

# Farming loved but misunderstood, survey shows

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A YouGov Cambridge poll has revealed widespread affection for agriculture, even though there is a surprising level of ignorance about the sector and its contribution to the economy.

A survey exploring public opinion about the UK's agricultural sector has revealed that farming has a special place in most people's hearts, even though they know surprisingly little about it.

The results of the YouGov-Cambridge poll show that [large numbers](#) of people believe that farming is important for both the environment and the economy, visit the countryside regularly and appreciate living near

rural green space.

But it also uncovered a surprising level of ignorance about the extent and contribution of farming in the UK. A majority of people (72%) feel that they do not know much, or know nothing, about the sector. That appears to be substantiated by the fact that most people dramatically underestimate the proportion of land used for farming, while overestimating its economic contribution.

Only 10% of [respondents](#) knew, to within 10 percentage points, the actual amount of land that is farmed nationally. The mean [estimation](#) put forward by those taking part in the survey was about 35%. In fact, farming takes up about 75% of available land in the UK. On the other hand, the mean contribution of farming to the [national economy](#) was reckoned to be about 24% by most participants. In truth, farming contributes closer to 1.5% of [GDP](#).

The study was conducted in collaboration between YouGov-Cambridge and Mark Reader, a specialist in farming at the Department of Land Economy, University of Cambridge, who argued that the findings would be useful for both [agricultural policy](#)-makers and from the point of view of public well-being.

"If we want to legitimise agricultural policy, but also make sure that it is tailored to the needs of the populace, we need to know what people think," he said. "If people thought that farming wasn't important, that would be a big problem for those working in the sector."

"In fact, there is clearly a lot of [affection](#) for farming, which is surprising given how much people underestimate the amount of land it takes up. It is heartening to see this because food security is going to be an important issue in the years to come, as recent droughts in North America have shown. At the moment the UK is managing to feed itself

surprisingly well on a calorie basis. But, as policy adapts to cope with new pressures and changes, this kind of public appreciation and recognition will prove increasingly important."

The survey was based around an online questionnaire which was carried out with 1,736 people, drawn from a panel of individuals who have agreed to take part in YouGov surveys. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

Along with specific findings about the [agricultural sector](#), it revealed evidence of a clear and widespread passion for the British countryside. A majority of people still visit the countryside more than once a month and 82% said it was either fairly important, or very important, for them to live within 30 minutes' striking distance of rural green space. Significantly, 73% of Londoners—many of whom do not live within easy reach of such areas—felt this way.

"Given that a wealth of recent studies about happiness and well-being have pointed to the role our physical location plays in determining our sense of life satisfaction, that is significant," Reader said. "We should be making sure that they do not feel deprived of access to green space."

Most people also clearly see the countryside as being under threat, although not from farming. The most troubling incursions were seen as being those of new building projects, roads and airport extensions, as well as the dumping of rubbish.

Farming itself is perceived in broadly positive terms. 75% of respondents said it played an important role in protecting the environment and only 5% considered it unimportant in this respect. 85% see farming as important for the UK economy as a whole. Despite this, there was an air of pessimism about the results, with roughly two-thirds of people adding that they believe farming's contribution to the British

economy will get smaller over the course of the next 10 years.

"Most people's hearts appear to be in the right place about farming and the [countryside](#) even if they have some misconceptions about it," Reader added. "That matters less than it would if there was widespread negativity about agriculture in the UK on a mistaken basis. It's fantastic to see that [people](#) appreciate the contribution of the agricultural sector, given its likely significance in the future."

Provided by University of Cambridge

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