

# RICS rural Brexit priorities

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## **Fiona Mannix and Tamara Hooper outline the latest RICS UK rural land Brexit priorities and recommendations**

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In the light of the UK's decision to leave the EU, RICS has formed a Rural Brexit Group to assist with developing RICS policy priorities for the rural land sector. This group, consisting of members representing [RICS Rural Professional Group board](#) and RICS Countryside Policy Panel with some additional members, has devised the following UK rural land Brexit priorities and associated recommendations.

These are being further developed and expanded for the UK nations and form the basis of RICS' external affairs activity with relevant government departments. Brochures are also being produced for each UK region - for copies of the relevant brochure for England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, please email [Tamara Hooper](#).

## **Agriculture and horticulture**

*After Brexit, the UK needs resilient and sustainable agriculture and horticulture to contribute to food supply and exports*

In 2015, the value of food, feed and drink exports from the UK was £18bn, the principal destinations being the Irish Republic (17%), France (11%) and the USA (10%). The value of UK imports for the same category was £38.5bn, the principal countries of despatch being the Netherlands (12%), the Irish Republic (10%) and France (10%), leaving an agri-food trade gap of £20.5bn.

It is clear that, following Brexit, the UK needs resilient and sustainable agricultural and horticultural sectors both to contribute to affordable food self-sufficiency and to expand our export base.

Resilience will only be achieved with the support of the government, the public and retailers. With the current £2.3bn of annual direct agricultural support from the EU not guaranteed beyond 2020, anticipated gradual reductions in support after this date will directly affect farm incomes and lead to restructuring of the sector.

UK farms of all sizes will need to strive for efficiency and profitability after Brexit. Access to labour will be crucial for the survival of many businesses and wage subsidies may even be required in order to ensure viability. Continued direct support may also be needed by some sectors and should include funding, for example, for new marketing initiatives and training.

### **Recommendation**

RICS calls on government to guarantee funding of targeted direct financial support beyond 2020 where it is required and provide an availability guarantee of labour for the agriculture and horticulture sectors to assist them achieve resilience post Brexit.

## **Ecosystem services**

New approaches to the valuation, appraisal and management of natural capital and nature's services ? ecosystem services ? promise to transform the way land is managed, development is undertaken, assets are appraised and valued, and payment is made for a range of goods and services previously taken for granted.

There are an array of ecosystem services opportunities for land managers, which can contribute to sustainable rural businesses and to the public good.

These include, but are not limited to, the enhancing of biodiversity, the prevention and alleviation of flooding, the sequestering of carbon and the management of the countryside and access to it by the wider public.

The forestry sector has a significant role to play in the provision of ecosystem services, and the delivery of these public goods by land managers should be recognised and duly rewarded as well.

### **Recommendation**

RICS calls on government to provide financial incentives for and reward the provision of ecosystems services and public goods that contribute to wider governmental and societal objectives.

## **Education, knowledge and technology**

The increase in productivity required from UK farms after Brexit will require a move to intensify production sustainably, produce more from less land and fewer resources, and manage any associated environmental impact of increased output.

Application of new knowledge and technology to day-to-day practices through education and upskilling of farmers will be key to this. The UK has an opportunity to become a world leader in this area. The food industry and consumers also need to be educated on, and alert to, the demands on farmers and the myriad of challenges ahead.

### **Recommendation**

RICS calls on government to enhance funding immediately for UK applied agricultural and horticultural research and agri-tech development.

## **Land use**

There are ever-increasing demands being made on UK land for farming, forestry, recreation, energy, built development, flood alleviation, carbon sequestration, air quality improvement and wildlife conservation.

Brexit provides the UK with a golden opportunity to devise a national strategy identifying the most appropriate use of land according to its physical characteristics.

Better quality information is required to identify more readily the potential of land to help inform decision-making and ensure the best and most appropriate use of UK land post Brexit to ensure it delivers its full potential.

### **Recommendation**

RICS calls on government to modernise the systems of land classification/capability for agriculture and review permitted development rights to enable more conservation-related activities.

## **Natural resources and the environment**

While agri-environment schemes have provided a number of environmental benefits, some populations of farmland birds, butterflies and wildflowers are in continuing decline. More than 75% of English surface waters do not meet a good standard, and there are growing concerns about the health and stability of our soils.

Farming's major role in the protection of our natural resources is recognised, and food security will only be achieved by protecting our natural resources. The public needs to appreciate the role that farmers and land managers play in enhancing the aesthetics and biodiversity of the countryside, and the myriad public goods that flow from good management of land.

### **Recommendation**

RICS calls on government to draw up outcome-led agri-environment measures beyond 2020 to support land management activities which enhance the environment, contribute towards a reduction in emissions and support rural businesses.

## **Rural businesses**

The nature of rural land-based businesses continues to evolve. Looking at rural estates alone gives a clear picture of the changes over time. The percentage of total estate income from agriculture was 48.7% in 2000, but in 2016 it fell to 36.9%. Estate income from residential, commercial and leisure activities all rose over the same time frame.

With the inevitable restructuring of UK agriculture ahead, there will be a need to support all rural business activities beyond primary agricultural production.

### **Recommendation**

RICS call on government to 'rural proof' all national policies, recognise the highly diverse nature of rural land-based businesses and ensure rural development funding is available to support and develop the establishment and growth of rural businesses post Brexit.

## **Trade**

UK food is exported to more than 200 countries. Research by Savills has shown that changes to trade agreements could potentially be far more significant to the agricultural sector than changes to existing agricultural support.

It is inevitable that farming businesses will be affected in a number of ways in terms of access to markets, tariff changes, cost of production and retail prices. The sector's role in producing high-quality, safe food, supported by health and safety standards and contributing to the health and wellbeing of UK residents should be appreciated.

### **Recommendation**

RICS calls on government to ensure the food sector, incorporating both primary production, food processing and manufacturing, is attributed special status when negotiating future trading arrangements and ensure due recognition of the UK's high production and environmental quality standards.

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## Further information

- Related competencies include [Agriculture](#) , [Land use and diversification](#) , [Management of the natural environment and landscape](#)
- This feature is taken from the RICS *Land journal* (March/April 2017)