An aerial photograph of a yellow tractor plowing a field. The field is divided into a grid of squares. The tractor is moving from the top right towards the bottom right, leaving a dark red furrow. Several white birds are flying in the sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

SOWING THE SEEDS OF STABILITY: The case for a basic income for farmers, farmworkers and food producers in the UK

March 2024



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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank every farmer, farmworker and food producer and stakeholder that took the time to lend their knowledge to the consultation activities that helped build this case. The organisations listed below support this discussion paper and the exploration of a permanent basic income for farmers, farmworkers and food producers that ensures everyone producing food in the UK can live a life free of poverty.



Supporters Oxford Real Farming Conference, Urban Agriculture Consortium, Organic North, Feedback, Open Food Network, Better Food Traders, FoodFutures North Lancashire, UBI Lab Food, Bath UBI Beacon, UBI Piloteers Network, Citizen's Basic Income Trust

Autonomy is an independent research organisation which creates data-driven tools and research for sustainable economic planning.

Published 2024 by © Autonomy

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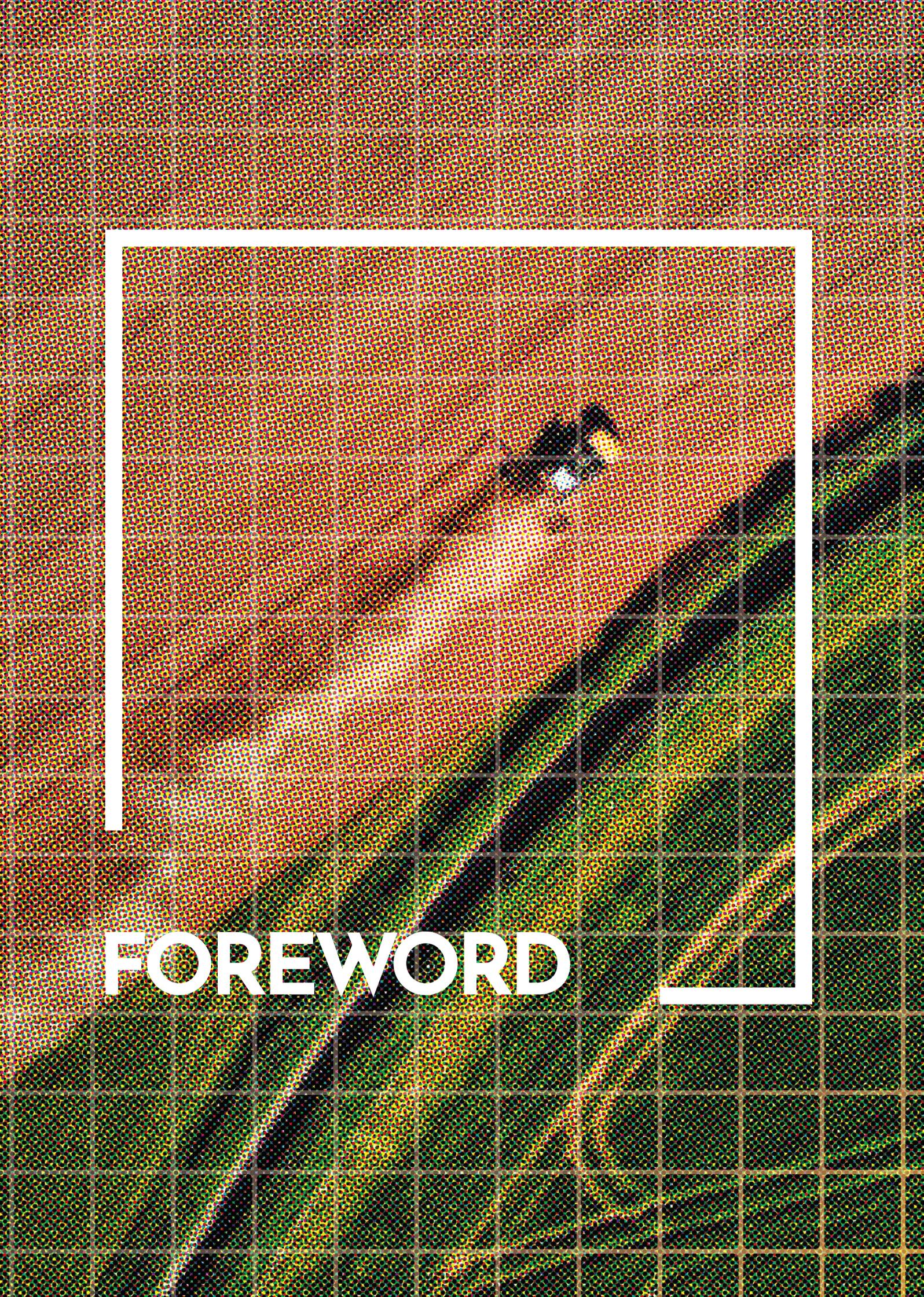
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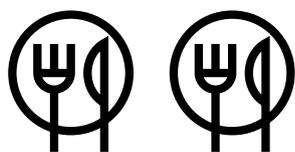
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The background is a dense halftone grid of small dots in various colors, primarily red, orange, and green. A white border frames the central image. The central image is a close-up of a person's face, showing their eyes and nose, rendered in a halftone style. The word "FOREWORD" is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the bottom of the frame.

FOREWORD



FOREWORD

Now is the time.

It is time to reimagine finance, both in its fundamental structure and in its overarching purpose. To enable a swift and effective response to the pressing issues of food poverty, economic instability and the impact of the climate and ecological crisis, keeping the farming community at the forefront.

From workers to landowners, livelihoods in agriculture are often precarious. A lack of funded pathways and financial support makes careers in producing food both hard to access and difficult to sustain. Financial insecurity impacts the mental and physical well being of those who produce our food whilst weakening the overall strength of the local food system. Finding ways to support these livelihoods will be critical to building the resilient, sustainable, and just local food systems we need.

There is a critical and immediate imperative to champion a more impactful, democratic vision for the future of our food system in the UK. One that ensures a fair livelihood for our food producers and motivates them to cultivate high-quality, nourishing, and ecologically regenerative foods. Achieving this calls for substantial public investment in the foundational infrastructure of food and farming, accounting for the entire supply chain.

In this report, we make a case for exploring a basic income for farmers and how it could be part of this investment. A Basic Income would provide unconditional cash payments to farmers, farmworkers and food producers to provide them with essential financial stability.

We are farmers, growers and farmworkers and we trust farmers as custodians of the land who deeply care for the communities they feed.

Basic Income 4 Farmers is a campaign created by a fresh working group of farmers, growers, academics and union co-ordinators with personal and professional experience of the issues explored. The aim of the campaign is to encourage farmers, farmworkers and food producers to discuss possible solutions to the financial barriers they face.

This report has not been funded and has been created through the voluntary time and energy of the working group. It is the consolidation of conversations so far that we hope will form the basis for deeper exploration in the next phase of work.

Next, we intend to scope out what a basic income for farmers policy could look like with further input from this on the ground as well as colleagues working in agricultural policy. We will begin research into how a pilot scheme could be designed and delivered to collect data on the efficacy of the policy and make the case for systemic change in the financing of farming that is so clearly needed.

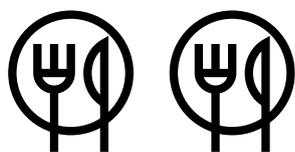
Brexit has introduced complex economic changes that demand innovative financial solutions within the agricultural sector. The interconnectedness of UK farmers' income security and the climate crisis cannot be denied; yet, neither issue is being addressed with the urgency it warrants. The stakes are higher than ever, as the repercussions of not addressing these issues rapidly could lead to worsening food security across the UK with parallel crises evolving in both our climate and food supply.

Now is the time.

Joanna Poulton, Basic Income 4 Farmers Co-ordinator

The background of the entire page is a halftone grid pattern. In the center, there is a white-bordered rectangular area containing a halftone image of a person's face. The person is looking upwards and to the right, with their eyes and nose clearly visible. The overall color palette is a mix of warm and cool tones, with the halftone dots creating a textured effect.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report draws on four sessions with farmers and growers about their lived experience and research on basic income and the UK farming sector. It outlines the current challenges in UK farming, how a basic income could uniquely meet the needs of farmers and perhaps most importantly, lays out the key areas and big questions the work to date has highlighted that should form the basis of further work.

- » A basic income for farmers would be a regular, unconditional cash payment directly made to farmers and agricultural workers.
- » In the UK, there has been a comprehensive investigation of potential basic income pilots in Scotland, and in Wales there is an ongoing basic income pilot for care leavers.
- » In Ireland, a basic income for artists scheme launched in 2022. Over 100 pilots have been proposed in the USA and dozens others globally.
- » This discussion paper intends to inform and instigate an investigation into how a basic income for farmers could work for the UK and Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England individually.

The problems faced in UK farming are often underpinned by inadequate incomes for farmers.

- » The **true cost of food** includes enough to sustain farming businesses and provide a decent livelihood to farmers. However, pressure in the UK to drive down prices has led to precarious supply chains, unpredictable procurement and farmers whose health and well-being is negatively affected by their work.
- » Despite having the lowest food prices, the UK has the highest levels of food insecurity in Europe - **cheap food does not serve us.**

- » **Brexit represents a historic shift in state subsidies for farmers.** Many UK farms depend on EU subsidies, and these are in the process of being replaced by schemes delivered by the UK Government. Independent and government projections show that these new schemes won't cover the funding gaps left in this transition, and many smaller scale farms have never been eligible for this investment.
- » There is a growing problem in the **low yield of new workers causing a decline in the farming work force.** Barriers to new entrants are numerous, and often income related, and farmers across the UK are approaching retirement age with no viable succession plans for their farms in sight.
- » These issues show that a **new model is needed.**

Based on this work so far, it appears that **part of the solution** could be a basic income for farmers. In this report, using our research into UK farming and evidence on basic income, we identify the ways this policy is particularly fit for purpose.

- » Providing **financial security for farmers** directly in the form of an unconditional regular payment to them as individuals.
- » **Improved health and well-being** is a well established outcome for basic income, and it is highly likely this would also be the case for a basic income for farmers.
- » For a just transition farming needs to become a **viable livelihood.** A basic income for farmers could contribute to this by guaranteeing an adequate income, improving access to time off and reasonable working hours and making entering a career in farming affordable for new entrants.
- » The **environmental case** for a basic income for farmers is part of a wider picture that involves wages, fair work, subsidies and training and education. But the freedom and flexibility a basic income provides, in addition to a new income source for small scale farmers, makes it a fit for purpose addition to the policy toolkit.
- » We also propose an initial list of **short, intermediate and long term policy outcomes** for a basic income for farmers identified in this initial work.

How this policy would impact **the people** in the UK farming sector is absolutely central to the development of a basic income for farmers. Over the course of this initial work we spoke to 18 farmers and growers. During these conversations we asked what they would spend a basic income on and answers fell into three categories:

- » **Basics and essentials:** payments towards debt clearance, healthcare, housing costs, rent and immediate bills.
- » **Long-term investments:** investing in their future by adding to a pension pot, investing in their food business ventures, practically maintaining tools and structures at their farms as well as employing other people to help share the workload, alongside professional development like sector-based courses and conferences and investing in their local community.
- » **Personal and leisure:** reducing hours in other part-time jobs to focus more on farming, passion pursuits and restorative time with family and friends.

In this discussion paper we believe there is a strong case made for a basic income for farmers. There are also clearly identified areas for further work towards the design of **the policy**.

