



A snapshot

Regional overview

The NFU's North East region encompasses Northumberland, Tyneside, County Durham, Teesside & Yorkshire, covering over 1m hectares of land. With 4 National Parks, 5 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 615 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, the region takes in many diverse and valuable landscapes.

More than 16,000 farms manage 70% of the region's land area, but farm types vary greatly. The farming industry is worth millions to the regional economy and employs more than 40,000 people. Additionally, in rural areas of the North East, farming can account for 30% of businesses.



This document provides an overview of farming types across the region and some key environmental and policy documents produced by the NFU.



Livestock farming

This is sometimes known as pastoral farming and it is the breeding of livestock for meat, wool, eggs and dairy. Livestock most often graze on permanent pasture, which is grassland that remains unploughed for years.

37% of land in the NFU's North East region is permanent pasture, which as well as feeding livestock, is also an excellent carbon sink. Much of this upland area cannot be used to produce crops. As well as transforming grass into nutrient-rich meat and dairy products, livestock farmers also maintain the celebrated British countryside by conserving habitats such as limestone grassland and upland heath.



Arable farming & horticulture

This is the use of land to grow crops including cereals, vegetables grown outside and in glasshouses, and potatoes. Cereal crops are key to agricultural systems in the North East, where farmers produce significant yields of cereals including barley, wheat and oilseed rape.



Also important is the horticultural production of fruit, vegetables, salads and ornamental plants. The region produces a wealth of crops including peas, asparagus and beetroot, plus soft fruits and Yorkshire speciality rhubarb. The banks of the Humber are home to many glasshouse growers producing a wealth of high value salad crops.

Biofuel production

This is the growth of crops that are used to produce fuels. Biofuels tend to be produced from fermentation of crops such as wheat and sugar, both of which are produced in the region.

The government announcement that the rollout of E10 (a petrol that contains 10% renewable bioethanol) will begin this year has been welcomed by the NFU and is a key aspect in achieving farming's net zero ambitions. Farmers in the region are already leading the way in producing renewable biofuel crops and with two bioethanol plants in the region, they are set to deliver renewable fuel for the nation.



North East profile

This area includes Northumberland, Durham, Darlington, Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees, South Teesside, Tyneside and Sunderland, plus parts of the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and Peak District National Parks.

624,000 hectares of land is farmed in this region. 45% of this is best suited to growing grass for grazing livestock. This region has almost 2 million sheep grazing the rough pasture and moorland to turn grass into high quality food and wool.

Despite much of the land being uplands, arable crops are also grown in the region where 22% of farmed area is used to produce cereal crops such as wheat, barley, oilseed rape and oats which are grown in the fertile, lowland areas towards the coast.

Farms in this region are unique where they are very large – around 66% larger than the English average (144 hectares compared to 87). Many of the farms also tenanted, meaning farmers lease land from landowners. Farming Business Income (FBI) is also lower than the English average due to the large number of grazing livestock farms.



Yorkshire profile

The NFU's Yorkshire area takes in the East Riding and Kingston upon Hull as well as North Yorkshire, York, South and West Yorkshire. It also boasts parts of the Peak District, Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Parks.

1.1 million hectares of land is farmed in this area and farm type is very variable across the region. 50% of farmed area is used for arable production, including cereals, but the region also boasts a thriving industry for potatoes and field vegetables.

The region also accounts for 37% of the English pig population and 13% of the poultry population. In addition, permanent pasture characterises much of the upland areas such as in the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors, which are characterised by grazing livestock. Dairy cattle are grazed in the lowland areas to produce quality dairy products.



Climate change & net zero

There are several issues facing the region's farmers, from a loss in financial support following Brexit and changeable market conditions to labour shortages. However, some of the most prominent issues are environmental, particularly the impact of climate change.

Farmers are on the front-line of climate challenges dealing with increased flooding and drought events. The industry is also responsible for around 10% of UK GHG emissions. That is why the NFU launched its [net zero challenge](#) with the aim of leading the global drive to deliver climate-friendly food production. This is an industry-wide goal, not an expectation that every farm will be able to reach net zero.

Agriculture has a major part to play in decarbonising the UK economy, as both a source of and a sink for CO2. Farmers can implement measures on-farm that fall under three key pillars:

- **Boosting productivity and reducing emissions**

Reducing emissions using a wide variety of techniques to enhance productivity and deliver the same or greater output from every farm, while working 'smarter' to use fewer inputs.

- **Increasing farmland carbon storage**

Increasing farming's ability to capture more carbon through the management of bigger hedgerows, more trees and woodland, as well as enhancing the organic matter in soils and conserving existing carbon stores in grassland and pasture.

- **Boosting the bioeconomy and renewables sector**

Displacing greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels and removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through bioenergy and bio-based materials such as hemp fibre and sheep's wool.

To achieve our net zero ambition, a varied approach is needed as every farm business is different. A partnership approach is also essential with government, stakeholders, and supply chains. In achieving net zero, we must not undermine food production and simply export our emissions to other parts of the world. The NFU is forging ahead with this environmental challenge and it has never been more important to discuss net zero and the ambition for the industry.



Net Zero and Agriculture: A Guide for Local Authorities

The aims and ambitions of local authorities and agriculture often align with a shared goal to tackle climate change. That is why the NFU created [a national guide for local authorities](#) designed to highlight our three action pillars and how local authorities can help in their delivery.

