



Chris Hinchliff MP  
**North East Herts**

# 10 Policy Shifts to Deliver a Transformative 25-Year Roadmap for Farming

Chris Hinchliff MP  
NORTH EAST HERTFORDSHIRE

September 2025

## Contents

Introduction .....	2
1. Ensure Agricultural Property Relief works fairly .....	4
2. Contracts for food security .....	5
3. Reform Environmental Land Management schemes .....	7
4. Secure greater investment in public goods .....	9
5. Land matching for new entrants .....	10
6. Protect domestic food production .....	11
7. Build a fairer supply chain.....	12
8. Strengthen land workers' rights .....	13
9. Planning reform that protects and promotes farming .....	14
10. Enhance agricultural education and research.....	16
Conclusion.....	17
Endnotes.....	18

## Introduction

As the Member of Parliament for North East Hertfordshire, 90% of which is agricultural land, it has been a privilege to meet many of the committed and innovative farmers growing food locally since my election in July 2024.



However, our conversations have confirmed beyond doubt that years of policy failure have pushed farmers into a deeply unfair and precarious situation. Competition from imports produced to lower standards, monopolistic power in the food supply chain, and erratic public policy decisions, amongst many other pressures, have left a dwindling farming community battling to make a decent living from feeding the nation.

In this context, the Government's commitment to developing "*a 25-year farming roadmap that will be the most forward-looking plan for farming in our country's history, with a focus on making farming and food production more profitable in the decades to come*", is extremely welcome.<sup>i</sup> However, this roadmap must also now align with the recently published Food Strategy, which rightly highlights that while making a return on farming has become increasingly difficult, "the food system is not delivering the outcomes we need with respect to health, environmental sustainability, resilience and food security".<sup>ii</sup>

It is, therefore, essential that the 25-year roadmap for farming delivers not only the long-term thinking necessary for an industry that plans years in advance, but also bold policies that break decisively with a status quo defined by profound failure. We must remember that farming is unlike any other business. It is foundational to our culture and to securing the essential components of a good life for all of our citizens.

Farmers manage roughly 70% of one of our nation's most important assets—our land—and are responsible for stewarding the natural capital that underpins all wealth in this country. If the 25-year roadmap is to succeed, it must spring from a recognition that traditional concepts

of productive efficiency and competition on international commodity markets will never secure the strategic food security or nature restoration the UK needs.

For far too long our farmers have been left to carry the weight of wider societal problems. They have been expected to simultaneously provide the public goods we need and to sell their produce at such a low price that politicians don't have to grapple with a failing economic model responsible for low wages, unaffordable housing and rip-off utilities.

This cannot continue. The roadmap must empower our farming sector to make a good living growing the healthy food necessary to nourish the nation, using practices that maximise the huge potential of our farmland to reverse environmental decline, and providing a balanced diet resilient to shocks from climate or international trade. It will then be for wider Government policy to ensure that wages and the cost-of-living are no barrier to anyone affording good food grown in the right way.

The following are 10 areas of policy development that I believe, as an MP representing a predominantly agricultural constituency, could play a vital role in securing these outcomes. While presented on my own behalf without wider endorsement, these suggestions are based on many valuable conversations and proposals made by organisations like the FFCC, CPRE, the Land Workers Alliance, and crucially, farmers across North East Hertfordshire. I thank them all for their time and expertise in shaping these ideas.

### **Summary of the 10 policy shifts:**

1. Ensure Agricultural Property Relief works fairly
2. Contracts for Food Security
3. Reform Environmental Land Management Schemes
4. Secure greater investment in public goods
5. Land matching for new entrants
6. Protect domestic food production
7. Build a fairer supply chain
8. Strengthen land workers' rights
9. Planning reform that protects and promotes farming
10. Enhance agricultural education and research

## 1. Ensure Agricultural Property Relief works fairly

Delivering the public goods that we need from our farming sector is wholly reliant upon the intergenerational expertise and engagement of our farmers. For food production that is healthy, sustainable, and resilient we need farmers with an intimate knowledge of the land they work and a long-term commitment to stewarding it for future generations.

However, the proposed changes to Agricultural Property Relief (APR) and Business Property Relief (BPR), following commitments in the 2024 General Election that Labour did not plan to do this, risks a break down in the relationship between farmers and the Government that puts the entire agricultural reform agenda at risk. If action is not taken to restore trust, the 25-year roadmap for farming will be in jeopardy of failure from the outset. The Government must take decisive action to prevent this by working on amended plans with the National Farmers Union, the Tenant Farmer's Association, and other key stakeholders ahead of the passage of the 2025 Finance Bill. These solutions should focus on ensuring that changes to APR and BPR protect those farmers too old or ill to reasonably adjust their succession plans, and shield family businesses from having to sell land beyond the point of viability.