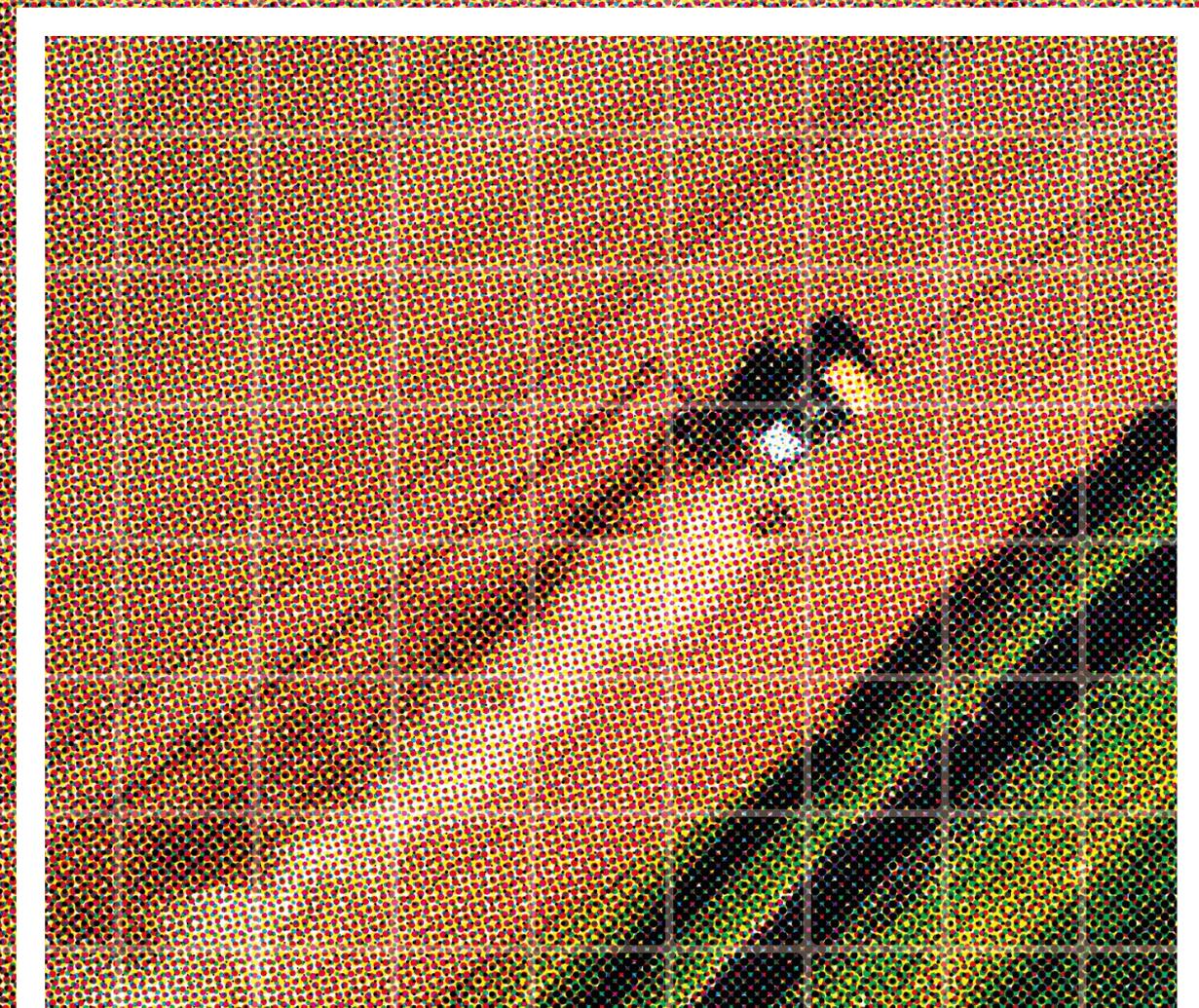
- » The key areas that should be consulted on further with farmers, experts in farming policy and policy researchers are:
 - » **Eligibility:** How the recipients of the basic income for farmers are defined must be designed in consultation with farmers and without alienating key groups like new entrants, workers with essential skill sets or small scale farmers.
 - » **Payment level and frequency:** Level and frequency are intrinsically linked to the impact of the policy, so it is important to get this right based on research into a funding model and consultation.
 - » **Funding:** A sustainable and redistributive funding model is required, research on the design and impacts of such a model should be produced in the short term.
 - » **Infrastructure for delivery:** Payment delivery must be seamless, it is possible that existing infrastructure could be adapted but further consultation on the requirements of this infrastructure and experience of the current systems is needed.

- » **Interaction with other schemes:** It is imperative that it does not make recipients or their businesses ineligible for payments from subsidies, social security or any other schemes that provide them with essential income.

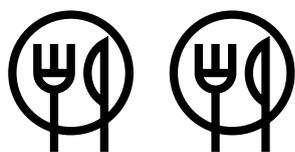
- » The **political pathway**, towards a basic income for farmers is worth consideration at this stage.
 - » As agriculture is a devolved policy area, it is important to consider political pathways towards a UK-wide roll out, as well as individually in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England.

 - » A **basic income for farmers pilot** would be desirable for building the evidence base and political support for this policy. Various approaches should be considered including government led pilots, national pilots and community led and privately funded pilots.

 - » The **Basic Income 4 Farmers project intends to produce policy and pilot proposals** in the next phase of work, informed by widespread consultation.



INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

When considering what a healthy economy looks like, few elements are as fundamental and indispensable as farming and food production. The people who do the work that feeds us all face challenges that are as diverse as the crops they nurture and livestock they raise. Some of these challenges are inherent to their work and some are due to dysfunctions in how the profits of their labour are distributed.

The UK finds itself with farmers who are overworked and underpaid. If we are to build food systems that are fit to weather the changing political landscape with Brexit, using farming practices that adequately respect the environment and that begin to truly address food insecurity we need to make farming a viable career.

Basic income, also referred to as a citizen's basic income, guaranteed income, universal basic income and UBI, has gained significant traction as a proposed solution to income inequality and economic insecurity. While the concept has largely been applied to urban and suburban areas, here we argue there is a strong case to be made for exploring how a basic income could be applied to rural areas and for farmers, farmworkers and food producers across the UK.

This discussion paper intends to inform and instigate an investigation into how a basic income for farmers could work for the UK and Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England individually. It summarises the work that has been done so far and, perhaps most importantly, lays out the key areas and big questions the work to date has highlighted.

The paper draws on insights from farmers and growers' lived experiences from four transcribed conversations that took place online between March and August 2023, whilst referencing current and relevant reports published in the farming sector. These methods are used to both outline the current challenges and to show the ways in which a basic income could uniquely meet the needs of those working in the farming sector.

We hope this paper provides a compelling starting point that evidences why this is an area of discussion worth investing in. We welcome input and feedback from our colleagues from every corner of the sector. These conversations about basic income will continue, ensuring farmers themselves lead and shape the work at every turn.

AN INTRODUCTION TO BASIC INCOME

The global basic income movement has built momentum in recent years. A policy poster child with a wide range of advocates across the political spectrum, from grassroots welfare advocates to Silicon Valley billionaires. Largely, however, interest in basic income is motivated by a commitment to social justice and action on the extensive body of evidence proving the negative impacts poverty has on citizen's health and national economies.

The design of a basic income, codified by the definition of its 5 core characteristics, reflects the fundamental goal of the policy: to guarantee every citizen an income that gives them the security to meet their basic needs and greater financial agency. First, delivering **cash**, rather than vouchers, on a **regular** basis ensures that a basic income acts like any other source of income. It is paid to the **individual** rather than to households, or as a subsidy to a business that might pass on the benefits as income. Policies that deliver payments on a household basis, or as business subsidies can perpetuate existing imbalances of power, including abusive domestic relationships and exploitative work¹. The heart of the basic income proposal is that it is **unconditional**. Ensuring this income is supplied without conditions is based on trust, solidarity and a belief that people know best what they need most. It aims to reduce the stigma of social security and to shift the way we value and reward labour - particularly the unpaid labour and essential labour that is required regardless of profit margins. Food production and the care of the natural environment are also other important examples.

The final piece of the basic income puzzle is the most controversial and compelling, that payments should be **universal**. A true universal basic income would go to everyone in a defined geographic area. Usually, the proposal is made on a national basis - although global basic income models also exist.² Universality allows basic income to be redistributive. If everyone is touched by the system, it is easier to justify and administrate the accompanying levers that move money from areas where it is abundant to where it is missing.

1 Neil Howard, *Basic income and the anti-slavery movement*, 2017 <https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/basic-income-and-the-anti-slavery-movement>

2 Equal Right, *Climate Justice Without Borders*, Aug 2023 https://www.equalright.org/uploads/7/8/9/3/78930716/climate_justice_without_borders_-_discussion_paper.pdf

An automatic, universal system also addresses the issues of our present piecemeal, 'targeted' social security system, by ensuring no one is left entirely without. A universal basic income builds an income floor beneath the social security system that no one can fall beneath and upon which everyone can build their lives.

Usually, the response to public interest in basic income is a pilot, from the high profile government-led pilot with unemployed people in Finland to over 100 programmes and demonstrations that have erupted across the USA since 2018, many led by communities and NGOs.³ It is from these pilots and subnational programmes that evidence on basic income is drawn.

Pilots that deliver payments to a geographically defined area, such as a town, are the best test of a universal basic income because they simulate universality on a small scale. Many important impacts of a universal basic income are likely to arise from interactions between many people receiving payments. These are termed community level impacts.

Many, indeed most, basic income schemes globally are 'targeted', however. Rather than delivered to a geographically defined community, a targeted basic income is delivered to a community that is defined by shared characteristics. Often a pilot evolves from an interest in a particular community and the utility of the features of a basic income for this group. For example artists in Ireland,⁴ care leavers in Wales,⁵ and the unemployed in Finland.⁶ Sometimes a pilot that has many layers of targeting is still referred to as a basic income pilot. A number of the pilots in the USA are targeted both to people on low incomes and that are part of a certain demographic, for example The Magnolia Mother's Trust pilot that is targeted towards low-income families headed by a Black female living in affordable housing in the United States⁷.

A basic income universally delivered to a target group is a distinct proposal from a universal basic income *for all*. However, the justifications for making payments to an entire demographic are the same as they are for a society-wide universal basic income. The entire community that has been identified is provided with an income floor and money is redistributed to the target group.

3 Economic Security Project, *Champions for Guaranteed Income Celebrate the Announcement of the 100th Guaranteed Income Pilot Program in Five Years*, September 2022 <https://economicsecurityproject.org/news/champions-for-guaranteed-income-celebrate-the-announcement-of-the-100th-guaranteed-income-pilot-program-in-five-years>.

4 gov.ie, *Basic Income for the Arts*, Jan 2024 <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/09cf6-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme/#>

5 Welsh Government, *Basic income pilot for care leavers: overview of the scheme*, Jan 2024 <https://www.gov.wales/basic-income-pilot-care-leavers-overview-scheme>

6 Heikki Hiilamo, *The basic income experiment in Finland yields surprising results*, May 2020, <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/news/fair-society/basic-income-experiment-finland-yields-surprising-results>

7 Springboard to Opportunities, *The Magnolia Mother's Trust*, Jan 2024, <https://springboardto.org/magnolia-mothers-trust/>

Targeted income support is common practice in social security policy making. Some policies closely resemble a basic income, including the UK's child benefit which can be claimed by all parents of children in the UK without conditions or exclusions based on income.⁸ It is essentially a basic income for children. Pensions also closely resemble a basic income for people above retirement ages, although there are many more conditions put on pensions related to work, including National Insurance payments and the amount paid into private pensions.

Work on basic income in the UK has largely been done at the level of devolved and local government. The Scottish basic income experiment feasibility study was led by Glasgow, Edinburgh, North Ayrshire and Fife local authorities and funded by Scottish Government.⁹ It set out to explore whether a pilot in Scotland was financially, practically and politically feasible and desirable. In 2020, the output of this study was a report outlining a gold standard pilot proposal, advocating for two saturation sites. One with a population of 2,500 receiving a high level of basic income, £213.59 a week for adults aged 16 to pension age, and another with a population of 14,600 receiving a low level of basic income, £73.10 a week for adults aged 25 to pension age, around the level of payment job seekers receive from the existing benefits system. This would allow for the assessment of the impact of a full basic income based on the high level of payment and the impact of removing conditions from payments made through the existing benefits system.

The study advocated for these pilots to progress, contending that they were affordable, evaluable and desirable. However, it did identify political barriers. These pilots would require primary legislation and support from central government. Since this political support has not been garnered, the pilots in Scotland have not progressed further to date.

In 2021, the First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, announced that the Welsh Government would deliver a basic income pilot. In 2022 the Welsh basic income pilot for care leavers began. This pilot drew from the learning of the Scottish feasibility study and was designed to be implemented without support from the central UK Government. Participants receive £1600 a month for 24 months. Due to the lack of collaboration from the UK Government, HMRC and DWP, this payment is subject to taxation and makes participants ineligible for certain benefits, so the take home value is lower.

The pilot will run for 3 years in total, with a staggered start. Every person who had been in care in Wales that turned 18 during the first year of the pilot was invited to participate. 635 people eventually enrolled in the pilot, an uptake

8 UK Government, *Child Benefit*, Jan 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/child-benefit>

9 Wendy Hearty et al, *Assessing the Feasibility of Citizens' Basic Income Pilots in Scotland: Final Report*, June 2020, https://www.basicincome.scot/---data/assets/pdf_file/0024/175371/Draft-Final-CBI-Feasibility_Main-Report-June-2020.pdf

rate of 97%.¹⁰ Reports from the project are positive so far, with participants saying the financial security of the payments have made a big difference for them. One participant, for instance, noted that "I wouldn't have food in my fridge. I wouldn't be able to have a shower. I've been there and to think that I've now changed all that just because of a little bit of money. It has changed everything".¹¹ The pilot will conclude in 2025 and the publication of the evaluation will follow.

It has been more than 20 years since the last prolonged period of falling poverty in the UK,¹² and there is more to be done to guarantee adequate incomes. A key component of this is decent wages, and the Living Wage¹³ and minimum income standard¹⁴ provide important insight into what this should look like. Income is not the only way to guarantee aspects of a decent quality of life. Public services are also key, and offer an efficient way of reducing the level of individual income people need to meet their needs.

A universal basic income is proposed as an income floor that underpins the incomes of everyone in the UK, with the goal of systematically improving quality of life. But the principles of a basic income can also be applied to a demographic specific approach where there is a particularly extreme or time sensitive need. This can be applied to demographics where there is a particularly high rate of inadequate income or poverty, when there is a high risk of adverse health or well-being outcomes, and when there is crucial but traditionally low or unpaid work being delivered by this demographic.

In this paper we show that farmers, farmworkers and food producers meet all of these criteria and propose that deep exploration of a basic income for farmers should be embarked upon.

