# Nature-friendly farming offers vital lifeline amid UK’s driest spring in decades



As the UK contends with its driest spring in over six decades, the arrival of Nature-Friendly Farming Week feels particularly poignant this year. Farmers are grappling with the dual challenges of declining crop yields and looming water shortages, prompting urgent concerns about food security in an increasingly volatile climate. Current conditions mirror broader systemic issues within British agriculture, where uncertainty over government support compounds the strain already felt from supermarket pressures and rising costs.

The situation is dire; water supplies are alarmingly low, particularly in northern regions like the North East and North West, which are experiencing their driest start to the year since 1929. Reports indicate that by mid-May, rainfall levels were 29% below average, highlighting a trend that could have significant repercussions for food production in the short term. The Environment Agency’s warning of medium drought risk and potential water restrictions reflects a growing concern among farmers who are now, in some instances, resorting to early irrigation practices. This troubling scarcity of water comes on the heels of two consecutive years marked by extreme weather, including heavy rains that have already hampered crop growth and planting efforts.

Navigating these challenges, farming advocates argue that nature-friendly practices could be key to building resilience. This approach embraces not just the role of farms in food production but also their potential to enhance biodiversity and improve soil health. By moving away from dependency on chemical inputs and fossil fuels, farmers can create more sustainable agricultural systems that withstand the pressures of a changing climate. This strategy could also mitigate the economic uncertainty farmers face by enhancing long-term productivity and reducing reliance on costly inputs.

Indeed, the notion that farms exist solely to maximise food output is increasingly viewed as outdated. As highlighted during Nature-Friendly Farming Week, a paradigm shift is necessary — one that prioritises harmony with nature. Increasing domestic production of fruits, vegetables, and nuts is essential, particularly as a third of all food produced is wasted, while substantial arable land remains dedicated to livestock feed. This calls for a more diversified agricultural landscape, one in which the UK can enhance its self-sufficiency and reduce its reliance on imports, a particularly precarious practice in light of climate change.

In an encouraging turn, younger generations of farmers are beginning to embrace regenerative agricultural practices, reflecting a shift in values towards more sustainable methods. New entrants like Sarah Dusgate, the first tenant at New House Farm in Monmouthshire in a century, are paving the way for innovative farming approaches that emphasise soil health and environmental stewardship. Increased interest in sustainable practices has seen a notable demographic shift at agricultural events, suggesting a budding optimism for the future of farming in the UK.

However, the reality remains that without urgent and decisive action from both the government and the food supply chain, many farmers could be left unsupported as they confront the challenges of a warming climate. The closure of the Sustainable Farming Incentive to new applicants has already raised alarms among farming communities, who fear that without a clear policy direction and financial backing, crop failures could lead to a deeper farming crisis, jeopardising livelihoods in rural areas.

The clock is ticking. With the government urged to take bold action, both ministers and retailers must recognise the gravity of the situation and work collaboratively to ensure the agricultural sector’s survival and prosperity. Nature-Friendly Farming Week serves not only as a reminder of the urgent need to protect our food systems but also encapsulates a broader movement towards integrating ecological principles into farming — an essential shift for ensuring food security amidst the uncertainties ahead.

As this week unfolds, the call to action is loud and clear: farming must evolve to sustain not just our food supply, but the very ecosystems upon which we all rely. Now is the time for sustainable innovation, robust support, and a commitment to cultivating a resilient agricultural future.

## 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/8e69c305-8f22-4052-817d-5397f107d8c8)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://eastangliabylines.co.uk/farming/nature-friendly-farming-offers-food-security-and-better-resilience/), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ea-steps-up-dry-weather-prep-after-driest-spring-start-since-1956)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/7db49516-4863-45da-abe0-68066f66e275), [[6]](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/new-report-reveals-nature-friendly-farming-budget-inadequate-meet-climate-and-nature-targets)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://eastangliabylines.co.uk/farming/nature-friendly-farming-offers-food-security-and-better-resilience/), [[7]](https://www.nffn.org.uk/nature-friendly-farming-week-2025/)

