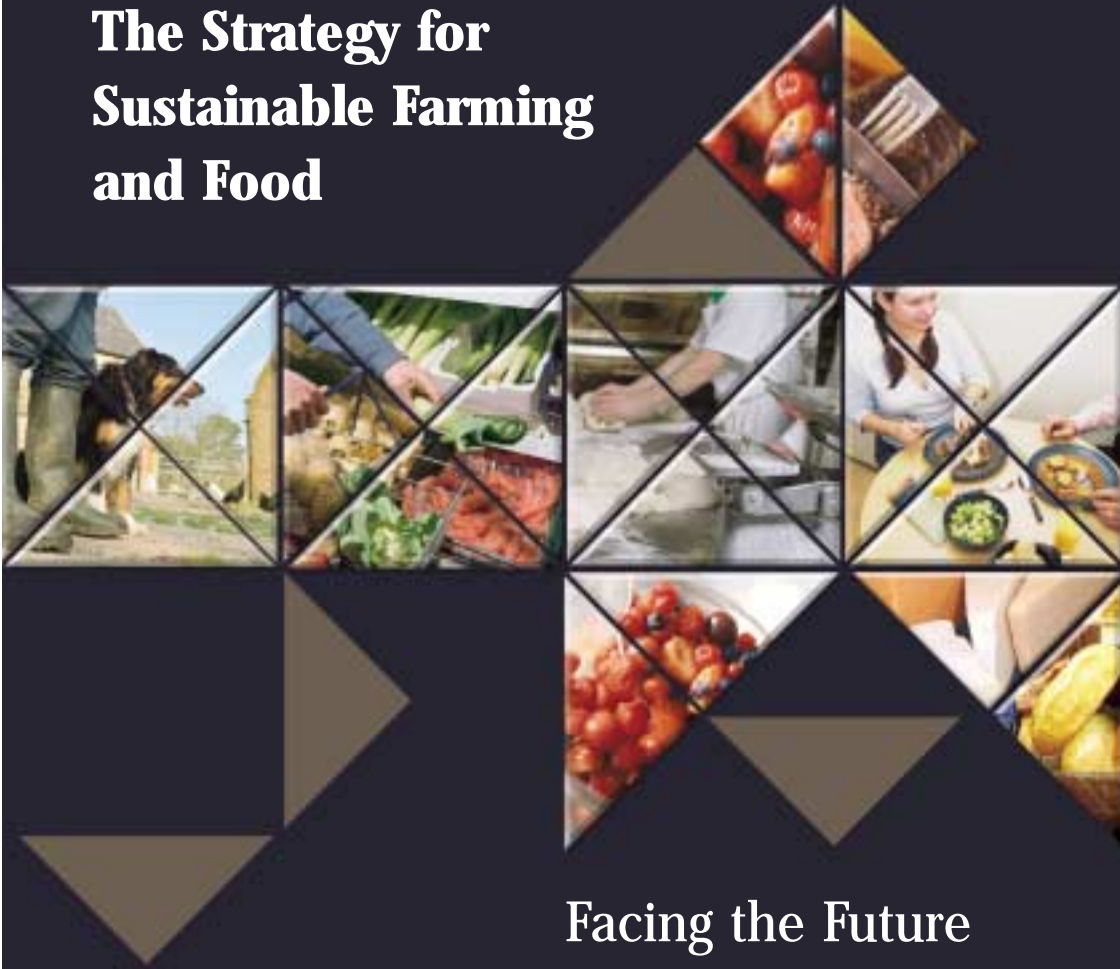


The Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food



Facing the Future





Why do things have to change?

The last few years have not been easy ones for farming. Although there are some signs of recovery, incomes and profitability remain at very low levels by historical standards.

At the same time consumers are demanding not only good value and guaranteed quality, but safer and more traceable food. They are concerned about nutrition, and about animal welfare. The foot and mouth outbreak was traumatic for many farmers, and for the wider countryside. And although regulation is needed – not least to meet consumer demand, it can mean time consuming duplication of effort in ways which should not be necessary and are never desirable.

While this may mean that more upheaval is unwelcome, many will share our belief that things can't go on as they are. Farming has been embracing change for many years. But more is needed. All of us, the industry, the government and consumers – must work together if we are to secure a prosperous future for the industry and the communities which depend on it in so many ways.

Farming has a unique part to play in preserving and enhancing our environment: it has done much to create the landscapes which we treasure. But we can't ignore the growing evidence of environmental damage.

However remedying it could present a great opportunity for English farmers. Being rewarded for good environmental management can go hand in hand with providing the good quality assured food consumers want.

Where does the strategy come from?

The Food and Farming strategy for England builds on the new vision set out in the Curry report.

The strategy has been drawn up with the help and views of many organisations. The NFU, CLA and Tenant Farmers Association have all contributed, as have many sector bodies. Many individual farmers have also taken part in the process: by inputting to the Curry Commission, and by attending our regional seminars.

What does the strategy mean for you?