"Basic Income is essentially the difference between [farming in the UK] working and it not." - Farmer, Wales

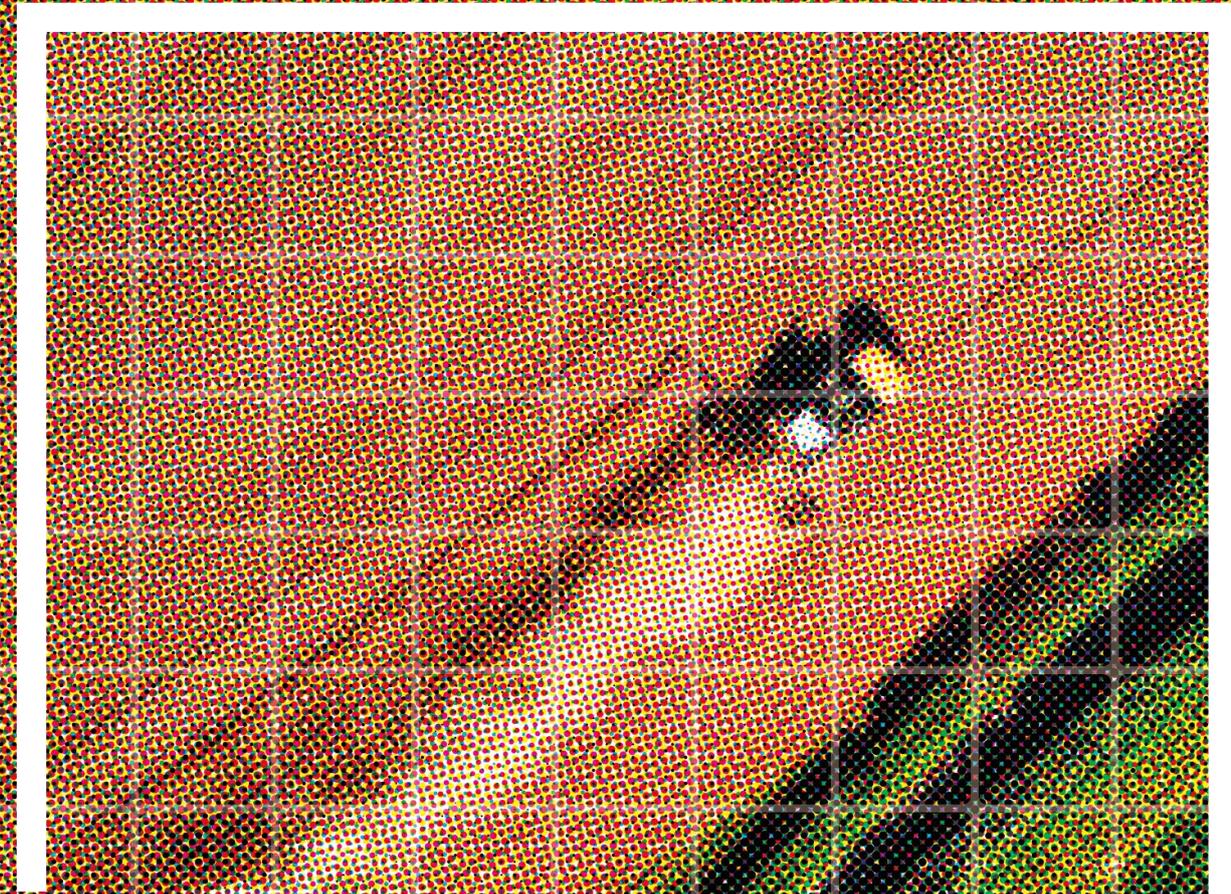
10 Welsh Government, "We are delighted with the progress of the Basic Income pilot scheme and hearing about the positive impact on those taking part," says Minister, Oct 2023, <https://www.gov.wales/we-are-delighted-progress-basic-income-pilot-scheme-and-hearing-about-positive-impact-those-taking>

11 Wales Online, 'I wouldn't have food or a shower, everything has changed because of a little bit of money', Oct 2023, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/i-wouldnt-food-shower-everything-27978882>

12 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK Poverty 2024, Jan 2024 [https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2024-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk#:~:text=Poverty%202024%20report-.Poverty%20has%20increased%2C%20close%20to%20pre%2Dpandemic%20levels,nearly%203%20in%2010\)%20children](https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2024-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk#:~:text=Poverty%202024%20report-.Poverty%20has%20increased%2C%20close%20to%20pre%2Dpandemic%20levels,nearly%203%20in%2010)%20children)

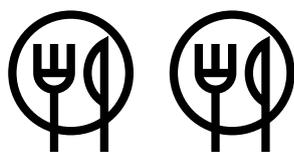
13 Living Wage Foundation, Feb 2024, <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/>

14 Matt Padley and Juliet Stone, A Minimum Income Standard for the United Kingdom in 2023, Sep 2023 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/cost-of-living/a-minimum-income-standard-for-the-united-kingdom-in-2023>



THE PROBLEM:

Current challenges of
farming in the UK



THE PROBLEM:

Current challenges of farming in the UK

Before discussing the potential benefits of a basic income for farmers, farmworkers, and food producers in the UK, it is crucial to highlight the existing challenges they face.

*"We've got to do something because it's not working right now." -
New Entrant, NW England*

Our case for a basic income for farmers starts from an appreciation of the often crushing material insecurity of life as a producer of food. As much as life as a farmer is romanticised - for instance, in rural Britain, as a peaceful existence amongst rolling hills criss-crossed with hedgerows and woodland - these livelihoods and landscapes are often also sites of domination and precarity. The tranquillity and emptiness of English vistas is a product of the clearance of inhabitants of common lands through the processes of enclosure. Ongoing for centuries, this practice emerged most fiercely in the sixteenth century.¹⁵ Systems of private ownership were established in place of the commons, where farmers became competitors in a rental market for land, forcing the less productive farmers out and concentrating control amongst a smaller pool of landowners. It is not just the landscape that bears the scars of the market; the word farmer itself originates from the old French word for tenant. This system, whilst it has changed somewhat over the centuries, is by and large still in place, with a small number of farmers placed in competition with pressures that make their livelihoods stressful and insecure.

Those farmers and commoners that were pushed from their land, through force or the market, were 'freed' from their means of subsistence: thus also from their relationship with the soil, their communities, and their local ecology. With only their expertise in tow, they either roamed footpaths between fields where they could work, or travelled to the towns in search of employment in industry. The task of the farmers left behind became the provision of cheap food for their former fellows, now urban workers. The antagonistic relations these changes established between producers and consumers of food is exemplified by the debate over the Corn Laws in the 19th Century.¹⁶ On one hand, landowners wanted food prices to remain high, to keep their incomes stable and ample. On the other hand, employers and workers wanted food to be cheaper, to lower their business and personal costs respectively. This tug of war, formed through centuries of social upheaval, remains at the heart of the British economy.

Rather than placing the financial and nutritional security of farmers and consumers against one another, the way forward is to ensure everyone - farmers and those they feed - are able to live secure and decent lives; a basic income for farmers is but one small part of this path to a more just world.

THE TRUE COST OF FOOD

The farming community has been under relentless pressure to make food cheaper and cheaper.

Producing cheap food requires producing it in massive quantities, keeping supply high so prices can stay low. The challenge of this can be summarised as 'there can never be a good year for farmers'.¹⁷ Bumper yields increase supply and thus lower prices, reducing farmers' economic returns. Conversely, the only time prices are high is when poor harvests decrease supply, and thus farmers' incomes remain low in either case. The centrality of cheap food to the economy places a relentless pressure upon the security of farmers' livelihoods.

"Food is too cheap at the minute but at the same time we have a huge poverty problem where people can't afford to pay the real cost of food." - Councillor, Sussex

¹⁶ Tim Lang, *Feeding Britain: Our Food Problems and How to Fix Them*, A Pelican Book (London: Pelican, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2021).

¹⁷ Smith, J, *Harvest of a Lifetime: Farmers' bumper crops tempered by low market prices*, Nov 2016 <https://apnews.com/article/business-prices-52cd1951fde749a0b099ef7fcdef6f17>

Not only is food sold extremely cheaply, but farmers also receive very little of the returns made through the sales of food, further limiting their incomes. The culmination of the “supermarket revolution” has been a concentration of the retail market amongst a small number of large supermarkets.¹⁸ These businesses have used their market power to drive down the prices they pay their suppliers, sometimes through punitive practices such as last minute cancellations, invoice deductions, and unexplained fees.¹⁹ Farmers are often left with less than 1% of the revenue made through the sale of the food they produce, with some farmers making less than one pence per loaf of bread or block of cheese sold.²⁰ The power of supermarkets puts farmers in an even more precarious position in the market.

“So many small scale farms are just unable to afford to pay their staff properly, and it's not that they don't want to. It's just that the food system is set up in such a way that they are barely paying themselves enough money. It means that people like me can maybe do a traineeship and take a bit of a wage cut or move and live in a caravan, but lots of people can't. So it's the inequality perpetuating more inequality.” - Trainee Farmer, Scotland

Meanwhile, farmers have to absorb the often unpredictable costs of food production, further undermining their economic security. The costs of fuel and electricity, purchasing and maintaining equipment, and procuring inputs such as livestock feed, seeds and fertilisers are all fronted by farmers themselves. These costs can be highly unpredictable, with recent inflationary increases providing a stark example of this.²¹ In an environment of highly volatile costs and consistently low economic returns, many farm businesses are struggling to stay afloat.

18 Philip H. Howard, *Concentration and Power in the Food System: Who Controls What We Eat?*, Contemporary Food Studies: Economy, Culture and Politics (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

19 Isabella Thompson, Rebecca Laughton, and Tony Little, *Vocal for Local: Why Regional Food Systems Are the Future*, 2021, <https://staging.landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Vocal-for-Local.pdf>

20 Lisa Jack and Harriet Hammans, *Unpicking Food Prices: Where Does Your Food Pound Go and Why Do Farmers Get so Little?*, Dec 2022, <https://www.sustainweb.org/reports/dec22-unpicking-food-prices/>.

21 Chris Clark, Brian Scanlon, and Kaley Hart, *Farming at the Sweet Spot: How Farming with Nature Can Make You Happier, Healthier, and Wealthier*, June 2023, https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Farming%20at%20the%20Sweet%20Spot_1.pdf; Elise Uberoi and Sarah Coe, *Farm Funding: Implementing New Approaches*, October 2023, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9431/>.

"It's just very difficult to make a living out of vegetables. It shouldn't be." - Grower, NW England

This precarious situation exacts a number of costs that are not recognised in the price of foodstuffs. Living under these conditions of insecurity over long periods takes a serious toll upon the mental and physical health of farmers. A government enquiry into rural mental health found that farmers were at an increased risk of suicide compared to the general population, with the most at risk being those who experience the lowest incomes.²² These high rates of death and illness mean that 81% of young farmers believe mental health is the "biggest hidden problem" currently facing farming.²³ Tackling this issue cannot be separated from tackling farmers' material economic insecurities.

These insecurities also have wider effects on the environment and food security. The methods of agriculture employed in the pursuit of extremely high yields have been, and continue to be, extremely damaging to the environment.²⁴ If farmers do not feel economically stable, they are not able to take the risks involved in changing these practices, locking in this environmental damage.

"One of the main problems farmers face nowadays is you're pushed to grow in a way that matches the price at Aldi or Lidl or any of the supermarket demands. We've got this consistent issue with not been able to grow in the best way." - Farmer, SW England

These environmental costs are also often shipped overseas; the UK currently imports around half of its food from overseas, with the greatest deficit being vegetables (46% imported) and fruit (84% imported), many of which are grown in countries whose agricultural systems are becoming increasingly vulnerable to global warming.²⁵

22 EFRA, *Rural Mental Health: Fourth Report of Session 2022-23*, May 2023, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/39991/documents/195139/default/>.

23 Elaine Mitchell, *Mental Ill Health Affecting "Hundreds of NI Farmers"*, February 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-47224808>.

24 Emile A. Frison and Nick Jacobs, 'From Uniformity to Diversity: A Paradigm Shift from Industrial Agriculture to Diversified Agroecological Systems' (Brussels, Belgium: IPES-Food, 2016), https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/UniformityToDiversity_FULLL.pdf.

25 'A manifesto for Food, Farming & Forestry' (Landworkers' Alliance, 2023) <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/LWA-Manifesto-2023-Digital.pdf>

This is in part driven by the “race to the bottom” on food prices, as supermarkets use international suppliers to drive down the prices they pay for their foodstuffs. This undermines domestic farmers, creating longer systems of supply chains that are more vulnerable in times of crisis, as many of us have experienced in the past three years.²⁶ The drive for cheap food clearly hurts farmers, but in doing so, it risks all of our livelihoods.

BREXIT: A HISTORIC SHIFT IN STATE SUBSIDIES FOR FARMERS

The contradiction at the heart of farming - that incomes are driven ever downwards despite increasing productivity - does not go unrecognised by the state. This contradiction is often attenuated through the provision of subsidies to farm businesses; for the past half century in the UK, this support has been provided by the European Union (EU). However, subsidies do not address the root causes of the problems farmers face, and thus are not an adequate solution. As a result many farmers continue to make marginal profits. Smaller scale farmers are much less supported, and workers and new entrants to farming are discouraged from entering or staying in the sector. This system is in need of drastic overhaul.

The Brexit process presents an ideal opportunity to do this. With the recognition that subsidies are currently an essential component of farming in the UK. We could ensure their design makes them a desirable part, making them work better for farmers and pushing the industry towards favourable outcomes. The right legislation could be a historic landmark, the point where UK food systems begin to work for the workers that drive them, the people they feed and the ecosystems they must exist harmoniously within. However, current efforts have been disorganised and insufficient.

²⁶ Juliette Rowsell, ‘Food Inflation Highest in 45 Years Due to Supply Chain Disruption’, *Supply Management*, 22 March 2023, <https://www.cips.org/supply-management/news/2023/march/food-inflation-highest-in-45-years-due-to-supply-chain-disruption/>.

