# Farmers express concerns over looming financial crisis at NFU annual meeting



At the annual meeting of the National Farmers’ Union (NFU) of England and Wales, held in London on Tuesday, concerns over a looming financial crisis faced by farmers were starkly voiced. Tom Bradshaw, the NFU president, addressed the assembly as he described the agricultural sector's current predicament, stating that “bad policy, geopolitics and unprecedented weather” have plunged some areas of UK farming into what he called “the worst cashflow crisis ever.”

Bradshaw's remarks reflected a broader anxiety among farmers regarding their viability as structural changes unfold. Many expressed genuine fears about their financial futures, with some worrying about their ability to endure until the end of 2025. This crisis follows years marked by escalating costs, labour shortages, and significant reductions in support payments after Brexit. Recent statistics from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) indicate that income across all farming types in England has decreased between 2023 and early 2024.

Central to the discussions was the contentious issue regarding proposed alterations to inheritance tax (IHT) affecting agricultural properties, a subject Bradshaw openly criticized as “cruel” and “morally wrong and economically flawed.” He relayed that he had received “hundreds” of letters from NFU members expressing apprehension over the potential effects of these tax changes on elderly farmers, particularly those nearing the end of their farming careers.

The government announced plans to include farms and other business properties under IHT from April 2026, a decision they argue is necessary to bolster public service funding. Ministers indicated that only a quarter of estates valued at more than £1 million would be subject to a reduced IHT rate of 20%, positioned as a change primarily affecting affluent landowners. However, farming representatives have contended that the proposed measures could compromise domestic food security, limit investment, and impose serious difficulties for family-operated farms.

The tension at the conference escalated when Environment Secretary Steve Reed delivered a speech that was met with boos and groans from delegates. His address was further interrupted by protesters who unfurled a banner that read: “How high up your ‘pecking order’ is eating Steve?”

During this charged atmosphere, a farmer shared a personal account of hardship, asking Reed how he could support new tax policies when they were prompting elderly relatives, including his 90-year-old mother who continues to farm, to contemplate drastic measures. Reed responded with sympathy but refrained from engaging with the specifics of the situation, stating he was “very sorry” but unable to comment on individual circumstances. This response was met with frustration, with the farmer later expressing disappointment, indicating that it overlooked the collective struggle of many like him.

Bradshaw also expressed skepticism regarding the potential benefits of new public sector procurement guidelines aimed at increasing the use of British food in institutions such as hospitals and schools. These plans include a target for sourcing at least half of all food from farms that meet the highest welfare standards.

In an effort to address ongoing concerns, Reed announced the establishment of a new “farming profitability department” within Defra, which will engage the farming community in workshops to develop a long-range strategy for the sector. Additionally, he mentioned a review of trade agreements concerning pesticides harmful to bees, specifically neonicotinoids, which had been temporarily allowed after Brexit. Reed's commitment to uphold standards whereby food produced to lower standards than those in the UK would not be accepted under new trade agreements was a notable aspect of his address, although he clarified that existing deals with Australia and New Zealand would remain as is.

Anticipation is also growing around an impending announcement from Defra regarding the release of beavers back into the wild, a subject that has raised concerns among farmers due to potential flooding risks. Bradshaw stressed that farmers need the option to control beavers through lethal means if they pose threats to agricultural land.

Overall, the NFU conference underscored the prevailing sense of uncertainty and fear within the UK farming community as they navigate the implications of government policy changes and external pressures.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.fwi.co.uk/business/markets-and-trends/outlook-2025-lower-inflation-offers-hope-for-uk-economy> - This article supports the claim that UK farm profits are expected to decline due to high costs and reduced support payments. It highlights the challenges faced by farmers, including rising fixed costs like labor and machinery.
* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/02/25/tractor-tax-wiped-out-hope-for-farmers-nfu-tom-bradshaw-uk/> - This article corroborates the concerns over the proposed inheritance tax changes affecting agricultural properties, which NFU president Tom Bradshaw criticized as harmful to family farms.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs> - This is the official website of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), which is relevant to discussions about agricultural policies and statistics mentioned in the article.
* <https://www.nfuonline.com/> - The National Farmers' Union (NFU) website provides information on their stance and activities regarding agricultural policies, including their concerns over inheritance tax and support for farmers.
* <https://www.farminguk.com/news/uk-farming-industry-faces-uncertainty-over-brexit-trade-deals_63045.html> - This article discusses the uncertainty and challenges faced by the UK farming industry due to Brexit and trade agreements, which aligns with the concerns mentioned at the NFU conference.