



FIR FARM

— *Made in the Cotswolds* —

Fir Farm response to the National Food Strategy Consultation October 2019

Fir Farm¹ is a pasture-based mixed livestock farm of 700 acres set in the heart of the Cotswolds. Over the past 10 years we have transitioned from a conventional dairy business to a certified organic system built on the principles of sustainability, health and welfare. As farmers who have been on the journey to become more sustainable, we greatly appreciate the need for a supportive policy and economic framework.

We would therefore like to see a National Food Strategy that strengthens local food systems and supports farmers and farming infrastructure to deliver healthy food alongside a range of public goods.

Key points and suggestions:

1. Strengthen local, traceable food systems by ensuring local abattoirs are considered part of the 'agricultural infrastructure' of the UK and therefore eligible for future funding and support.
2. Ensure sustainable, healthy food is locally accessible to all through the support of small businesses and direct selling such as online orders, farm shops or farmers' markets.
3. Enable consumers to make informed choices by clearly indicating sustainability of food on the label and ensuring labels such as 'grass-fed' really mean 100% grass-fed and are properly regulated.
4. Pay farmers to adopt more sustainable practices, return to mixed farming and transition away from fossil fuels using renewable energy that utilises farm waste in order to meet the net zero target and address problems of soil degradation² and biodiversity loss.
5. Employ the polluter pays principle to discourage damaging farming practices, for example by taxing nitrogen fertiliser and using the money to support systems that rebuild natural soil fertility.
6. Ensure recommended diets reflect the productive capacity of sustainable systems. This should include grass-fed meat and dairy.
7. Educate consumers to differentiate between intensively produced grain fed meat that is part of the problem and grass-fed meat that is part of the solution for climate change and health.
8. Prioritise public procurement of local food.

Local food and local slaughter

¹ <https://firfarm.co.uk>

² Sustainable Food Trust, 'Soil Degradation: A Major Threat to Humanity,' December 2015
<http://sustainablefoodtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Soil-degradation.pdf>



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- The already growing demand for local food in the UK could be strengthened through policies that support farmers to sell direct. This would contribute to rural economies, reduce food miles, improve food security and increase consumer understanding about food.
- Key to this is the existence of a network of smaller local abattoirs throughout the UK.³ These abattoirs provide an essential service of ‘private-kill’ which means the meat is returned to the farmer. Without these small facilities we would no longer have a local traceable meat supply and animals would travel considerably further to slaughter, raising concerns for animal welfare and making smaller farms economically unviable. But while farmers have received ongoing financial support, abattoirs have struggled without access to such help, bearing the burden of significant running costs, levies, waste charges and equipment costs with little economic return. Many small abattoirs have gone out of business in recent years as a result.
- It should therefore not only be farmers who are eligible for support in the form of subsidies, grants and other financial assistance. Abattoirs provide a service crucial to the future of sustainable agriculture whilst also delivering or enabling a range of public goods. We therefore urge the strategy to recognise this and ensure future agricultural funding and other support also be made available to abattoirs.⁴
- Work should be supported to explore the potential for mobile and ‘pop up’ abattoirs in areas that currently lack a service. The Government has recognised the benefits of slaughtering as close to the point of production as possible.⁵
- Public procurement of local food should be a priority and would have multiple benefits for public health, the environment and the local food economy.

Clear and simplified labelling and regulation

- Sustainability of different foods should be made clear on the label as currently it can be very confusing with lots of overlapping schemes - each using different language and criteria for assessment. Consumers need to make informed choices and this would encourage farmers to improve their practices. The strategy should support a clear and simplified sustainability assessment scheme based on harmonised metrics to benefit

³ Sustainable Food Trust, ‘A Good Life and A Good Death: Re-Localising Farm Animal Slaughter,’ February 2018 <http://sustainablefoodtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Re-localising-farm-animal-slaughter.pdf>

⁴ Campaign for Local Abattoirs, ‘Small Abattoirs Briefing,’ October 2018, <https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/SFT-Small-Abattoirs-Briefing-Oct-18.pdf>

⁵ A call for evidence on controlling live exports for slaughter, April 2018 https://consult.defra.gov.uk/animal-health-and-welfare/live-exports-and-improving-welfare-in-transport/supporting_documents/A%20call%20for%20evidence%20on%20controlling%20live%20exports%20for%20slaughter%20and%20to%20improve%20animal%20welfare%20during%20transport%20after%20the%20UK%20leaves%20the%20EU.%20.pdf



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both farmer and consumer, such as the one being put forward by the Sustainable Food Trust of which Fir Farm is a part.⁶

- Pasture-fed livestock are better for the environment and meat quality. Only feeding animals on pasture means no imported grain, a cause of deforestation, and is a more natural diet for the animals. Diverse pastures are better for soil health, biodiversity and welfare and the meat is more nutrient dense. However, 'grass-fed' labels can be misleading as they don't necessarily mean a 100% pasture-based diet. We urge the strategy to acknowledge the importance of pasture-fed meat in a healthy diet and to call for clearer labelling.⁷
- We would also like to see simplification in regulatory and government bodies, as currently it can be confusing for farmers to engage with so many different organisations and agencies.

Regenerative mixed farming

- Diets should be linked to the productive capacity of sustainable farming systems. In the UK this means integrating arable production with grazing livestock. This makes use of the two thirds of UK farmland under grass and ensures a resilient food system, diverse habitats and rebuilds lost soil fertility. Sustainably produced meat should therefore be part of a healthy diet.
- We know from experience that doing 'the right thing' for environment and public health isn't always profitable. Support must be given to make sustainable farming appealing, not only to existing farmers but also to the next generation.
- In order to reach our target of net zero emissions by 2040 we need to see investment in farm specific renewable energy that utilises farm waste.
- The polluter pays principle should be employed to discourage damaging inputs and practices, for example by taxing nitrogen fertiliser.

We look forward to seeing a strategy that integrates all these issues and recognises the important link between sustainable farming and healthy diets.

⁶ Fir Farm is part of the Sustainable Food Trust's Sustainability Metrics working group and we are assisting in an ELMS trial to test a new way of measuring farm-level sustainability, with the ultimate aim of facilitating the emergence of an internationally harmonised framework for measuring and communicating sustainability <https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/key-issues/true-cost-accounting/sustainability-metrics/>

⁷ Perhaps the best way to ensure honest labelling is through certification with the Pasture-Fed Livestock Association, <https://www.pastureforlife.org>