Prior to leaving the EU, many UK farms were essentially kept afloat by EU subsidies. In 2019, the UK received approximately £4.7 billion in funding from the EU, under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), introduced in 1962.²⁷ 80% of this money was provided through the Basic Payments Scheme (BPS): subsidies granted based upon the area of land kept suitable for grazing or under cultivation.²⁸ Without these subsidies, between 19% and 42% of farms would have been unable to break even.²⁹ The discontinuation of this support represents a source of severe uncertainty for many British farmers.

The funding schemes being proposed to replace the BPS and CAP do not provide the same levels of support. The UK Government's Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), and nested Sustainable Farming Incentives (SFI), propose to replace flat rate subsidies with an approach that will reward farmers for providing public services in the form of environmental benefits.³⁰ However, both government and independent projections have shown that even if farmers qualify for the highest levels of support, the new schemes won't cover the funding gap left by BPS, leaving many small family farms on the brink of financial viability.³¹ Subsequently, many farmers will likely resort to farming methods that are worse for the environment to make up for lost income, or go out of business altogether, with negative impacts on the climate, food security, and the concentration of land ownership.

Both the previous schemes and the ones replacing them have significant flaws. There is a strong bias towards large-scale farms, 80% of subsidy funding goes to just 20% of the largest farm businesses.³² Subsequently, smaller farms have been disappearing, as subsidies merely speed up the treadmill of low prices upon which farmers find themselves.³³

"I'm very aware that smaller scale farms don't really factor in subsidies. So I'm interested in anything that can kind of even out the playing field a bit." - Ex dairy farmer. Midlands

27 European Commission, 'The Common Agricultural Policy at a Glance', 12 October 2023, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-glance_en; Uberoi and Coe, 'Farm Funding'.

28 Uberoi and Sarah Coe, 'Farm Funding: Implementing New Approaches' (London: House of Commons Library, 11 October 2023), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9431/>.

29 Uberoi and Sarah Coe, 'Farm Funding: Implementing New Approaches' (London: House of Commons Library, 11 October 2023), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9431/>.

30 Rural Payments Agency, 'Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI): Handbook for the SFI 2023 Offer' (London, UK: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, September 2023), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1188264/SFI23_handbook.pdf.

31 Kai Heron, Alex Heffron, and Rob Booth, 'You Can't Eat Profits: A Democratic Vision for England's Tormented Farmlands', *New Statesman* (blog), 19 April 2023, <https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2023/04/eat-profits-england-food-system-focused-over-sustainability-new-scheme>; Uberoi and Coe, 'Farm Funding'.

32 Chris Williams et al., 'Credit Where Due: Financing a Just Transition to Agroecology in the Aftermath of Brexit' (London, UK: New Economics Foundation, June 2021), https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/NEF_Credit_Where_Due.pdf.

33 Howard, *Concentration and Power in the Food System*.

According to data from Defra, farms of less than 100 hectares have halved in number in the last 60 years. Small holdings have also seen a dramatic decrease too, from around 160,000 in 1950 to less than 30,000 in 2020.³⁴ The new schemes may continue this trend of concentration, particularly as they look set to continue to fail to support small farmers. At the time of the publication of this report the schemes are set to offer money only to those with 5 hectares of land or more.³⁵ There are ongoing discussions around whether the new ELM scheme will support those who farm at less than 5 hectares but these decisions are yet to be set in stone, and with this lack of surety this is of little comfort to these smaller scale farmers.

"At the moment anybody who is not farming 5 hectares is not recognized as a farmer, so most market gardeners are not considered farmers, but that definition of a farmer should change." - Farmer, Northern Ireland

Failing to support small farmers is a fundamental misstep. Smallholders, contrary to common conception, outcompete large-scale farming on productivity, with small farmers and peasants producing somewhere between 30 and 70% of the world's food, probably nearer the latter.³⁶ Smaller scale farms also tend to employ more ecologically sound practices, have higher biodiversity both of food crops and non-food flora and fauna, and are often more engaged with their local communities.³⁷ Therefore, the flood of labour out of farming and into the towns, started by enclosures centuries ago but continued today by subsidies, needs to be reversed; we need more people involved in the primary production of food, not less.³⁸

"The new ELMs are really for the benefit of much bigger farmers and food producers, and we really need something that fills that gap for much smaller producers." - Councillor, Sussex

34 Abby Allen, *The Slow Disappearance of Small Family Farms*, July 2021 <https://pipersfarm.com/blogs/journal/the-slow-disappearance-of-small-british-family-farms>

35 Rural Payments Agency, *Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI): Handbook for the SFI 2023 Offer*, June 2023 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sfi-handbook-for-the-sfi-2023-offer>

36 ETC Group, *With Climate Chaos, Who Will Feed Us? The Industrial Food Chain or the Peasant Food Web?* (Montréal, Canada: ETC Group, 2014), https://www.etcgroup.org/sites/www.etcgroup.org/files/web_who_will_feed_us_with_notes_0.pdf; ETC Group, *Small Scale Farmers and Peasants Still Feed the World* (Montréal, Canada: ETC Group, 2022), https://etcgroup.org/sites/www.etcgroup.org/files/files/31-01-2022_small-scale_farmers_and_peasants_still_feed_the_world.pdf; Vincent Ricciardi et al., 'How Much of the World's Food Do Smallholders Produce?', *Global Food Security* 17 (1 June 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2018.05.002>

37 Henrietta Szathmary, 'Reversing the Trend of Excluding Small Farms from Subsidy: An Update across Four Nations', *Farmers Guide* (blog), 28 February 2023, <https://www.farmersguide.co.uk/business/finance/reversing-the-trend-of-excluding-small-farms-from-subsidy-an-update-across-four-nations/>

38 Max Ajl, 'How Much Will the US Way of Life © Have to Change?', *Uneven Earth* (blog), 10 June 2019, <https://unevenearth.org/2019/06/how-much-will-the-us-way-of-life-have-to-change/>

It is not just a bias towards large scale farms that will prevent the current systems of financial support from fostering this move towards a better, more involved system of farming. Firstly, subsidies - past, current, and future - offer very little to the farm workers who do the majority of the work of food production. This bias towards farm managers and owners is a continual trend in farming policy and research.³⁹ Sure enough, a lack of support contributes to very poor conditions and pay for agricultural workers and urban growers,⁴⁰ which in turn contributes to a continual outflow of labour from the sector every year, with recent rates of decline reaching as high as 10%.⁴¹

"In 1939, 15% of the population of the UK worked in agriculture. And now it's like 0.2%... Within living memory that we've lost 99% of the workers." - Market Gardener, Midlands

Current subsidy systems in part drive a generalised labour shortage in agriculture. This results in difficulties for farm managers, high rates of food wastage,⁴² and fails the workers who are unable to stay in the sector.

"I work full-time in project management, and I keep a small herd of very rare breed cattle, mainly conservation grazing. I don't have any land of my own, so no security and I don't qualify for 99% of the current government support and it looks like I won't qualify for the new Welsh version either." - Farmer, Wales

39 Naomi Terry, 'Jumping Fences: Land, Food and Racial Justice in British Farming' (London, UK: Land in Our Names, 2023), <https://landinournames.community/projects/jumping-fences>.

40 Catherine McAndrew et al., 'Debt, Migration, and Exploitation: The Seasonal Worker Visa and the Degradation of Conditions in UK Horticulture' (Pembrokeshire, Wales: The Landworkers' Alliance, 2023), <https://staging.landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/LWA-Debt-Migration-and-Exploitation-2023.pdf>

41 Defra, 'Agricultural Workforce in England at 1 June 2023' (National Statistics, 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agricultural-workforce-in-england-at-1-june/agricultural-workforce-in-england-at-1-june-2023>.

42 NFU, 'Millions of Pounds of Fruit and Veg Wasted Due to Workforce Shortages', National Farmers' Union, 14 June 2022, <https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/nfu-horticulture-mid-season-labour-survey-results/>.

A LOW YIELD OF NEW WORKERS

Subsidy schemes also offer very little to those looking to start a career in farming. As well as the issues of a declining workforce and the need for more smallholders, farmers as a group are ageing rapidly,⁴³ so new entrants into the sector are desperately required.

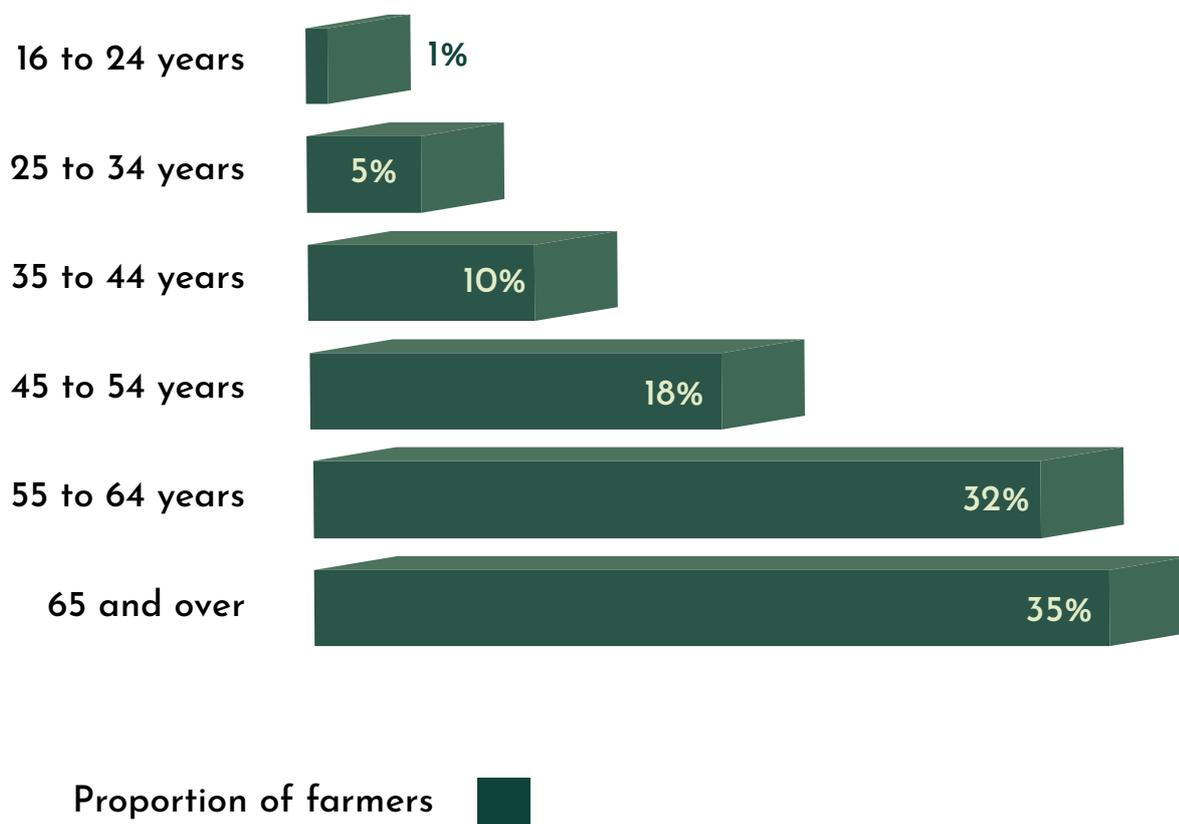


Figure 1 - Age distribution of farmers in England at 1 June 2023⁴⁴

However, those looking to start a career in farming face numerous barriers, including difficulty accessing land due to highly concentrated ownership,⁴⁵ low paid or voluntary training schemes,⁴⁶ and insecure access to work after training due to seasonality.⁴⁷

43 Peter Gittins, 'British Farmers Are Being Offered a Lump Sum Payment to Leave the Industry - but at What Cost to Agriculture?', *The Conversation*, 17 June 2022, <http://theconversation.com/british-farmers-are-being-offered-a-lump-sum-payment-to-leave-the-industry-but-at-what-cost-to-agriculture-183264>.

44 National Statistics. (2023). Agricultural Workforce in England on 1 June 2023. Updated 28 September 2023 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agricultural-workforce-in-england-at-1-june/agricultural-workforce-in-england-at-1-june-2023>

45 Guy Shrubsole, *Who Owns England? How We Lost Our Green and Pleasant Land, and How to Take It Back* (London: William Collins, 2020).

46 Priscilla Claeys and Barbara Van Dyck, 'ECVC Youth: Navigating Dreams and Precarity. Working and Learning Conditions of Young Agricultural Workers, Interns and Volunteers across Europe' (Brussels, Belgium: European Coordination of Via Campesina, 2022), <https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/youth-report-EN-edit02.pdf>.

47 Autonomy, 'A Basic Income for Cornwall' (Cranbourne, UK: Autonomy, 2022), https://autonomy.work/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/cornwall_ubi.pdf.

"I used £10,000 of savings just to be able to volunteer or work 2 days a week at an established place. My annual salary now is £12,000, working 4 days a week. I just don't know how people from different backgrounds, who might not have savings for a career change, would ever entertain the idea of trying to grow food for people." - New Entrant farmer, NW England

Farming has many seasonal jobs and a low wage economy which brings a lack of stability to many workers.

