

# Making 'green Brexit' work for agriculture and the environment

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Post-Brexit policy should carry out a root-and-branch reform to better address the specific needs of the UK's farming and food sectors whilst protecting the countryside. Speaking at the 'Ecology Across Borders' conference in Ghent, Belgium this week, academics will outline some of the challenges and opportunities that present themselves to deliver on a 'green Brexit' under the current political landscape.

Although the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) provides income support to farmers across the UK nations (on average to the tune of 50-60%), it has been criticised for its complexity and for creating inequalities within the system, failing to support the most vulnerable farmers.

As the UK prepares to leave the EU, future [agricultural policy](#) could move towards the use of public money to reward the provision of public goods\*. To this end, it is vital to reach a consensus on what public goods are and to ensure that landscape management and [environmental protection](#) are central to this definition, according to a recently published [policy brief](#).

Dr Adam Hejnowicz from the University of York's Department of Biology says: "Replacing the CAP with a fairer, more appropriate and effective funding model that is based on the supply of public goods and environmental protection is an immediate priority."

"Whatever the outcome of Brexit negotiations, responsibility for

agriculture will return to the UK. There is an opportunity to rethink and reframe the way UK agricultural [policy](#) is managed, taking a wide approach that encompasses sustainable land use, rural development and environmental conservation", he adds.

The report suggests that agricultural policy could become part of a wider sustainable Land Use Strategy, which seeks to improve the declining environmental quality through restoration. There is scope to enhance farmland by recognising both its economic values and ecosystem services, including flood risk mitigation, biodiversity, carbon storage, clean air and water, and recreational opportunities.

Securing an agriculture-friendly trade deal with the EU will be critical in finding a balance between imports and exports that enables an adequate degree of self-sufficiency.

"We must also recognise that our biggest market will still be the EU after Brexit and that cooperation is essential", comments Professor Sue Hartley, Director of the York Environmental Sustainability Institute, and President of the British Ecological Society, who also contributed to this policy brief. "As well as well needing the ability to freely trade products with our neighbours, many parts of the UK agriculture and food sectors will continue to rely heavily on seasonal overseas workers."

"Ultimately, Brexit offers the UK a chance to design agricultural policy that is fit for purpose, long-term in nature and that has sustainable prosperity at its core', Dr Hejnowicz concludes.

The report was produced by a number of academics from Queen's University Belfast and the University of York, with support provided by the York Environmental Sustainability Institute (YESI) and the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI).

Dr Adam Hejnowicz will provide a review of the challenges and opportunities for agri-environmental policy after Brexit at the 'Ecology Across Borders' annual meeting in Ghent on Tuesday, 12 December 2017.

This year's conference is jointly organised by the British Ecological Society, Gesellschaft für Ökologie (the Ecological Society of Germany, Switzerland and Austria), and Dutch-Flemish Ecological Society (NecoV), in association with the European Ecological Federation, bringing together 1,500 ecologists from around 60 countries to discuss the latest advances in ecological research across the whole discipline.

*\* environmental goods and services which benefit the general public but are not remunerated through the market, e.g. water, soil and air quality*

**More information:** Gravey, V., Brown, I., Farstad, F., Hartley, S.E., Hejnowicz, A.P., Hicks, K., and Burns, C. (2017) Post-Brexit Policy in the UK: A New Dawn? Agri-environment.

[www.york.ac.uk/media/yesi/researchoutputs/Brexit%20Agri-Environment%20Brief.pdf](http://www.york.ac.uk/media/yesi/researchoutputs/Brexit%20Agri-Environment%20Brief.pdf)

The 'Joint Annual Meeting: Ecology Across Borders' is taking place at ICC Ghent, Belgium from 11-14 December 2017. The full programme is available here: [eventmobi.com/eab2017/agenda/289512/groups](http://eventmobi.com/eab2017/agenda/289512/groups)

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