Government is prepared to provide £500m of new public money to stimulate change, and will work in partnership with farming and the rest of the food chain as they seek to respond to the challenges of the future. But real change is needed.

There are no quick fixes. But change should come in, for example:

- Support schemes – which are focused on activities which will help your business
- A broad agri-environment scheme – in which you can all participate and which will reward good environmental practice in a non-bureaucratic and efficient way
- Regulation – administered on a whole farm basis, taking account as far as is possible of all of the pressures on the business.

But this must be a shared strategy. Your participation is vital to its success. We hope you will take advantage of the increased business advice, visit demonstration farms, and draw on the many good ideas on collaboration. At the heart of our approach is the dissemination of good practice – so you can see what others have achieved. Then you can decide what works for you.

The food chain

Many of the new initiatives in our strategy are aimed at bringing processors, manufacturers, caterers and retailers together, reflecting Curry's call to reconnect the food chain with its customers. The chain needs to become more efficient, which is where the Food Chain Centre can make a difference.

Investment for the Future

The extra £500 million is available for:

- **Money for a new entry-level agri-environment scheme.**

This is a central recommendation from the Curry report. Our aim is for all farmers to have access to a scheme which will pay them to farm in a more sustainable way. We will soon be looking for 600 farms to pilot this new scheme in Lincolnshire, Devon, Durham and Berkshire. If they are successful the scheme will be rolled out across England in 2005.

- **More money for schemes like Countryside Stewardship.**

For those who want to stay with the higher-level environment schemes there will be additional money made available for new applicants and agreements. We are also reviewing the existing schemes to try to make them more simple, streamlined and accessible.

- **A new 'whole farm approach'.**

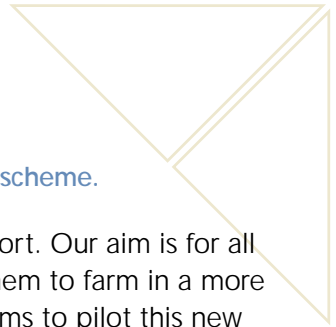
This is aimed at reducing unnecessary bureaucracy. It will be at the heart of our new relationship with farmers. We want to:


- reduce the number of times you have to provide us with information
- cut the number of inspections and the amount of red tape
- make more information available to help you plan your business
- pay you on time.

The Rural Payments Agency is adapting its computer system so it can draw on information held by the British Cattle Movement Service. We fully recognise that this is an uphill task but we are working to reduce the need to ask farmers to repeat information already provided.

- **More money for the new Agricultural Development Scheme and regional branding.**

We want to help farmers gain a fair and better reward for their products. We will work to make consumers more aware of and interested in the origin of





their food. We will help small regional producers develop new and niche markets by providing additional support through Food from Britain, complementing Regional Development Agencies.

- **More money for skills and training.**

We are reviewing the provision and delivery of all our training and advice services with the aim of a more streamlined and easy access service. In the review we will look specifically at how we can encourage young people to enter the industry. We want to help farmers develop and take forward their businesses, and give them the flexibility to exploit new opportunities. This is part of the Government's wider emphasis on "Lifelong Learning" which can benefit all industries.

Knowing how to make a profit is fundamental, but respecting the environment and marketing require different skills and knowledge.

- **A network of demonstration farms.**

We are setting up a pilot network of farms which will open their doors to other farmers to share best practice and experiences. We're working with industry organisations to get them up and running in early 2003.

- **Improving animal health and combating diseases.**

We are drawing up a separate animal health and welfare strategy in response to the Foot and Mouth Disease Inquiries. We have started to combat the threat of illegal meat imports – but we must and will do more – and strengthen our emergency preparations. We will make major new investment in initiatives such as livestock identification, and the National Scrapie Plan, to improve animal health across the industry.

But this can only reduce the risks, which is why we must have some controls on animal movements. The Government wants to work closely with farmers to decide as quickly as possible on the long term arrangements taking into account independent assessments of the costs and benefits.

What is already underway

Many farmers have already started to respond:

- More than 25,000 farmers are in existing Government environmental schemes
- More than 400 farmers' markets are offering producers the opportunity to sell direct to their markets
- Over 78,000 farmers and growers are already members of farm assurance schemes with their produce branded under logos such as the Little Red Tractor
- Co-operative projects are starting to flourish, many aided by Government grants under schemes such as the Rural Enterprise Scheme and the Processing and Marketing Grant. New funds are being made available under the Agricultural Development Scheme
- There are now many more farmers who are producing for niche, value added, markets. For example, there are more than 2,500 organic farmers in England, many earning premiums for their produce and using innovative marketing.

Where can I find out more information?

Copies of the full strategy document are available on the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain or by calling the Defra Helpline on 08459 33 55 77 or by e-mail at helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk.

If you have specific questions about elements of the strategy please also call the Defra Helpline. Because this is a joint strategy with industry we do not have all the answers, but we can put you in touch with the appropriate organisation if we need to.

Government and industry are coming together at regional level to determine priorities for action. Regional information is available from your local Government Office.