The agricultural sector relies heavily on seasonal, part-time, under-waged and non-waged workers who often lack income security during the off-season. Many domestic seasonal workers spend part of the year unemployed, although only some are able to access income support during that time. This is a barrier to these workers remaining in their roles in the sector and to them returning to the same farms for subsequent seasons losing complex skills and place-based knowledge that are critical for productivity.⁴⁸

"[A basic income for farmers would] increase the diversity in the workforce and enable more people who want to pursue it to do so." - Ex Dairy Farmer

All of these barriers intersect with class, race, and gender inequalities, entrenching the lack of diversity in the UK farming sector.⁴⁹ Subsidies offer nothing to ameliorate or reverse these obstacles to accessing farm work, which means that despite considerable enthusiasm for careers in farming,⁵⁰ the domestic agricultural workforce will likely continue to decline.

In summary, subsidies alone are not sufficient to support farmers with the challenges they face in the current climate. The schemes that replace the previous EU subsidies should be offering support for smaller farms, workers, and new entrants. Currently, there is little sign of this happening and the window for radical reform is disappearing day by day.

48 Coalition Canada (2023) 'Agriculture Case for Basic Income' <https://basicincomecoalition.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/1.-Case-for-agriculture-March-3-2023.pdf>

49 Terry, 'Jumping Fences: Land, Food and Racial Justice in British Farming'; Claeys and Van Dyck, 'ECVC Youth: Navigating Dreams and Precarity. Working and Learning Conditions of Young Agricultural Workers, Interns and Volunteers across Europe'.

50 Royal Horticultural Society, 'Demand for Horticultural Training Surges, Says RHS', FE News, 29 July 2021, <https://www.fenews.co.uk/skills/press-release-demand-for-horticultural-training-surges-says-rhs/>.

CHEAP FOOD DOES NOT SERVE US

Not only does the drive for cheap food put incredible pressure upon food producers, it also fails at its nominal goal: to make food accessible to everyone. Despite having some of the lowest food prices in Europe, the UK faces the highest levels of food insecurity on the continent.⁵¹ In recent years, with the cost of living increasing, this insecurity has worsened significantly: 9.3 million adults (17.7% of households) experienced food insecurity in January 2023.⁵² In a tragic irony, many of these people work in the food system, as growers, retail workers, or cooks.⁵³ Therefore, it is plainly evident that pressuring farmers to produce cheaper food does not lead to favourable outcomes for food access.

Neither does it necessarily lead to health and satisfaction for those who can afford access to food. Consumption of ultra-processed foods, often high in sugar, salt, and fat, is high across much of the population, with adults and older children on average consuming 56% of their calories in the form of ultra-processed foods.⁵⁴ Rising cases of non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, are associated with these consumption patterns. Additionally, the commodification of food production and lengthening of supply chains removes consumers from the origins of their food, leaving them feeling detached from its producers and the land.⁵⁵ Of course, health outcomes are even worse for those with insecure access to food, as healthy food products are often the least accessible. Dental health, children's growth, and life expectancy are consistently worse amongst the most deprived segments of the UK population, which is undoubtedly linked to poorer diet quality.⁵⁶ Evidently, making food cheaper does not ensure access, health, or fulfilment.

51 Food, Farming, and Countryside Commission, 'Our Future in the Land' (London, UK: Royal Society of Arts, 2019), <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/reports/rsa-ffcc-our-future-in-the-land.pdf>.

52 The Food Foundation, 'The Broken Plate 2023: The State of the Nation's Food System' (London, UK: The Food Foundation, 2023), <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/broken-plate>; The Food Foundation and YouGov, 'Food Insecurity Tracking', 2023, <https://www.foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking>.

53 The Food Foundation, 'New Data Shows UK Essential Workers Face Devastating Food Insecurity Levels', The Food Foundation (blog), accessed 24 October 2023, <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/new-data-shows-uk-essential-workers-face-devastating-food-insecurity-levels-0>.

54 The Food Foundation, 'The Broken Plate 2023: The State of the Nation's Food System' (London, UK: The Food Foundation, 2023), <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/broken-plate>.

55 Isabella Thompson, Rebecca Laughton, and Tony Little, 'Vocal for Local: Why Regional Food Systems Are the Future' (Pembrokeshire, Wales: The Landworkers' Alliance, 2021), <https://staging.landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Vocal-for-Local.pdf>.

56 The Food Foundation, 'The Broken Plate 2023: The State of the Nation's Food System' (London, UK: The Food Foundation, 2023), <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/broken-plate>.

There is evidence that suggests local food infrastructure, where the farmer is more directly linked to the consumer, has a greater potential to address food security. Income from vegetable box schemes generates almost twice as much value for the local economy as supermarkets do.⁵⁷ A recent report from the New Economics Foundation revealed that every £10 spent in a local food outlet is worth approximately £25 to the local economy, whereas every £10 spent in a supermarket only leads to £2.40 being spent in the local area.⁵⁸ Introducing farming to urban and local areas has also been shown to improve population health through increased well-being, physical and mental health gained from access to green spaces.⁵⁹

Researchers from the University of Gloucestershire calculated the social return on investment in local food. They found that for every £1 invested in local food, between £6 and £8 are returned to society in the form of economic and social benefits, including training and skills and health and wellbeing.⁶⁰ But without a thriving farming workforce these benefits cannot be scaled sustainably.

In summary, the cheap food production system serves healthy food to very few people; it primarily serves agrifood businesses - from agricultural input manufacturers to big retailers - with comfy profit margins.⁶¹ These profits come at the expense of the health of farmers, food workers, consumers, and the environment. Support is required for farmers to make the transition to food systems that serve everyone, but current economic assistance is woefully inadequate.

57 New Economics Foundation & The Soil Association. (2020). Farmer focused routes to market: An evaluation of the social, environmental, and economic contributions of Growing Communities <https://www.nefconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Farmer-focused-routes-to-markets-an-evaluation-of-growing-communities-April-2021.pdf>

58 New Economics Foundation & The Soil Association. (2020). Farmer focused routes to market: An evaluation of the social, environmental, and economic contributions of Growing Communities <https://www.nefconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Farmer-focused-routes-to-markets-an-evaluation-of-growing-communities-April-2021.pdf>

59 Twohig-Bennett and Jones, 2018; South et al, 2018) <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.fph.org.uk/media/2409/sustainable-food-systems-for-a-healthier-uk-final.pdf>

60 Landworkers' Alliance. (2021). Vocal for Local: A Case for Local Food Sovereignty. <https://staging.landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Vocal-for-Local.pdf>

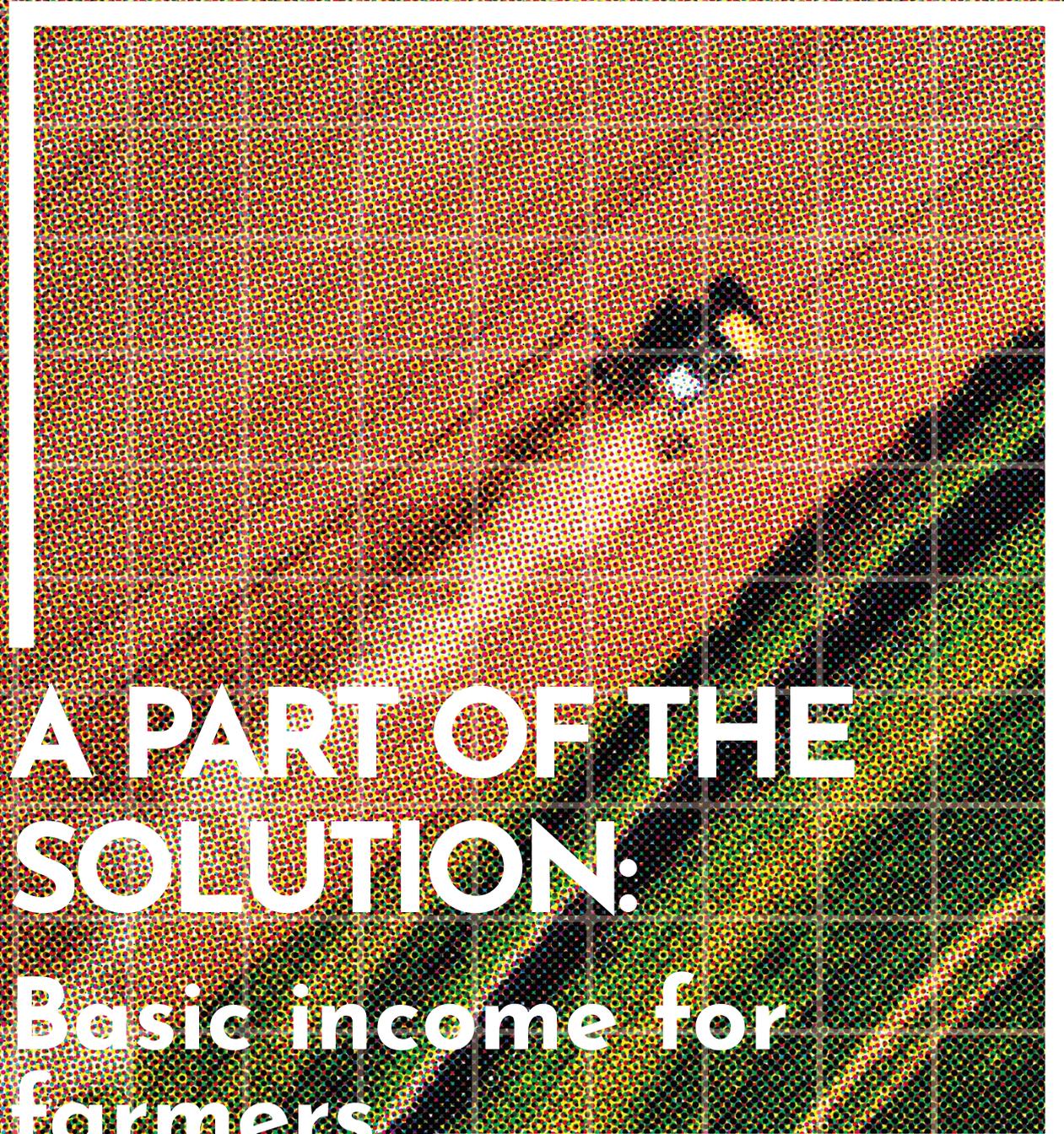
61 Fiona Harvey, *Record profits for grain firms amid food crisis prompt calls for windfall tax*, Aug 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/aug/23/record-profits-grain-firms-food-crisis-calls-windfall-tax>

A NEW MODEL IS NEEDED

These multifaceted issues collectively underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms and supportive policies within the UK's agricultural sector.

This new model needs to consider the individual incomes of farmers and essential workers across the agricultural sector, to acknowledge the importance of the work they deliver and reduce the pressures that are causing a mental health and well-being crisis for these workers. It needs to address the systematic barriers and disincentives to entering agricultural work in order to attract people into the sector and build a workforce fit to take on the challenge of building adequate food systems in the UK. The model must enable small scale farming and all kinds of experimentation with more environmental practices to shift food production to a sustainable model in the UK. A basic income for agricultural workers could be an effective policy tool for meeting these goals, in the rest of this paper we look at the ways in which it is a fit for purpose tool and the further exploration of this policy that is required.

If we want to grow more of our food in the UK, if we want to improve the environment, if we simply think that everyone deserves to live a decent life, we need to support farmers. For farmers to thrive, they need economic security.



**A PART OF THE
SOLUTION:**

**Basic income for
farmers**



A PART OF THE SOLUTION: Basic income for farmers

In this section we highlight the key features of a basic income that make it such a compelling policy approach to explore for the farming sector. This is informed by the main themes of the discussions we have had with farmers and farming organisations to date, as well as input from basic income experts who are familiar with the mechanisms of impact from basic income pilots and the wider, global debate.

This is not an exhaustive list of potential impacts, more the first attempt at defining the policy outcomes that could be expected for a basic income for farmers which could form the basis of a theory of change for the policy.

FINANCIAL SECURITY FOR FARMERS

Farmers face significant income volatility due to factors such as weather, market fluctuations, and crop failures. As we have laid out, this in-built risk has been exacerbated by market conditions and pressures to drive prices down, leaving farmers barely able to make a living. A basic income paid to farm workers takes the pressure off the business model of their work allowing them to refocus their labour and time on the fundamentals: producing food for their communities and caring for the land.

It is key that a basic income for farmers is not seen as a replacement for subsidies, but instead an addition to the system of investment into the agricultural industries. That is not to say that subsidy programmes are without flaws, only that they supply essential income to agricultural businesses which should be safeguarded. Subsidies made to businesses are appropriate methods of incentivising certain desirable practices, including sustainable methods as is the focus of the Environmental Land Management schemes, and investing in businesses that deliver work for the public good. However, subsidising businesses does not do enough to safeguard the incomes of the workers delivering the work of these businesses. A basic income is a more effective policy tool for this as it deals directly with the income of individuals.

This income being supplied, as with all basic incomes, as cash, on a regular basis and to individual farmers at a flat rate is key. These simple characteristics ensure this policy maintains the key features of incomes of other types and, for some farmers, may more closely resemble an income from a salaried role than the earnings from their farming had previously.

The primary policy objective of a basic income for farmers is to guarantee a level of financial security to all agricultural workers that underpins and is topped up by the income made from farming. Other outcomes will be a result of addressing this base issue. This is a ground up investment in the people at the heart of agriculture.

