# Nature-friendly farming offers vital hope as UK’s driest spring since 1950s devastates agriculture



The UK is currently grappling with its driest spring since the 1950s, a situation that is exerting immense pressure on agriculture across the country. As Nature-Friendly Farming Week unfolds, it highlights the critical intersection of food security, climate resilience, and sustainable farming practices. Farmers face unprecedented challenges this season, including severe water shortages, crop losses, and an increasing risk of wildfires. These pressures occur amid growing uncertainty about government support and relentless demands from supermarkets, which only exacerbate the difficulties facing agricultural communities.

The ongoing drought has already begun to wreak havoc on food production, with dangerously low water supplies compelling farmers to make difficult decisions regarding crop preservation. Each passing dry day diminishes yield potential, adding to the anxiety that follows nearly two years of extreme weather, including significant rainfall and flooding that disrupted previous crops. As farmers look toward autumn planting, a clear absence of new government initiatives leaves many contemplating the stark possibility of leaving their fields bare due to insufficient resources.

This precarious situation is further complicated by a policy landscape fraught with uncertainty; the government has closed the Sustainable Farming Incentive to new applicants, and other agri-environmental schemes remain in flux. The National Farmers Union has raised alarms, stating that declining farm incomes coincide with a lack of protective measures, creating a perfect storm that threatens low production in the near future and job losses in rural areas.

In juxtaposition to these challenges, there is a burgeoning movement towards nature-friendly farming, which offers potential solutions to restore ecosystems and enhance food resilience. This approach advocates for increasing soil health, carbon sequestration, and water conservation while simultaneously boosting wildlife populations. Regenerative practices are gaining traction, especially among younger, environmentally conscious farmers like Sarah Dusgate from Monmouthshire, who are pioneering methods to reduce harmful inputs and improve industry sustainability.

Nature-friendly farming challenges the outdated perception that farms exist solely to maximise yield—a notion rooted in mid-20th century thinking. Current agricultural practices must pivot towards synergising food production with environmental stewardship. Advocates argue that achieving true food security relies on a harmonious approach to land use, rather than one that pits agriculture against nature. This holistic view emphasises the necessity of growing more diverse crops domestically, particularly fruits, vegetables, and nuts, while addressing the staggering statistic that approximately one-third of food produced is wasted.

Such changes call for robust government and supply chain commitment to support farmers through this crucial transition. The landscape of agricultural policy needs comprehensive restructuring if farmers are to adapt and thrive amid climate volatility. Currently, many in the industry feel overlooked; retailers and policymakers must recognise the urgency for meaningful support that would empower farmers to not just survive but also contribute to a resilient ecosystem and sustained food production.

The government has set ambitious targets, aiming to safeguard 30% of land and marine areas by 2030 as part of broader efforts to combat biodiversity loss. However, many farmers express concerns that current policies lack defined targets for food production, risking future closures of agricultural enterprises. Initiatives encouraging biodiversity, such as the Natural England projects endorsed by Tony Juniper, emphasize the financial viability of ecological restoration compared to traditional farming. Yet, substantial hurdles remain, including complex regulatory frameworks and questions about income stability for farmers during their shift to more sustainable practices.

