



**Friends of
the Earth**

Food Chain Campaign - Briefing for farmers

A planet-friendly future for livestock farming

Friends of the Earth is calling for a sustainable future for meat and dairy farming in the UK. Livestock farming is part of our natural and cultural heritage and can deliver many benefits for the environment and society - for rural communities and employment, biodiversity and wildlife, and food provision from otherwise unproductive land. Small and family farms are at the heart of rural communities and local food systems, and have a vital role in ensuring a secure food supply.

Independent, small and family farms are under increasing pressure from the growth in intensive farming, unfair treatment by supermarkets and Government policies that put the interests of business above people and the environment. Many farms, particularly in upland areas, are operating on the brink of viability. The intensification of farming has led to decline and loss of livelihoods in traditional farming communities in the UK and overseas, and has had a devastating impact on the environment. Evidence is growing of the unacceptable environmental and social impacts of intensive livestock production, particularly from the cultivation of soy for animal feeds.

Friends of the Earth is campaigning for a fair and planet-friendly system that works for farmers in the UK and overseas, reduces the impacts of both animal products and feeds, and replaces soy with alternative home-grown proteins.

How we work with farmers

Friends of the Earth has campaigned for over eight years for fairer treatment of farmers by supermarkets. We led the call for an independent supermarket watchdog and a strong Groceries Supply Code of Practice to prevent the supermarkets bullying suppliers. We also recognise that for farmers to develop alternative feeds and more extensive systems of production, they must be paid a fair price for their produce and receive appropriate rewards and incentives. Our survey of dairy farmers for the Competition Commission's inquiry highlighted how farmers struggle to invest in conservation and environmental measures because of the low prices they receive from the supermarkets.¹

We are now working with farmers to develop our vision for a sustainable future for farming and identify the policies needed to achieve this. We want to work with the farming community to:

- Develop an alternative vision for UK livestock farming which supports local economies, rural communities and has a positive impact on the environment.
- Give traditional, small and family farmers a voice – supporting traditional farming skills and rural communities, not the vested corporate interests of industrial-scale farming.
- Explore the benefits of mixed farming systems and the opportunities and barriers to growing home-grown feeds for livestock. How can farmers benefit from a better meat production system by reducing reliance on imported feeds and getting a fair price?
- Explore what needs to change to reduce reliance on imported feed, particularly soy from South America – including supporting traditional breeds, extensive grazing and home-grown feeds through shifting subsidies and other Government policies.
- Identify the research and development needed to increase viability and uptake of use of home-grown feeds.
- Support livestock farming systems that help with conservation, particularly sheep and cattle grazing in upland areas. Extensive systems make valuable contributions to biodiversity and landscape, maintain natural carbon stores, and are not dependent upon artificial inputs and feeds.
- Call for an independent supermarket watchdog to monitor and enforce the new Groceries Supply Code of Practice, and to push for other policies that will ensure livestock farmers receive a fair price that reflects the cost of production.
- Pressure the supermarkets to pay a fair price for sustainably produced food.
- Demand that the public sector purchases local and sustainable meat and dairy products.

¹ http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/media_briefing/farmers_speak_out_over_the0.pdf

Impacts of the current intensive livestock system

While traditional UK livestock farming has many positive benefits for biodiversity, the natural environment, employment and food security, evidence is growing of the negative impact of intensive factory farming.

Environmental and social impacts

The global food system is under increasing scrutiny - it requires ever-growing quantities of increasingly scarce land, water, energy and chemical inputs to produce the food we eat. This is particularly true of intensive livestock production, which is heavily reliant on imports of soy for animal feed.

The forest loss and land use change caused by the production of soy feeds has a damaging impact on the environment – destroying biodiversity and wildlife and increasing greenhouse gas emissions (6% of the global total). The big business soy takeover is also forcing small farmers and indigenous communities off their lands.

The vast majority of this soy goes into intensive pig, poultry and egg production, as well as dairy and some beef. Globally, by far the greatest increases in livestock production are from intensive high input sources including large-scale intensive pig and poultry units.

Economic impacts of rising feed prices

The global livestock system is not working for farmers in the UK. With commodity price rises, farmers have seen the cost of animal feed and other inputs increase. The price of fertiliser grew by 156% in 2008.² The cost of chicken feed has risen by £80/tonne in the same period.³ The UK pork sector has already seen its market share shrink as a result,⁴ and pig farmers have been hit by volatile feed costs.