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## 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/8e69c305-8f22-4052-817d-5397f107d8c8> - England and Wales are experiencing their driest start to the year since 1997, with only 225mm of rainfall recorded by mid-May 2025—29% below average—making it the seventh-driest year since 1931. The Environment Agency's latest report highlights significantly reduced river flows, particularly in northern regions, where six sites logged their lowest-ever April flows. The agency has issued a medium drought risk warning and anticipates potential water usage restrictions, such as hosepipe bans. Reservoirs remain around 84% full, but levels are notably low in the North East and North West, which have seen their driest start to a year since 1929. Farmers are increasingly concerned, with early irrigation underway in some areas despite good groundwater reserves. Water companies like Yorkshire Water, United Utilities, and Severn Trent are preparing for possible shortages. Thames Water's CEO affirmed that supply would continue but cautioned that usage restrictions may be necessary depending on future rainfall. The report links recent dry conditions to climate change, predicting more frequent summer droughts in the coming decades.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/7db49516-4863-45da-abe0-68066f66e275> - Sarah Dusgate, a 30-year-old veterinarian inspired by regenerative farming principles, recently became the first new tenant at New House Farm in Monmouthshire in a century. Regenerative farming, focusing on soil health and reducing artificial inputs, is gaining popularity among younger, climate-conscious individuals. The average age of farmers is 59, but events like the UK's Groundswell show a shift, with over half of attendees being under 50. Entering farming remains challenging due to high costs and traditionally inherited roles, but rising interest in sustainable practices is opening new opportunities. Major companies and the UK government support regenerative practices, with initiatives like the Sustainable Farming Incentive changing subsidy allocations. Progressive landlords and competitions like Pitch Up are offering new entrants chances to innovate. Despite challenges, including financial sustainability, the shift in farming practices and tenancies may transform the industry and its workforce, potentially leading to better valuation and support for farmers.
4. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/blog/2025/why-has-spring-been-so-warm-and-dry-so-far-this-year> - Spring 2025 has brought notably dry weather across much of the UK, with most regions seeing far less rainfall than usual. The main driving factor has been the prevalence of high-pressure systems, often extending from the Azores or mainland Europe, which have lingered over or near the UK for extended periods since late February. This has led to settled, dry weather patterns. Additionally, the jet stream has taken a more meandering path, often looping north of the UK, allowing high pressure to remain in place for longer stretches and effectively blocking the usual progression of weather fronts. April 2025 was the sunniest on record for the UK since records began in 1910, with 47% more sunshine than the long-term average. England experienced its sunniest April ever, while Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland each recorded their second sunniest. The UK saw an average of 228.9 hours of sunshine during the month, with particularly bright conditions in the Midlands, East Anglia, and parts of Scotland. This follows a similarly sunny March, making it the sunniest March–April period on record for England. Temperatures were also notably warm, with the UK's mean temperature for April being 9.6°C, 1.7°C above the long-term average, making it the third warmest April since records began in 1884. All four UK nations recorded their third warmest April, with daytime temperatures playing a major role. The highest temperature of the month was 26.7°C, recorded on 30 April in Wisley, Surrey. That day also tied with 19 April 2018 as the UK's warmest April day on record for mean temperature. Rainfall was well below average, with the UK receiving just 56% of its typical April total. Northern Ireland was the exception, recording 114% of its average due to mid-month rain. Northern England was especially dry, with only 25% of its usual rainfall, while Tyne and Wear saw just 7%, making it the county's second driest April since 1836. With March and April both exceptionally warm and dry, spring 2025 could be one of the warmest and driest on record, though with May still underway, the full picture remains to be seen.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ea-steps-up-dry-weather-prep-after-driest-spring-start-since-1956> - The Environment Agency has urged water companies to do more to safeguard water supplies after the driest start to spring in 69 years. In England, March was the driest since 1961 and April received just half its normal rainfall. Farmers have had to start irrigating crops earlier, and reservoir levels are either notably low or exceptionally low across the North East and North West of England. Both these regions have seen their driest start to the year since 1929. Representatives from the EA told the meeting—which includes the Met Office, government, regulators, water companies, farmers, and conservation experts—that while no area is currently officially in drought, there is a medium risk of one this summer without sustained rainfall.
6. <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/new-report-reveals-nature-friendly-farming-budget-inadequate-meet-climate-and-nature-targets> - A new report reveals that the current budget for nature-friendly farming is inadequate to meet climate and nature targets. Tackling the climate and biodiversity crisis is crucial for farm business viability and UK food security. The report highlights the impact of wet winters and widespread flooding, emphasizing the need for improved soil health, water quality, and resilience to flooding and drought. The Wildlife Trusts call for increased public funding and rapid scheme progress in England to enable the farming community to transition to nature-friendly farming at the required scale. The report also underscores the importance of unlocking private investment in environmentally friendly farming to support long-term food production capacity.
7. <https://www.nffn.org.uk/nature-friendly-farming-week-2025/> - Nature Friendly Farming Week 2025 is scheduled to run from Monday 19 May to Sunday 25 May. This annual event aims to highlight the vital role that farms play not only in producing food but also in protecting the environment and building resilience to climate shocks. The event emphasizes the importance of farming in harmony with nature to achieve true food security and calls for a more holistic approach to land use. The Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN) encourages farmers and the public to participate in the event and supports the transition to nature-friendly farming practices.