

# POSITION STATEMENT

## Time to Act on the Curry Report

The National Trust is committed to far reaching reforms of farming and rural policy to deliver healthy food, safeguard and improve the environment and breathe new life into rural communities. We set out a new direction in our *Agriculture Policy 2000* and we published our commitments to deliver last year in *Farming Forward*. This briefing summarises what we are doing now to bring change about and the key areas where Government action is also needed.

### The National Trust – delivering change

The National Trust is investing an extra £1.7m in 2002 in a huge range of initiatives helping our farm tenants build a viable future across the Trust's 245,000 ha of farmland. These include:

1. ***Sustainable enterprises*** - A whole farm planning approach was first pioneered by the Trust in early 1990s, providing a model way forward for environmentally responsible food production. The Trust is committed to developing 100 Whole Farm Plans every year, forming the basis of sustainable rural enterprises.
2. ***Pioneering land management*** - On some of our major farming estates, such as Brockhampton in Herefordshire, we are working in partnership with our tenants and other organisations to demonstrate new approaches to managing land that will bring long-lasting benefits to farmers, local communities and businesses and the wider public.
3. ***Agri-environment schemes*** - The Trust has been working with every part of this important Government programme since its inception. As a landowner, farmer and environmental organisation, we can bring an innovative and unique approach to developing these 'contracts' between farmers and the public. At Avebury and Stonehenge World Heritage Site, the Trust initiated and recently helped to develop a special agri-environment scheme to protect the 1,000 known archaeological sites.
4. ***Free Farm Advice*** - The Trust believes that farmers will need extra support during this significant period of transition. We have therefore employed expert farm advisers in every region to provide a free on-farm advice and facilitation service to our tenants. The aim is to help integrate the environment at the heart of our tenants' rural businesses, so that they are financially and environmentally viable in the long term.
5. ***New markets*** - Business diversification can offer important opportunities to improve farm viability through entering new markets. The Trust can provide its tenants with capital investment grants to 'pump prime' initiatives such as developing tourist accommodation e.g. bed and breakfast, holiday cottages; developing alternative crops e.g. herbs, garden plants; developing catering enterprises e.g. cafes, sandwich business; and developing new rural businesses e.g. equestrian centre, offices for letting, brewery.
6. ***Local food*** - The Trust supports the growth of local and regional food economies in many ways. We invest in the essential production infrastructure e.g. contributing to a new co-operative abattoir in Yorkshire, building butchery 'white rooms' on farms; we facilitate the direct sale of local food e.g. a new farm shop will be opened this year on the Wallington Estate (Northumberland); we

support local produce 'branding' and marketing and this year we will be launching a pilot National Trust food label on meat produced on our estate to high animal welfare and environmental standards. We are in the process of employing a Farm Produce Marketing Adviser to provide expert support to our tenants wanting to 'add value' to their produce. We also support the local food economy as a catering business, sourcing 60% of the produce in our restaurants and cafes from local producers.

7. **Organic farming** - The Trust provides its tenants with expert independent advice on organic conversion, including business planning and help with attaining certification. Over the last 2 years, this has led to the completion of 26 conversion plans, plus additional support for essential capital works so the farm business can comply with organic standards.
8. **Vocational Training** - The Trust is committed to offering training opportunities for both existing farmers and new entrants to meet consumer requirements and citizens' needs. We are organising workshops for tenants on a wide variety of issues, from food marketing to soil management. We are also working in partnership with LANTRA to develop and run apprenticeships in farming and other land-based careers.
9. **Education** - The Trust owns an unparalleled 'outdoor classroom' and we are always looking for ways to increase access to this resource. In partnership with the Countryside Foundation for Education, we will be running a Countryside Day for Schools at our Buscot and Coleshill Estate in May. Many of our tenant farmers support educational visits e.g. Bradley Farm on Hadrian's Wall Estate has an Education Base, a teacher's pack and a self guided trail leaflet and is used by the full age range, KS1 to GNVQ. This year, we will also be launching a pilot learning programme 'Plot to Plate'. This aims to link horticulture, farming and cookery, by developing knowledge and skills in food production and preparation in both children and adults.

### **Priorities for Government**

The National Trust looks to the Government to provide a lead on the following issues:

#### ***Providing the Funding Catalyst***

- The Government should exploit the existing flexibility in the Common Agricultural Policy and redirect at least 10% of subsidies towards support for the environment, organic farming and rural development. The July Spending Review should liberate £200m more funds through "modulation" in 2004 – redirecting £100m direct production payments matched by £100m from the Treasury. This would be a good deal for the public, farmers and the environment.

#### ***Early action on agri-environment***

- An 'entry-level' agri-environment scheme offers the best opportunity to reconnect farmers with the environment. The Government should act without delay to pilot this new approach across different farming systems. Farmers, Government agencies, farming and environmental groups are all ready to work with Government to take this forward.

#### ***Business planning and advice***

- The Government should move towards whole farm business and environmental assessment as the norm for receiving public money and ensuring it is best invested. This should be backed by high quality environmental and business information and advice. Urgent action is needed to develop a simplified 'front-end' service for easy access to the myriad sources of information and advice; to co-ordinate the public, private and voluntary advice 'providers'; and to introduce quality control measures to bring consistency and high standards to publicly funded advice.

#### ***Skills and demonstration farms***

- Improving skills in the farming sector is one of the biggest challenges facing Government. A cross-Departmental assessment of training and skills development in the land-based sector is needed and wider use of demonstration farms. For a relatively modest investment, the Government could

facilitate an accredited, professional network of demo farms, bringing together key players in the public, voluntary, private and academic sectors.

***Regional and Local Foods***

- A new national agency supporting the development of local and regional food economies should be established and should work with Regional Development Agencies and partner organisations in developing regional and local food strategies.

***Farm vouchers for children***

- It is crucial that we provide children with the learning experiences that help inform the choices they make throughout their lives on diet, health and lifestyle. Support is needed from Government to facilitate opportunities for children to learn firsthand in an 'outdoor classroom'. A simple first step would be for Government, in partnership with the food industry, to launch a voucher scheme to promote access to farms for every child.