind a legacy. Operating a silvopastoral agroforestry system, Phil chose to incorporate trees into the grazed fields, enabling the core farm business to continue. Phil had a commercial goal with his tree planting and explained... "The farm's original woodlands have expanded since the 1990s with the farm planting several hectares of trees which are now over ten metres tall. They are a mix of native broadleaves and conifer species such as spruce and larch. The trees are used commercially, for stakes and binders used in hedge laying and biofuel which heats the headquarters and the eco-built visitors centre."



The NFU also understands that there is a need for policy to create an enabling environment which includes:

- Reviewing the existing barriers that prevent tenant farmers from engaging in tree planting activity.
- Alternative private funding streams to established, such as payment for public goods linked to a robust carbon price reward for the carbon storage achieved. It should be possible to stack this private funding on public schemes
- Developing Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs) and other targeting tools such as local ELMs priorities in consultation with land managers.



Crucially, nearly 30% of agricultural land in England is tenanted on either Full Agricultural Tenancies or Farm Business Tenancies. In most cases, our tenant farmers are unable to plant trees on their holding due to existing clauses within their tenancy agreements. To open up opportunities the Government must help overcome this barrier.

Current woodland cover in England is

10%

In the years ahead, we are likely to see alternative funding streams emerge. An example is the carbon market. There is a need for a robust carbon price reward for the carbon storage achieved. Both farmers and investors need confidence and security in these new funding opportunities. It must be possible to allow public and private funding to work simultaneously.

As LNRs begin to be developed (subject to the Environment Bill reaching Royal Assent), or other local environmental targeting tools these may contain priority areas for tree planting. It is fundamental that land managers and farmers are consulted on the development of their local LNRs, and any other local priorities for example, within ELMs.

CASE STUDY

STEVEN CRABTREE, LIVESTOCK FARMER, NORTH EAST

Steven Crabtree is a third-generation livestock farmer in the Yorkshire Dales. In 2006, Steven planted some unproductive areas of the farm with trees.

"This year I've taken part in the Big Farmland Tree Planting challenge, promoted by the NFU North East and Woodland Trust. I have chosen to plant my trees with the goal of supporting biodiversity on my farm and rejuvenating my existing ageing woodland. It's a great initiative to try to encourage local farmers to plant trees for all sorts of reasons."





CASE STUDY

SAYA HARVEY, ARABLE FARMER AND WOODLAND OWNER, EAST MIDLANDS

"Hedgerows are a very important wildlife habitat and landscape feature and we've planted approximately two-and-a-half kilometres of hedge on the farm over the past 30 years. Other habitats on the farm include a 15-year-old woodland and several ponds that have been established where ancient field drainage has collapsed. Since planting the woodland, we have seen an increase in the number of bird species on the farm from 45 species to 60. A permissive right of way through the new woodland ensures that our whole community enjoys our farm, the wildlife and landscape."

In short, the NFU believes that tree planting will be crucial in tackling the climate change challenge and that farmers and growers have a key role to play in delivering the outcomes required. Trees offer a multitude of additional benefits to climate action too, which should not be overlooked. Across the countryside trees of all kinds have an important role including shaping our iconic landscapes, contributing to flood prevention and delivering for biodiversity.

The NFU continues to be committed to its own Net Zero ambitions and will encourage and aid the farming industry to step up to the challenge. Individual farmers have a role to play, no matter how small or large those actions are, all will contribute towards the overall success of the industries ambition.

The NFU hopes to continue to influence and in turn, see the government create a landscape where on-farm trees, hedges and woodlands are valued for the public goods they deliver. Trees should work alongside active farming, and we are committed to working alongside government to help develop funding streams that will work practically for our membership and work towards Net Zero by 2040.



**TREES SHOULD
WORK ALONGSIDE
ACTIVE FARMING,
AND WE ARE
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TO WORKING
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GOVERNMENT**

