



DEFRA Consultation

FSC Response to: Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit. Submitted 3rd May 2018

Section 4 A successful future for farming

Farming excellence and profitability

What are the most effective ways to support new entrants and encourage more young people into a career in farming and land management?

1 Ensuring that all young people have regular opportunities to explore the countryside.

One of the most effective ways to encourage more young people into farming and land management is to ensure that all schoolchildren have the opportunity to explore the countryside and different landscapes from a very early age as part of a broad curriculum.

Outdoor learning is an essential part of sparking an interest in the natural world. It also broadens the horizons of young people to see the range of career options that are available in a mostly rural environment. This is especially true for young people from an urban background. Unfortunately, these school experiences are by no means guaranteed as school funding for activities such as residential trips is under pressure and children spend little time out of doors. For example, a school pupil who came to learn with us recently at one of our 20 field study centres had never heard of “wellies”.

2 Ensuring that young people have an opportunity to take part in practical science outside the classroom and develop field study skills.

Field study skills and practical science – and particularly practical outdoor experiments in the natural world rather than in laboratory conditions – are known to interest and engage young people in the environment and in curriculum subjects such as the sciences and geography.

It is therefore an area of concern that parts of the curriculum that link directly to agriculture and land management do not get the level of attention that reflects the importance of farming and environmental issues in the UK. For example, whilst the AQA Exam Board’s biology A’ level encourages students to consider the biodiversity implications of agriculture, soil science is no longer taught at A’ Level geography.

There is no substitute for real world learning because it offers opportunities to work and experiment in unpredictable natural environments, develop critical thinking skills and use a range of scientific, digital and technical equipment. Much of this cannot be replicated in classroom conditions. Above all, it can introduce young people to the challenges facing the natural environment, deepen their understanding and develop their confidence and enjoyment of learning and working outdoors.

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Residential experiences provide additional benefits by allowing young people to become more immersed in the countryside and in the natural world. Not only does this deepen their knowledge it provides a number of opportunities to develop key social skills needed in land management and agricultural careers. For example, building quick rapport with a range of partners, working across teams and being flexible in coping with ever changing conditions. These kinds of skills are all needed to negotiate access issues, balance competing demands, develop partnerships between neighbouring land owners or manage shared natural resources.

Labour: a skilled workforce

What are the priority skills gaps across UK agriculture? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) Business / financial**
- b) Risk management**
- c) Leadership**
- d) Engineering**
- e) Manufacturing**
- f) Research**
- g) Other (please specify) Ecosystem Services**

The priority skills are those that will enable the government and the agriculture sector to deliver and monitor the aims set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan, i.e. to leave the environment in a better state for future generations. These skills relate to ecosystem services that assess the health of the farming habitats. For example, the ability to assess natural capital, identify and record species (including those needed for biodiversity monitoring), identification of pests, invasive species and protected species, tree preservation and awareness of countryside regulations. It is these skills which will be needed to monitor progress towards the proposals for improved soil health, air quality, water quality and biodiversity.

If the focus for agricultural policy in the coming years is going to shift from intensive food production and production targets to the provision of public goods and improved biodiversity, this will need to be reflected in the teaching modules at agricultural colleges and universities. Biodiversity issues will need to be fully integrated into all subject areas.

What can industry do to help make agriculture and land management a great career choice?

1 Demonstrating the wide range of scientific, practical, technical and fieldwork knowledge and skills that can be used in farming and land management careers.

Young people need know that that farming and land management careers are where the activities that they enjoy and the skills and knowledge that they have developed can be used directly. For example, landscape analysis and interpretation, a knowledge of plants, animals and soil, GIS mapping, data gathering and analysis, species identification, biological recording, sampling techniques, designing experiments and using technical equipment in unpredictable environments.



2 Campaigning to ensure that outdoor learning, practical outdoor science and field study skills remain prominent in the curriculum.

The challenges that face agriculture in the coming years are big enough to excite the next generation of the guardians of our countryside. Industry can help make agriculture and land management a great career choice by helping to get children interested and engaged with the natural world at an early age. Therefore by joining with organisations such as the Field Studies Council, industry can help by actively campaigning to ensure that regular outdoor learning – especially through residential- is an experience that every child is entitled to.