Soy accounts for 65% of all proteins used for animal feed in Europe and 40% in the UK, the vast majority of which comes from Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. Our reliance on imported soy is a result of European agricultural policy and the ban on meat and bone meal in response to the BSE crisis. But soy is not the only available source of vegetable protein suitable for animal feed. Alternatives protein sources – such as peas, beans, lupins and oilseed rape meal – are already produced in the UK and Europe, and many can be produced on-farm reducing the need for transport. In France for example, peas are widely used for pig and poultry feed.

The distorting effects of trade and agriculture policy has made it cheaper and more convenient for countries to import soy rather than grow our own feeds – Friends of the Earth is calling for change in subsidies, trade policies and research to enable farmers to switch from soy to domestic protein sources.

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<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/countryside-farming-news/farming-news/2008/08/19/rising-costs-and-store-wars-put-farms-at-risk-warns-nfu-91466-21556015/>

³ GM and the food chain roundtable report, June 2008

⁴ The role of UK companies in driving soy expansion in South America, Profundo Economic Research, August 2008

Supermarket power and unfair supply chains

Farmers are also suffering from a long-term decline in farm-gate prices as a result of the concentration of the grocery market and unfair terms of trade with supermarkets. Following a two-year investigation into the grocery market, the Competition Commission concluded in 2008 that the exercise of buyer power by the major supermarkets has a damaging effect on the supply chain and producers.

After eight years of campaigning from Friends of the Earth, the Competition Commission recommended a watchdog and a strong Groceries Supply Code of Practice (GSCOP) to protect farmers from the unfair practices of the supermarkets. The GSCOP came into force on 4 February 2010 and the Government has committed to an ombudsman to monitor and enforce the Code.

What our campaign aims to achieve

Friends of the Earth is calling for an urgent overhaul of the current global livestock system, to help create a sustainable and fair system for small farmers and rural communities.

Changes to agricultural and rural policy

Agricultural and rural support must be redirected to sustainable farming systems, supporting small and family farms that benefit rural communities. Currently, Government uses taxpayers' money to subsidise factory-farmed meat and dairy to the tune of £700 million each year.⁵ New measures must be introduced to promote low-impact livestock systems, home-grown feed production and research into different livestock breeds.

Supporting alternative animal feeds to soy

The Government must kick-start the UK's home-grown feed market so that it makes economic sense for farmers to feed animals on crops that have been grown closer to home. Alternatives protein sources to soy, including peas, beans, lupins and oilseed rape meal, can be produced on-farm, freeing farmers from the insecurities of global commodity markets and reducing the need for transport.

Changes to public food procurement public procurement

The purchasing power of the public sector must be used to invest in planet-friendly meat and dairy. Approximately £2.2 billion is spent every year on food in schools, hospitals, prisons and care homes. The Government must start spending taxpayers' money on better quality sustainable meat and dairy products, supporting planet-friendly UK livestock farmers.

Research and development

The Government must increase public funding for research into sustainable mixed farming systems, including livestock breeds, feed plant varieties and cropping systems.

A fair supply chain for farmers

A strong Code of Practice and an independent watchdog to oversee it are essential to ensure a fairer supply chain to protect farmers from the unfair practices of the supermarkets. It is also vital that farmers receive a fair return for their produce if they are to invest in alternative feed inputs or more extensive systems of production. The supermarkets refused

⁵ Feeding the Beast, April 2009, Friends of the Earth

to voluntarily accept terms for a watchdog and it is now vital that the Government follows the recommendation of the Competition Commission establishes an independent and proactive Ombudsman through legislation.

Climate change policies

The Climate Change Act requires Government to find ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including from the livestock sector. Measures to tackle emissions from food and farming must take into account the global impact of inputs including animal feeds. Farmers must be supported to reduce direct on-farm emissions and indirect overseas emissions – for example the release of stored carbon resulting from conversion of forests to soy plantations for feeds - in ways which do not undermine rural communities.

Further information

We want to work with farmers to develop our vision for a sustainable livestock sector. Please get in touch to share your experiences and ideas.

For more information on the campaign, please see www.fixthefoodchain.com or contact Oliver Hayes oliver.hayes@foe.co.uk