The degree of financial security that is provided is based on the level the basic income is paid at. So the design of the policy, particularly the payment amount and funding model, will dictate how strongly this outcome is met and should be carefully considered. Evidence from previous basic income pilots show that financial security increases for people in receipt of a basic income.⁶² Modelling of the impacts of a basic income shows that even a modest, fiscally neutral basic income* can reduce poverty rates significantly, with poverty experienced by working age adults falling by a quarter and by children and pensioners by over a half.⁶³

*Weekly rates for this modest basic income:

- » Adult aged 18-64: £63
- » Child aged 0-17: £41
- » Adults 65+: £190⁶⁴

62 Elliott Johnson et al, *The Health Case for Basic Income*, October 2023, <https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/case-study/the-health-case-for-basic-income/>

63 Howard Reed, Stewart Lansley et al, *Tackling Poverty: The power of a Universal Basic Income*, May, 2022, https://actionnetwork.org/user_files/user_files/000/076/443/original/Full_Paper_Lansley_Tackling_Poverty.pdf

64 Ibid

IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

A basic income for farmers is an investment in the experts in the field that not only values their knowledge but acknowledges the personal sacrifices they make. The impact of low incomes on health is widely understood: people can lose up to 10 years of their life from a low income.⁶⁵ The sacrifices made by agricultural workers are shown most starkly when looking at the evidence on mental health within the sector. The farming community has a lower level of average mental well-being than the UK population as a whole and those who work in skilled agricultural and related trades are 1.7 times more likely to die by suicide.⁶⁶ This should be a source of national shame.

The issue of farmers not feeling valued by the public was highlighted many times in the House of Commons inquiry into Rural Mental Health. A clear relationship between farming business' health and farmer mental health has been shown. Other key sources of stress included regulation, compliance and inspection, loss of subsidies/future trade deals and the future of farming.⁶⁷

A basic income for farmers is a clear message of support for agricultural workers and a necessary investment in the sector. It would increase farmer's ability to maintain the health of their business and manage challenging seasonal work. It would alleviate the stress caused by the loss of subsidies without introducing the pressure of new compliance, inspection, and regulatory measures.

There is a growing body of evidence on the potential public health impacts of a basic income. Modelling has shown that between 120,000 and 1.04 million cases of clinically significant physical health symptoms could be prevented or postponed by the implementation of a basic income. The same modelling predicted between 130,000 and 655,000 quality-adjusted life years (QALYs) could be gained, valued at between £3.9 billion and £19.7 billion.⁶⁸

65 Relationship between income and life expectancy by neighbourhood, The Health Foundation (September 2023) access link: <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/money-and-resources/income/relationship-between-income-and-healthy-life-expectancy-by-neighbourhood>

66 House of Commons, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee : *Rural Mental Health, Fourth Report of Session* (May 2023) <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/39991/documents/195139/default/>; *The Big Farming Survey: The health and wellbeing of the farming community in England and Wales in the 2020s* (October 2021) access link: <https://rabi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/RABI-Big-Farming-Survey-FINAL-single-pages-No-embargo-APP-min.pdf>

67 Relationship between income and life expectancy by neighbourhood, The Health Foundation (September 2023) access link: <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/money-and-resources/income/relationship-between-income-and-healthy-life-expectancy-by-neighbourhood>

68 Johnson et al, *Treating Causes not Symptoms*, July 2023, <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/treating-causes/>

Detailed mechanisms of impact put forward for a basic income policy centre include improvements to mental and physical health as long term outcomes. These mechanisms include that outlined by Johnson et al,⁶⁹ and the theory of change designed as part of the Scottish basic income pilot feasibility study.⁷⁰

Primary evidence from pilots and programmes comparable to basic income have shown modest to strong positive effects on various health outcomes. These include low birthweight, infant obesity, adult and child mental health, service use, and nutrition. Studies have suggested mechanisms underlying these improvements, including reduced stress, improved parenting quality, and reduced financial strain.⁷¹ It is reasonable to assume that relevant improvements in health outcomes would also be seen with a basic income for farmers and that these might be particularly strong if the levels of stress and financial strain experienced by farmers as a target group are higher than the general population.

A VIABLE LIVELIHOOD

Basic income's relationship to work is a key part of the debate around the policy. A common, but baseless, argument is that a basic income would lead to a widespread exodus from the job market with people instead opting to fund a lifestyle of leisure and fecklessness with their basic income payments. Pilots and policies comparable to a basic income have shown no evidence that this is the case with people receiving a basic income engaging with paid work at around the same rate as those without the payments. The only groups that regularly do less work when they get a basic income are parents of young children who spend more time with their children and young people who stay in education longer, both activities that lead to positive outcomes.⁷²

The more nuanced discussions around the impact a basic income might have on work are how a basic income could be a fairer way to compensate low or unpaid but crucial labour. Common examples of these types of work include education, care, parenting, art, household labour, entrepreneurship, community work, volunteering and here we argue, farming. These forms of labour are undervalued, often leaving the people who deliver this work without an

69 Howard Reed, Stewart Lansley et al, *Tackling Poverty: The power of a Universal Basic Income*, May, 2022, https://actionnetwork.org/user_files/user_files/000/076/443/original/Full_Paper_Lansley_Tackling_Poverty.pdf

70 Wendy Hearty et al, *Assessing the Feasibility of Citizens' Basic Income Pilots in Scotland: Final Report*, June 2020, https://www.basicincome.scot/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/175371/Draft-Final-CBI-Feasibility_Main-Report-June-2020.pdf

71 M Gibson, W Hearty, P Craig, *The public health effects of interventions similar to basic income: a scoping review*, Mar 2020 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(20\)30005-0/fulltext#seccestitle120](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(20)30005-0/fulltext#seccestitle120)

72 Relationship between income and life expectancy by neighbourhood, The Health Foundation (September 2023) access link: <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/money-and-resources/income/relationship-between-income-and-healthy-life-expectancy-by-neighbourhood>

adequate income.

The annual value of volunteering in the UK has been estimated at £18.7 billion.⁷³ The arts in the UK are estimated to have directly contributed £13.5 billion to the economy in 2018 with a larger, aggregate impact of £29.4 billion.⁷⁴ Yet last year research showed that the overall median hourly rate of artists was £2.60 an hour, dramatically below the UK minimum wage at the time of £9.50.⁷⁵ In 2023 Carers UK published new research showing that unpaid carers in England and Wales contribute £162 billion per year to the economy: a value equivalent to a second NHS.⁷⁶ Despite the value of this work unpaid carers are much more likely to live in poverty than those without caring responsibilities - 28% compared with 20%.⁷⁷

These forms of under and unpaid labour contribute enormous sums to the UK economy but at the expense of the individuals who deliver the work. The benefit from these forms of labour is felt at a societal level, not just economically but through the richness of our collective experiences and health and well-being. For the workers, it is not always possible, viable or appropriate to make a profit from this crucial work at the level of delivery. Unpaid carers do not charge the people they care for, they provide this care because it is necessary and right. This is not a clear cut choice and has knock on effects on paid work, health and well-being and income.⁷⁸ Volunteers contribute their labour willingly not expecting financial contribution and there is a whole industry created around supporting this work, ensuring it is not exploitative and that the work makes an impact. Entrepreneurs invest their time and labour in their ideas with faith that this will eventually lead them to a profit making business with the potential to create new jobs for others. Education and training is often seen as an investment in our careers, giving us access to higher salaried roles or different skilled work. All our lives are enriched by art and consume it on a daily basis through visual mediums, music, television and film. But creative practice and experimentation requires time, materials and headspace before a work is produced. Artists are subject to the rates people are willing to pay for their work and often, even at the highest level of creative success such as household names making their classic songs available for streaming, are compensated

73 Benefact Group, *The Value of Giving 2022*, 2022 <https://benefactgroup.com/fundraising-resources/charity-fundraising-articles/value-of-giving-report/>

74 CEBR, *Contribution of the art and culture sector to the UK economy*, October 2020 <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/research-and-data/contribution-art-and-culture-sector-uk-economy>

75 Lola Olufemi, Juliet Jacques, Jack Ky Tan, *Structurally F-cked*, March 2023 <https://www.a-n.co.uk/research/structurally-f-cked/>

76 Dr Maria Petrillo, Professor Matt Bennett, *Valuing Carers 2021 England and Wales*, May 2023, <https://www.carersuk.org/reports/valuing-carers-research-report/>

77 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *UK Poverty 2024*, January 2024 [https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2024-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk#:~:text=Poverty%202024%20report-.Poverty%20has%20increased%2C%20close%20to%20pre%20pandemic%20levels,nearly%203%20in%2010\)%20children](https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2024-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk#:~:text=Poverty%202024%20report-.Poverty%20has%20increased%2C%20close%20to%20pre%20pandemic%20levels,nearly%203%20in%2010)%20children)

78 Carers UK, *Key facts and figures about caring*, Feb 2024 <https://www.carersuk.org/policy-and-research/key-facts-and-figures/#:~:text=60%25%20of%20carers%20report%20a,%2C%20State%20of%20Caring%202022>

pitifully.⁷⁹

An unconditional basic income that is enough to live on or reduce the time we spend doing paid work would transform our relationship with these forms of labour, allowing people to prioritise different types of work at different points in their life based on their personal circumstances, professional aspirations and their health. We could prioritise the work that needs to be done without worrying about it turning a profit. This is particularly crucial in relation to labour that is required to address societal problems and the climate crisis.

This is why farming is a sector to prioritise in the exploration of the provision of an unconditional basic income. The work being delivered is unsustainable due to the lack of adequate income, and the consequences of farming continuing to be an unviable livelihood are dire for our environment and food systems.

Many people in the farming industry continue doing this crucial work, keeping their farms running at their own expense. Others are desperate to pour their knowledge, passion and time into farming but are unable to due to the expense. A basic income for farmers invests in the sector from the ground up. Trusting farmers with their own time and providing them with the financial security they need to make important decisions about their work. Like care, art and volunteering, farming is an economy of its own, that is dictated by the material need for food, the natural environment and the crops and livestock it produces. It cannot be bent into shape by the wider UK economy and policy should acknowledge this.

It is important that the work and wages are fair within the farming sector, a basic income is not a substitute for attention being paid and progress made in these areas. However, it is a fit for purpose tool that, in addition to fair work, fair wages, subsidies and profits, could lead to a positive transformation of the farming economy and ensure farming becomes a viable livelihood.

As we have previously highlighted the largest age group in the agricultural workforce is the over 65s.⁸⁰ This group deserves a retirement and an opportunity to pass on their wisdom to new generations.

The transition to just food systems requires large numbers of skilled agricultural workers. Many young people are attracted to building the farms of our future and want a job in the sector, but are confronted with the impacts of very low farmer incomes.

⁷⁹ Damon Krukowski, *Spotify made £56m profit, but has decided not to pay smaller artists like me. We need you to make some noise*, November 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/nov/30/spotify-smaller-artists-wrapped-indie-musicians>

⁸⁰ Department for Environment and Rural Affairs, *Agriculture in the UK Evidence Pack: September 2022 update*. Access link: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1106562/AUK_Evidence_Pack_2021_Sept22.pdf

New entrants to the agriculture sector do not only benefit the food system but the economy at large. Analysis from the Food and Land Use Coalition in 2019 found that a global investment in training young farmer entrepreneurs of £75-90 billion over the next decade would deliver a three-fold economic return of £230 billion.⁸¹ It is not only young people fresh out of education that would benefit from the door to the industry being more open. The Royal Horticultural Society also reported that a significant number of apprentice applicants were career changers, with 25-34 year olds accounting for 39% of applicants and 35-44 year olds for 17%.⁸² For people to enter the industry, they need an income that sustains them. A basic income for farmers addresses this directly, providing new entrants with an income without putting pressure on the already squeezed profits of farming businesses.

Older and more experienced farmers would be able to bring in new workers to their farms, impart their knowledge and create succession plans for their farms. They could learn from new entrants with different passions and knowledge and work together to incorporate these into their farming practices, all operating with the security of their basic income and able to focus on the needs of the farm as their own needs are better met.

"Ultimately I just couldn't start a market garden and have my job. You know it's a full-time job starting a market garden, and I couldn't do it. A Basic Income would have helped me. So I'm very interested in it as a solution for other people." - Aspiring Market Gardener, Scotland

Over the course of a career in farming, increased financial security would allow farmers to use their time differently, opening up opportunities for training and experimentation with farming and business practices that might lead to greater yields, better care for the environment or new revenue streams - or bring time off and sustainable working hours within reach. All of these factors, influenced by the implementation of a basic income for farmers, would make farming the viable livelihood it should be.

81 Growing Better: Ten Critical Transitions to Transform Food and Land Use, The Global Consultation Report of the Food and Land Use Coalition, September 2019 <https://www.foodandlandusecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FOLU-GrowingBetter-GlobalReport.pdf>

82 Nicole Winchester, *The UK's horticultural sector*, October 2022 <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/the-uks-horticultural-sector/>

ENVIRONMENTAL CASE

Tackling the ecological and climate crises is critical to UK economic prosperity and food security. It is well documented that a fundamental shift in farming practices is essential to meet these dual crises. Farmers and land managers play a central role in determining the health of the UK's natural environment, with agricultural land making up 71% of the UK's total area.⁸³

Transitioning into more ecological and regenerative farming practices can have high upfront costs and can require more human power on farms. Growing practices that increase biodiversity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions are desirable and practical, they just need a workforce that is properly equipped to implement them.⁸⁴ A basic income, as a direct, unconditional payment to individual farmers, is a fit for purpose tool for encouraging this work by providing farmers with financial security when they are working through the less profitable periods of initially implementing these practices.