The aim is to encourage local authorities to work with farmers to achieve their net zero ambitions. The document explores how local authorities can do this, from offering funding opportunities to support action on the ground and promoting the local food economy to adopting a flexible planning approach and supporting vital research and development, to name a few.

Local authorities must be aware that the sector is going through an unprecedented time of change. The pandemic has brought significant disruption the food and drink market, and a key outcome of Brexit is the phasing out of direct support for farm businesses. These payments currently make up a large proportion of farm business income and as they reduce, farmers will face a real squeeze both on cashflow and their ability to invest in net zero measures.

The NFU is keen to work with local authorities to achieve net zero goals and urges them to work with farmers and growers to include the supportive measures in climate change emergency plans, local plans, and economic development strategies.

Net Zero & Agriculture in the North East: A Guide for Local Authorities

Designed to complement the national document, this booklet looks at how local authorities can work with farmers across the North East.

Featuring a range of case studies showing how our members are implementing practical measures to reduce GHG emissions, the document also highlights how the sector is being affected by climate change regionally. It provides some simple measures that local authorities can implement to support farmers in the region. These range from encouraging the procurement of local produce and delivering a clear and transparent planning system to ensure that tree planting strategies are voluntary and prioritising the management of existing woodland. It also stresses the importance of local policy and collaborative working.

The NFU wants to continue to actively engage with local authorities in the region.



Water management

Related to climate change, one of the greatest challenges that farmers in the North East are experiencing is water management, whether working to improve water quality or dealing with the dire effects of too much or too little rain. Severe weather events are becoming much more common; with the region experiencing three major flooding events in just 12 months - between July 2019 and July 2020 - that once would have been regarded as once-in-100-year experiences.

Flooding affects upland, lowland and coastal areas, with all farm types at risk from extreme rainfall or tidal surges. Arable businesses face potential crop losses, livestock farmers risk seeing their livestock swept away, damage to farm infrastructure such as dry stone walls can cost millions to repair and given the integrated nature of the agricultural industry, the knock on effects, such as straw losses, can be felt far beyond the affected area. Although particularly vulnerable to flooding events, rural communities are often given a lower priority and can also suffer as a result of reduced maintenance of watercourses. This has a negative impact on farming businesses and overall food security.

The NFU launched its [Integrated Water Management Strategy](#) in 2021, calling for action to ensure the nation's water infrastructure is better able to cope with extreme weather events. It calls for proper investment in water management as a critical response to climate change.

The report reveals that:

- Significant investment in water infrastructure is crucial to protect existing farmland and food production during extreme weather events, increase our food security, and help deliver the NFU's ambition for farming to be net zero by 2040.
- 57% of farmers say they have experienced extreme weather conditions, such as flooding or drought, in the past 10 years. This shows why there is a pressing need to further equip farmers with tools to manage extreme weather events.
- The creation of a multi-sector integrated water management strategy would help secure a fair share of water for agriculture and establish the agri-food sector as an essential user of water.

Farmers play a key role in water management, with vast areas of farmland being mapped for use as flood water storage areas. This provides a valuable public good and the farmers providing it must be fairly compensated. The report highlights the need for an integrated approach to water management and the importance of working together to achieve joint ambitions. It sets out why a long-term, collaborative approach is needed, and articulates the NFU's call for farmers and land managers to be acknowledged as part of the solution to the problems we face, practically supported to deliver the on-farm actions needed.



Levelling up rural Britain

Rural communities in the North East region provide jobs to thousands of people and contribute millions to the regional economy. But no one should be disadvantaged by where they live or where their business is located. That is why the NFU launched the [Levelling Up Rural Britain](#) report which highlights how rural communities can provide solutions to numerous issues while continuing to deliver sustainable food production.

The report highlights several areas where the rural/urban divide continues to grow. These include:

- Broadband and connectivity – poor access to reliable mobile coverage and adequate broadband continues to put rural areas at a disadvantage, acting as a constraint to capital investment.
- Rural crime – farms and rural communities have increasingly become the target of criminals in recent years, with rural crime costing the UK £54.3 million in 2019. Rural areas continue to receive lower levels of police funding, per head of population, than urban areas.
- Planning – The planning system too often prevents farm modernisation, diversification and home building for farm workers. The government's planning White Paper offers an important opportunity to bring about reform and ensure renewal and growth can be sustained in rural areas.
- Investment - UK Government should be encouraging more investment, including British investment, into the success story that is British food.



The NFU believes that by levelling up rural Britain, more jobs will be created, green economic growth will be boosted, exports can be increased, and the wellness of the entire nation will be improved. All of this can be achieved with the UK being global leaders in sustainable food production.

Funding challenges

Farmers are currently experiencing an unprecedented time of change now we have left the EU. Farming businesses were previously supported by the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, which provided farmers with financial support known as Direct Payments. This was one of the main support instruments to farmers and comprised a significant proportion of farm business income. These payments are being reduced from this year and nationally on average about 60% of farm business income will be lost by the end of the transition period the government's new domestic agriculture policy.

However, this will be felt even harder by farmers in areas such as Northumberland, where direct payments can make up 98% of farm business income. This is due to the large number of upland and tenanted farms and will restrict cash flow as well as investment opportunities.

Direct Payments will be replaced with the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), which will pay farmers for providing payments for public good. Currently there is little information on the detail of the scheme and farmers cannot make long-term business decisions until there is further clarity on the scheme.

The NFU's North East region is one of the most diverse in terms of landscape and agricultural production. It is essential that future support schemes provide adequate support to all farming businesses to ensure they can continue to produce the food we all know and enjoy.