As Nature-Friendly Farming Week unfolds, it not only serves as a platform for advocacy but also highlights the vital role that farms have in building ecological resilience. Such initiatives present a timely opportunity for the agricultural sector to embrace methods that recognise the interconnectedness of food security and environmental health. In an era where climate challenges are becoming increasingly pronounced, a transformative approach to farming methods could be the key to sustaining both livelihoods in rural communities and the health of the planet.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://eastangliabylines.co.uk/farming/nature-friendly-farming-offers-food-security-and-better-resilience/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7db49516-4863-45da-abe0-68066f66e275)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://eastangliabylines.co.uk/farming/nature-friendly-farming-offers-food-security-and-better-resilience/), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/e28b3277-5b63-4a65-898a-f9debf7ecd53), [[7]](https://cebr.com/blogs/forecasting-eye-effect-of-drought-on-food-prices/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.nffn.org.uk/), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/17a3d2b3-5e1c-4384-a060-a574a9f828d3)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://eastangliabylines.co.uk/farming/nature-friendly-farming-offers-food-security-and-better-resilience/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7db49516-4863-45da-abe0-68066f66e275), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/17a3d2b3-5e1c-4384-a060-a574a9f828d3)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/e28b3277-5b63-4a65-898a-f9debf7ecd53), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/17a3d2b3-5e1c-4384-a060-a574a9f828d3)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://eastangliabylines.co.uk/farming/nature-friendly-farming-offers-food-security-and-better-resilience/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7db49516-4863-45da-abe0-68066f66e275), [[4]](https://www.nffn.org.uk/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/17a3d2b3-5e1c-4384-a060-a574a9f828d3), [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agroforestry_Research_Trust)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://eastangliabylines.co.uk/farming/nature-friendly-farming-offers-food-security-and-better-resilience/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/7db49516-4863-45da-abe0-68066f66e275> - This article discusses the rise of regenerative farming in the UK, highlighting the experiences of young farmers like Sarah Dusgate, who is implementing regenerative practices at New House Farm in Monmouthshire. It notes that regenerative farming, which focuses on soil health and reducing artificial inputs, is gaining popularity among younger, climate-conscious individuals. The piece also mentions that major companies and the UK government are supporting regenerative practices, with initiatives like the Sustainable Farming Incentive changing subsidy allocations. Despite challenges, the shift in farming practices and tenancies may transform the industry and its workforce, potentially leading to better valuation and support for farmers.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/e28b3277-5b63-4a65-898a-f9debf7ecd53> - This article explores the growing popularity of rewilding in the UK, driven by both ecological passion and emerging financial incentives. It highlights prominent cases such as Tatjana Greil Castro's estate in Suffolk and Rachel Evatt's project in the Peak District, which have seen transformations in biodiversity following restoration. The piece also discusses government initiatives supporting rewilding, including funding for woodland creation and Countryside Stewardship schemes. Financially, rewilding is becoming increasingly viable due to habitat restoration payments that can exceed traditional arable farming earnings. However, challenges such as the complexity and long-term obligations of Biodiversity Net Gain contracts, high unit prices, and lack of regulatory infrastructure hinder market growth. The article also addresses concerns over the impact of removing land from food production and explores regenerative farming models to produce nutrient-rich food sustainably.
4. <https://www.nffn.org.uk/> - The Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN) is a farmer-led membership organisation in the UK that supports farmers aiming to restore the balance between farming and nature. The NFFN provides resources, training, policy updates, and advocacy opportunities to its members. It also offers a community for like-minded individuals and organisations interested in nature-friendly farming practices. The network is open to both farmers and the public, promoting the benefits of nature-friendly farming to farmers and policymakers across the UK.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/17a3d2b3-5e1c-4384-a060-a574a9f828d3> - This article features Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, advocating for ending the perceived conflict between environmental conservation and agriculture. He emphasizes that both can coexist if farmers are compensated for ecological services. The piece discusses a transformative project on the Rothbury Estate in Northumberland, where 3,500 acres previously used for sheep farming and grouse shooting were sold to the Wildlife Trusts for ecological restoration. This initiative is part of the UK's broader ambition to protect 30% of land and sea and halt biodiversity loss by 2030. However, farmers, especially in upland regions, express concern over reduced food production, declining incomes, and changing government support schemes. The National Farmers Union warns that current policies lack food production targets and risk farm closures. The article also touches on tensions over Natural England's new powers under the planning bill, including the potential for compulsory land purchases, and counters that such measures are last resorts, stressing the importance of valuing non-food landscapes for their broader environmental contributions.
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agroforestry_Research_Trust> - The Agroforestry Research Trust is a British charitable incorporated organisation that researches temperate agroforestry and all aspects of plant cropping and uses, with a focus on tree, shrub, and perennial crops. It produces several publications and a quarterly journal, and sells plants and seeds from its forest gardens. The trust is managed by Martin Crawford and has a 2-acre forest garden next to the Schumacher College in Dartington, Devon, in the United Kingdom. It makes heavy use of ground cover plants to restrict the growth of weeds.
7. <https://cebr.com/blogs/forecasting-eye-effect-of-drought-on-food-prices/> - This article discusses the impact of drought on UK agriculture and its potential effects on food prices. It explains that a drought hampers agricultural production by diminishing irrigation options, reducing crop yields, and limiting the amount of food available for livestock. The piece notes that drier, hotter weather has made it harder to grow forage crops for livestock, resulting in farmers employing feed supplies traditionally reserved for the winter months now, placing upwards pressure on livestock costs at a time when price levels are already surging. The article also highlights that reduced available water options and drier soil have decreased farmers' ability to maintain yet-to-be-harvested crops and plant new ones. It mentions that between April and July, the wholesale prices of various vegetables have risen by at least a fifth due to crops failing in light of record temperatures. The piece concludes that while the drought poses no immediate threat to food supplies due to the UK's high degree of food security, a squeeze in agricultural production is likely to translate to higher costs for households.