Other incentives towards the adoption of more sustainable practices are of course essential for a full transformation to a robust farming sector that truly addresses environmental and nature crises. These include education and training programmes, subsidies for favourable practices like the Environmental Land Management schemes and legislation against harmful practices. But a basic income provides flexibility and security at the level of the individual that underpins these higher level measures, buffering workers and their incomes during the transition.

A basic income for farmers providing income supplementation to small scale farmers, in a way subsidy programmes have traditionally not, could lead to an increase in the number of farmers and farms producing food at a local level. There is evidence that local farming benefits communities and is a sustainable method of food production so this could contribute to improved environmental outcomes. A more robust system of local food production could also reduce average food miles across the UK.

83 The Wildlife Trusts. (2023). *Farming at the Sweet Spot: Integrating Agriculture and Biodiversity for a Sustainable Future*. https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Farming%20at%20the%20Sweet%20Spot_1.pdf

84 Basic Income Coalition. Hagen, et al., (2021). (Agriculture Case for Basic Income 2023 Bryan Dale, Alesandros Glaros, Cathy "Case for Agriculture 2023" <https://basicincomecoalition.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/1.-Case-for-agriculture-March-3-2023.pdf>

POTENTIAL POLICY OUTCOMES FROM A BASIC INCOME FOR FARMERS

These short, intermediate and long term outcomes are drawn from the evidence discussed in the previous section and the conversations had during this first phase of work on a basic income for farmers. They draw from the theory of change in the Scottish basic income pilot feasibility study.⁸⁵

SHORT TERM OUTCOMES (2-3 YEARS, LIKELY DURATION OF A PILOT)

- »» Reduced income insecurity
- »» Increased income
- »» Decreased use of emergency support
- »» Reduced debt
- »» Reduced poverty
- »» Increased opportunities to make life choices
- »» Improved health and well-being
- »» Improved experience of social security and farm funding
- »» Reduced barriers to work in the farming sector
- »» Increased uptake of opportunities for acquiring training skills and qualifications
- »» Increased farming related entrepreneurial activity
- »» Increased number of farming businesses profitable
- »» Increased amount of small scale farming
- »» Working hours reduced
- »» Holiday taken increased

85 Wendy Hearty et al, *Assessing the Feasibility of Citizens' Basic Income Pilots in Scotland: Final Report*, June 2020, https://www.basicincome.scot/---data/assets/pdf_file/0024/175371/Draft-Final-CBI-Feasibility_Main-Report-June-2020.pdf

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES (PERMANENT POLICY)

- » Increased new entrants to the sector
- » Increased trainee and apprenticeship opportunities
- » Sustained reduction in the levels of destitution
- » Reduction in absolute and relative poverty rates
- » Increase in proportion of population engaging in farming in paid and voluntary capacity
- » Increased usage of sustainable practices
- » Increased amount of food supplied by local farms
- » Increased satisfaction with farming as a livelihood
- » Sustained increase in number of farming businesses profitable
- » Increase in number of farming businesses

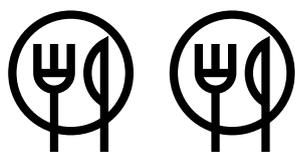
LONG TERM (PERMANENT POLICY)

- » Increased farming work force
- » Improved health and well-being of farmers as a demographic
- » Reduced average age of a farmer
- » Contribution to inclusive/economic growth
- » Contribution to positive environmental outcomes
- » Reduction in food miles



THE PEOPLE:

What it's like to
farm in the UK



THE PEOPLE: What it's like to farm in the UK

As part of this work we hosted a series of conversations with key stakeholders from farming industries to begin to scope out how a basic income for farmers should be designed and what it could mean for workers in the sector. Here we explore some of the key insights.

During the sessions participants were presented with current information about basic income and its characteristics and were asked three key questions, how a basic income of £1000 a month (it was explained this number was a rough guide and not founded in any modelling we had done) for farmers would impact: a) their personal lives, b) their professional lives and c) the wider community and food system as a whole. The duration of the discussion was always 90 minutes and they were held online via Zoom, capturing video, audio and transcripts for use in this report and future work.

Over the course of the four sessions we held these discussions with a total of 18 stakeholders who actively worked in food and farming.

When asked about what they would spend their basic income payments on, three different categories of spending emerged:

- » **Basics and essentials:** payments towards debt clearance, healthcare, housing costs, rent and immediate bills.
- » **Long-term investments:** investing in their future by adding to a pension pot, investing in their food business ventures, practically maintaining tools and structures at their farms as well as employing other people to help share the workload, alongside professional development like sector based courses and conferences and investing in their local community.
- » **Personal and leisure:** reducing hours in other part-time jobs to focus more on farming, passion pursuits and restorative time with family and friends.

BASICS AND ESSENTIALS

Farmers we interviewed said that a basic income would alleviate financial burdens, allowing them to pay off debt, cover housing costs, seek healthcare, improve mental well-being, and avoid needing second and third part-time jobs to bridge the gaps.

"It's the difference between just being stressed all the time about, 'am I actually gonna be able to eat this week? Am I gonna be able to pay my phone bill this month? Am I going to have to close the business this month because I just didn't sell enough to keep going?'. It's the difference between survival and not, especially in the early days." - Farmer, Wales

"I could pay off my debt, so I wouldn't have that hovering in my mind... I could afford to go and see an osteopath or a physio to help with the physicality and the body breakingness of growing vegetables." - Grower, Midlands

All workers should have the right to look after their health, but the nature of the work often prevents farmers from being able to rest and recover. Being able to take time off when ill or injured would support their physical health as well as their ability to participate in this field of work for longer.

"I would feel less stressed in general and not at the point of burn out." - Trainee Farmer, Scotland

A basic income could alleviate financial stress experienced by agricultural workers due to job and income precarity, with benefits for mental health. Participants shared that it would provide the financial security necessary to focus on self-care.

"I could afford to have therapy which is always good." - Vegetable Farmer, Midlands

Farming has many seasonal jobs and a low wage economy which brings a lack of stability to many workers.

"The main problem for a lot of farmers is the seasonal nature of the work." - Farmer, SW England

The agricultural sector relies heavily on seasonal, part-time, under-waged and unwaged workers who often lack income security during the off-season. Many domestic seasonal workers spend part of the year unemployed, although only some are able to access income support during that time. The income floor created by a basic income could provide some stability for farm workers to continue to work in the sector, and even return to the same farms in subsequent seasons. These returning workers bring complex skills and place-based knowledge that are critical for productivity.⁸⁶

"It's the work that I love, [with a Basic Income] I would definitely be staying in this sector. Whereas at the moment what I'm kind of thinking is 'Right. I'll be here for a season. I'll be here for maybe another season.'" - Grower, Scotland

A recurring theme in terms of social barriers for new and aspiring farmers in our research was the lack of respect and confidence in the solidity of farming. Participants noted this from family members and broader community, as well as public opinion which impacted their mental wellbeing. Participants expressed how a basic income would show a recognition of the value and skill in farming, positively impacting their mental health.

"[Basic Income would be] recognition that it's skilled work, and valuable and I think that's the biggest thing that's affected my mental health working in a lot of these different kinds of jobs. I'm working so hard, I'm exhausted and busy but I'm just so skint. It just makes you feel like you don't have value. And that's really hard to sit with." - Urban Farmer, London

"I would feel safe and valued. 1,000 pounds a month would be massive and life-changing." - Urban Farmer, Midlands

"Something that I notice is a lot of burnout. And that's really really sad to see. In this future vision, not being surrounded by lots of people who are really burnt out and have no energy or capacity for doing anything outside of their work would be nice." - Urban Farmer, London

"[With a Basic Income] I think I'd be able to just have a bit more pride in talking about what I do. For it to be more than just a labour of love. To know this is a viable way to make my living long term." - Grower, Scotland

86 Coalition Canada, *Agriculture Case for Basic Income*, March 2023 <https://basicincomecoalition.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/1.-Case-for-agriculture-March-3-2023.pdf>

LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS

One of the key findings from these discussions was that participants thought a basic income would bring long-term economic security and financial stability for those trapped in poverty and precarious work within the farming sector.

"Growing is unpredictable right now, and crop losses are so prolific, we need this [basic income] to ensure that people can continue to grow without being severely impacted by climate change. They can become more resilient by having the time, space and energy to put into building more resiliency in their systems. They wouldn't have to worry about just meeting this bottom line that's always kind of slightly out of reach." - Food Justice Activist, SE England

The farmers we interviewed described how they would use a basic income to maintain farming equipment, transition to more sustainable practices and make their day to day lives easier.

"[If I received a Basic Income] I could reinvest it so I could upgrade certain equipment. The safety equipment. Things like fixing the trailer before it completely falls apart, instead of waiting because I've got to save up." - Farmer, Wales

"I would invest in farm buildings, equipment and consumables." - Farmworker, South East England

Participants noted the risk involved in farming, and how this risk is left on farmer's shoulders. Many worked with more environmental and sustainable methods, explaining that this required a level of experimentation which was often out of reach due to financial pressures. They suggested that with a basic income more farmers would be able to take these additional risks to develop more sustainable methods, for the environment and their businesses.

"That knowledge and future-proofing source of income will allow you to make more long term decisions which in turn probably aids both the business and the nature recovery work that you might be doing on your land." - Farmer in SW England

"I think a lot of larger scale farmers are driven to a more and more intense production because they're trapped in commodity markets. So if the basic income can de-risk things a little bit then it gives them more space to diversify and to get on to that kind of journey towards agro-ecology which gives them more diversity of cropping." - Market Gardener, Midlands

"A Basic Income could lead to more sustainable farm practices so farmers can take more risks to try more organic practices." - Food Systems Lecturer in SW England

To enable a diverse range of youth to work in agriculture, financial support during their learning journey is crucial.⁸⁷ New entrants shared how a basic income could support learning and qualifications in sustainable horticulture:

"[A Basic Income] would have enabled me to get qualifications that I really wanted whilst training instead of just having to volunteer. I could actually be on training courses." - Trainee Farmer, NW England

"I would feel like I'm learning more, like I'm taking time to learn about things and not having to make compromises. I could take time to learn how to do things in a more sustainable way rather than just going for the quickest option." - Trainee Farmer, Scotland

The 2023 Jumping Fences report highlights the need to challenge existing narratives about farming and make the sector more racially inclusive, alongside providing funding, land access, and training opportunities.⁸⁸ This was reinforced by our conversations.

"I think we do have a real problem with new entrants, if you don't come from a farming background, and you don't have land then it can be a very difficult and unattractive field to get into." - Ex dairy farmer, Midlands

Participants emphasised that poor career prospects, low salaries, and overwork discourage individuals from pursuing farming as a career. A basic income could offer more time for training and reduce reliance on low-paid jobs, making farming a viable choice for those interested. It would contribute to the perception of farming as a viable, long-term career.

87 Priscilla Claeys and Barbara Van Dyck Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, CAWR, Coventry University, UK. *ECVC Youth: Navigating Dreams & Precarity Working and Learning Conditions of Young Agricultural Workers, Interns and Volunteers Across Europe*, Jan 2023 <https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/youth-report-EN-edit02.pdf>

88 Naomi Terry, *Jumping Fences: Land, Food and Racial Justice in British Farming*, (London, UK: Land in Our Names, 2023), <https://landinournames.community/projects/jumping-fences>.

Most participants discussed how economic freedom would give them more time to engage in civic activities and explore their passions. This included learning more about sustainable practices in farming, helping with environmental surveying, starting volunteering, entering higher education and developing new skills.

"Not only could I do things that take time and that are the right thing to do, it would also free me up to go on training courses. I could spend more enjoying being out there doing some environmental monitoring. I would have the ability to pay someone fairly to come and help me on the big jobs that you do need more people for. I'd be able to share that money around." - Tenant Farmer, Wales

Personal financial investment into their futures was also mentioned, things like investing in pensions and later life care.

"Many farmers have little possibility to set things up for their retirement, unless they already own land, so maybe putting that basic income money into a pension pot or private pension, something for the future." - Ex-Dairy Farmer, Midlands

Investing in their communities was another long term and future proofing point many participants referred to.

"A bit more financial security helps me to give more to the community, whether that be time, or reducing the cost of produce." - Trainee Farmer, Scotland

"It would have meant being able to do more for the community." - Dairy Farmer, Midlands

Enabling those who work in the field to go on courses and connect with other people in the industry strengthens the network of farmers and local producers. Investing in their communities further by providing more food for local businesses and strengthening the local food system.

"I think [with a Basic Income] you would get a patchwork of small initiatives springing up, and that can make a difference in terms of the access to fresh vegetables in cities." - Grower, NW England

"[with a Basic Income] supermarkets would stock more local food, including more organic and regenerative agriculture food as farmers would have risk mitigated through consistent support." - Food Justice Activist, SE England

It was predicted by the participants that reliance on services that combat food poverty and inequality such as food banks and charities could also decrease as a result of a basic income for farmers.

"There's a big need for more local food, for procurement by the councils for school meals, hospital meals, prison meals. So there's massive potential for the market for local produce. If only we could produce it, and if only the growers could get paid for growing it." - Grower NW England

"[It could] massively increase the supply of locally grown food and lower the price, making this food more accessible and more available to people on lower incomes." - Grower, Scotland

PERSONAL AND LEISURE

Participants also considered how a basic income could enable them to have more of a work-life balance, including holidays and more time devoted to hobbies and leisure time. This would aid health and well-being which in turn would positively impact their work.

"I think the main thing it would give me would be time, because I could probably afford to drop some hours from the day job. So at the minute I use my annual leave from the day job to do cattle tasks. I don't actually have a holiday. It's all juggling all the time." - Farmer, Wales

"[With basic income] farmers could have time off for holidays even during peak season, this could improve access for new growers and support better mental health." - Food Justice Activist, SE England

A key problem that participants highlighted was that they felt isolated from their friends and community due to having to live on the land or very close to where they farm to make it financially viable.

"I could spend more time with my friends and be able to give a little bit back to the community as well." - Trainee Farmer, Scotland

"As a single person household paying market price rent I just about manage month to month. I can't save. If I had a bit more choice about where I could live, I would probably live in [town name Y] and commute, because most of my support network, most of my friends are there. It would be that difference that would mean I was able to visit a bit more, and not feel isolated up in [town name X]." - Farmworker, Scotland

GENERAL LESSONS LEARNED

A basic income could be a powerful tool to support farmers, farmworkers and food producers' basic and essential needs, help them invest in the long term sustainable plans for their businesses whilst enabling them to contribute more to the local community whilst supporting their physical and mental well-being.

"It's more than just that I agree with this, solving this problem is essential because we just can't go on like this." - Farmer, Scotland

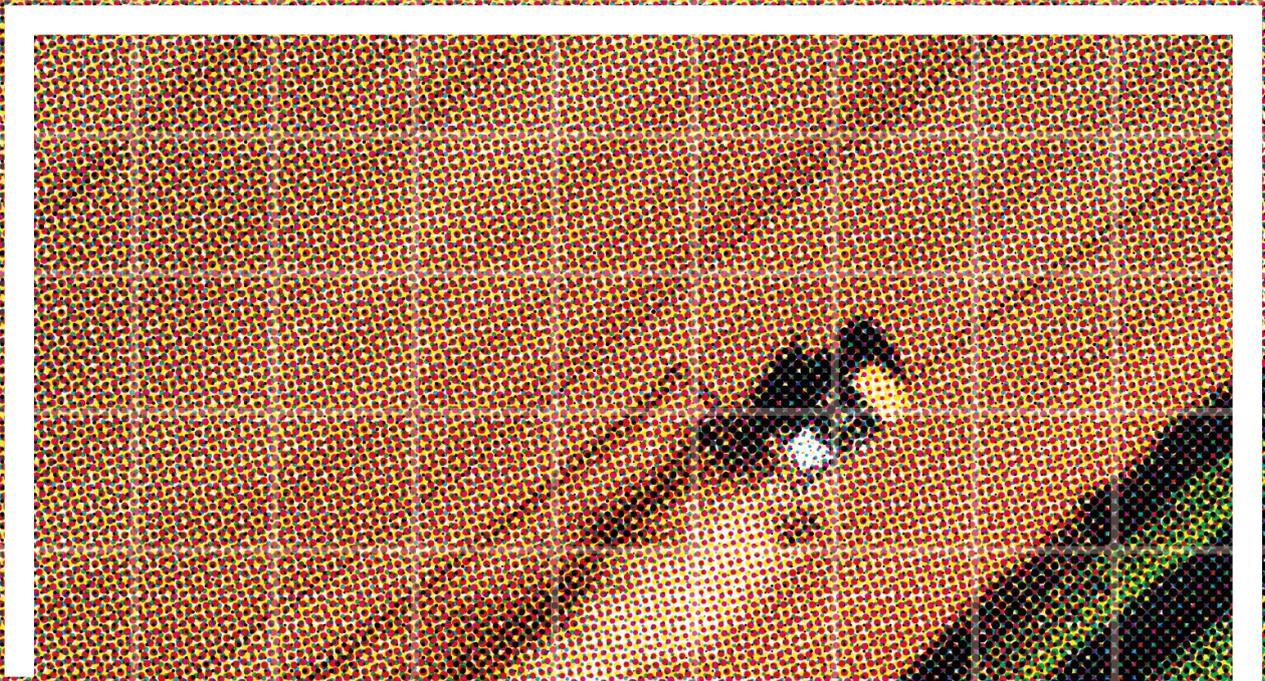
Overall, participants were supportive of a basic income for farmers, farmworkers and food producers and optimistic about the positive changes it could bring to the food system. They highlighted some of the concepts that would make it beneficial in their work and suggested some challenges that might arise in its implementation.

Unanimously, the participants wanted everyone in the UK to receive a *universal* basic income, not just farmers, farmworkers and food producers yet it was noted they saw the food and farming community would be the most prescient place to start in order to meet the current challenges.

"I think UBI for everyone is a great idea. If it just so happens to be for farmers then grand, but I would prefer it for everyone." - Grower, Midlands

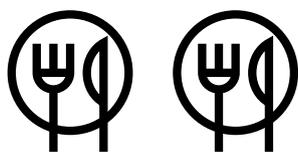
"We're specifically asking for farmers just now, even though we think UBI should be for everyone, because of how labour intensive food is and how low its market value is." - Grower, Scotland

With the high inequality and deprivation in the farming industry, only to be exacerbated by the loss of EU funding, the basic income going universally and unconditionally to all farmers regardless of scale was supported by most of the participants.



THE POLICY:

Designing a basic
income for farmers



THE POLICY:

Designing a basic income for farmers

If designed and implemented optimally a basic income for farmers could be key to a transformation of the farming economy in the UK. In this section we turn to how the policy should be explored to ensure it is informed by the people that do this crucial work and avoids replicating the failures of past and present systems.

Here, we do not provide a policy proposal but a framework for considering the policy and an emphatic call to our colleagues across the farming sector to engage in the next phase of exploration. With their input we hope to scope the design of a basic income for farmers policy for the UK and Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland as well as options for pilots.

ELIGIBILITY

The most crucial element of this policy is defining who is eligible to receive it. Every industry has its own ecology made up of workers, resources and infrastructure. All elements of this ecology should be taken into account when defining who should have their income underpinned by this basic income policy to ensure it is possible for it to flourish. The best way to do this is to speak to the people who work in the industry.

The work so far indicates that payments should be made to those working the land as opposed to those who just own the land that is being farmed, which is how government incentives have historically worked. Payments should be universal for all scale farmers, from large-scale, mid-scale to 1-acre farmers.

We believe that uniting farmers across the board would be beneficial and we recognise that large scale farmers will also suffer economically through the changes to financial support systems. They will need additional measures to ensure they can continue their work in helping to feed the nation. Ensuring smaller scale farmers are included in the scheme will, for the first time, make this work more viable and help shift the ecology of the industry in a positive direction.

Workers that possess the skills that are essential across agricultural work should qualify for the basic income payments. New entrants to the agricultural field and their eligibility for the scheme should be carefully considered to ensure they are encouraged rather than excluded.

Further consultation should be done to map the jobs and trades farming depends upon to ensure existing workers are supported and to attract new workers to these roles. Getting this right will reduce conflict and avoid leaving key workers behind.

PAYMENT LEVEL AND FREQUENCY

The level of payment is also key. The basic income must be enough to provide recipients with financial security. It must also be affordable as a permanent policy so it can remain in place, providing this financial security on a permanent basis. Defining the payment level should be done through consultation on what would be an adequate level of basic income to provide financial security and exploration of possible methods of funding.

The frequency of payment may have an impact, so again should be consulted on. However, it is likely that a monthly payment would provide flexibility through a consistent and regular source of income preferable to weekly or annually. Having different options for frequency of payment (weekly, monthly, quarterly, biannually and annually) should also be considered, so individuals can choose what would work best for them based on the circumstances of their work.

FUNDING

The next phase of this work should involve the commissioning of research into potential sources of funding for the basic income policy. Favourable sources include budgets for agriculture from central and devolved governments and a redistributive approach that facilitates investment in the scheme from comfortably profitable elements of the agricultural industry, including supermarkets, suppliers and land rental.

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DELIVERING PAYMENTS

Although some farmers have received financial support in the form of CAP payments previously, fit for purpose administrative infrastructure needs to be developed to deliver the basic income payments. Digital exclusion is a key consideration to make when designing this infrastructure and this should be an area that is consulted on. HMRC systems should be explored as the tax system is universal.

INTERACTION WITH OTHER SCHEMES

As we have stated in this report the basic income scheme is not intended as a replacement of subsidy programmes, but an additional, complementary policy that deals with the financial security of workers in the sector. It is imperative that it is designed as such and receipt of the basic income does not make recipients or their businesses ineligible for payments from subsidies, social security or any other schemes that provide them with essential income.

POLITICAL PATHWAY

Agricultural policy is a devolved matter, options should be explored for how a basic income for farmers could be delivered in a way that respects the devolved responsibilities of governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, in cooperation with the UK Government.

Governments, elected representatives and ministers with relevant portfolios should be engaged and consulted on this proposal. It is important for the development of the proposal to remain independent at this stage to ensure a balance of interests. Our side of this work will continue to be led by agricultural workers in the interest of workers across the industry.

The transition from EU subsidy schemes to ones delivered by the UK Government makes this a fertile moment for exploration of this policy. It is clear that more needs to be done for workers in the industry and it is crucial that this proposal is developed and presented. This will require consensus building from workers and organisations across the agricultural industry and constructive engagement with politicians, policy makers and governments.

PILOTS

"The food system is a perfect place to pilot something like this, it's people working in the food system who are so often experiencing food poverty themselves." - Councillor in Sussex

It would be possible for devolved governments or the UK Government to pilot this policy. However, due to the political and environmental context and the predicted catastrophic loss of income expected for many farming businesses as a result of the transition from EU to UK Government subsidy schemes it is recommended that pilots be national or UK-wide.

Privately funded, industry led pilots could be a viable and valuable route to building the case and evidence base for a basic income for farmers in the UK. This work could build on from basic income pilots that have evaluated its impacts on agriculture and demonstration projects that aim to build the case for unconditional cash transfers. These projects include the proposed pilots in Jarrow and Grange that were built from extensive consultation of the communities in these areas,⁸⁹ and the groundbreaking basic income demonstration project in Stockton, California and the many pilots across the USA that have followed.⁹⁰

BASIC INCOME 4 FARMERS PROJECT NEXT STEPS

The Basic Income 4 Farmers project will continue work to engage people on the potential of this idea. The main goals of this process are to build relationships and support within the farming sector and interrogate the areas of policy design laid out earlier in this section. In this next phase of work we hope to collectively agree upon answers to the key decisions that would need to be made in the design of a basic income for farmers around eligibility, payment level and frequency, funding models, infrastructure and interaction with other policies. If the appetite and enthusiasm for the policy remains through this process this will forge a political pathway towards a basic income for farmers.

Input from farmers and an evidence based approach are central to the success of this work. Consultation and collaboration with farmers will remain the driving force of this work. This discussion paper is the first publication designed to provide an evidence base for this consultation, we intend to follow this with publications on policy design, including funding models, and proposals for pilots based on a comprehensive feasibility study. We see that pilots are desirable to generate primary data on the efficacy of a basic income for farmers that can be used to hone the design of a permanent policy.

89 Elliott Johnson, *A Big Local Basic Income: Proposal for a locally led basic income pilot*, June 2023 <https://autonomy.work/portfolio/basic-income-big-local/>

90 Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration, January 2024, <https://www.stocktondemonstration.org/>

OUR NEXT STEPS

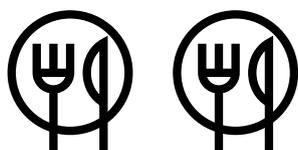
- » **Hosting conversations:** Continue hosting conversations (click [here](#) to join a conversation).
- » **Building networks:** Build cross-party networks to garner support for the policy.
- » **Pilot feasibility study:** Secure funding for a feasibility study to design a pilot program based on consultation.
- » **Policy proposal research:** Design basic income for farmers policies for the UK, Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland based on consultation and input from academic and policy stakeholders.

WHAT CAN YOU DO NEXT?

- » **Farmers, farmworkers, or food producers:** Share your thoughts on the policy idea by completing [this survey](#)
- » **Involved in politics:** Consider including this policy in your party's manifesto and contact ubi4farmers@gmail.com for support on this process.
- » **Media outlets:** Help by sharing the findings of this report through your magazine or news outlet.
- » **Support local farmers:** Buy local produce, join local veg box schemes, and source local and seasonal produce year-round to support farmers.
- » **Raise awareness:** Share this report with family and friends and engage in discussions about Basic Income 4 Farmers.
- » **Want to stay in touch with this project:** Follow Basic Income 4 Farmers on social media [Instagram](#) & [Twitter](#) or join the mailing list by completing [this survey](#).



CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

A basic income for farmers could make the industry more accessible for new entrants, support small-scale farmers who have historically been overlooked by government subsidies and support existing larger scale farmers who will also suffer from upcoming changes to their financing models.

While a basic income for farmers cannot solve the magnitude of financial pressures most farmers experience, it could play an important role to alleviate them and thereby enable some farmers to continue farming. Additionally, it could support the diversification of the food system through enabling a network of smaller farms and food producers.

A basic income would provide a reliable and unconditional source of income for farmers and food producers, enabling them to focus on the important work of producing the food that feeds the nation. It would also help to address the significant income disparities that exist within the agriculture industry, as well as the lack of access to social safety nets that many farmers face.

In conclusion, a basic income for farmers in the UK holds significant potential to address key challenges in the agricultural sector. By providing economic stability, enhancing food security, attracting young farmers, and promoting sustainable practices, a basic income could contribute to a thriving, resilient, and sustainable food and farming system.



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Published 2024 by:

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