## 2. Contracts for Food Security

Political debates on the future of farming in this country often include the assertion that ‘food security is national security’. However, in the face of increasing international instability and the escalating impacts of extreme weather due to accelerating climate change, the continued assumption that as a rich nation we will always be able to import the food we need is deeply unwise. Despite this, political references to food security are mostly vague and ill-defined. A successful 25-year roadmap for farming that aligns with the Government’s Food Strategy must set a clear and measurable target for a high proportion of our nation’s nutritional needs, according to a recognised diet like the NHS Eatwell Guide,<sup>iii</sup> to be reliably met by domestic production to high environmental standards.

Achieving this will require national policy to guide substantial changes in the amounts and types of food that we produce domestically. For instance, it has been estimated that if the UK population were to eat 5 fruit and vegetables a day we would need in the region of 5.4 million tonnes of fruit and veg,<sup>iv</sup> but the latest statistics indicate we are currently producing less than 3 million tonnes.<sup>v</sup> Nevertheless, expert analysis indicates that there is a plausible pathway to national food security and resilience, simultaneously reducing diet-related ill health, with production based on environmentally sustainable agroecological practices.<sup>vi</sup>

The essential element to securing these outcomes is establishing a national policy framework that provides the certainty and incentives for farmers to invest in practices that prioritise nutritional needs and environmental outcomes, but which will likely see their yields fluctuate in the short-term. Currently the low and uncertain prices that farmers are able to secure for their produce inevitably push them towards maximising output in order to make a living. Conversely, when we consider energy security, government Contracts for Difference ensure a minimum price that gives suppliers the confidence to invest in the production needed to secure national policy objectives. Food security is no less essential than energy security, and farming practices that restore nature are as important as the transition to low-carbon renewable energy.

Therefore, a 25-year roadmap for farming that is serious about making genuine food security profitable to produce should establish new Contracts for Food Security, based on the Contracts for Difference mechanism in the energy sector, providing certainty through price floors for key produce necessary to meet the nation's nutritional needs. As with Contracts for Difference, this protection from volatile commodity prices would give farmers the certainty to grow a wider range of produce more closely aligned to providing a healthy diet for all, whilst protecting consumers from paying spiking costs when international prices are high.

Furthermore, making adherence to basic agroecological principles—such as minimising soil disturbance, closed nutrient cycles, and eliminating use of most herbicides, pesticides and fungicides—a basic requirement for securing a Contract for Food Security could powerfully incentivise the rapid transition in farming practices necessary to deliver the environmental public goods the Government wants to see.





### 3. Reform Environmental Land Management schemes

Providing long-term, reliable public funding through Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) is essential to ensure that farming practices which feed the nation, support nutritional health, and protect the environment and climate are profitable. The recent evidence of increasing uptake of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) is very welcome and a clear sign of what our farming sector can achieve with the right incentives.<sup>vii</sup> However, as the Government reforms SFI and develops plans for round three of higher tier 'Landscape Recovery' schemes, there are important steps that can be taken to ensure that public funding through ELMs is as effective as possible.

Certainty is essential for farmers to plan their engagement with ELMs and the Government should make a firm commitment to end in-year and annual adjustments, establishing an upfront multi-year process for reviewing and refining the efficacy of schemes. There is also wariness of ELMs that ask farmers to stop growing food, which is rightly seen as increasingly incompatible with the need for greater national food security. It is reassuring that the latest statistics show that only 3.4% of the utilised agricultural area of England has been taken out of production by SFI agreements and the reformed scheme should be designed to further focus on farming practices that grow food in harmony with nature, rather than setting aside significant areas of land altogether.<sup>viii</sup>

The Government's reforms should also expand the opportunities for all farmers to engage with ELMs. SFI agreements should be available to reward those farmers who have already led the way in adopting nature friendly practices, recognising the public goods they already provide. The Government could also consider aligning the 25-year roadmap with a long-term rebalancing of funding within ELMS to unlock the enormous untapped potential for higher tier Landscape Recovery projects to restore lost ecosystems like calcareous grassland. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, the Government should ensure that public funding is also accessible through ELMs to support the public goods delivered by



small scale agroecological and horticultural producers, with schemes dedicated to growers below 5ha and capital grants usable on second hand machinery.

Finally, while uptake of SFI in particular has increased, farmers continue to report frustration with bureaucratic ELMs processes, including a lack of in-person advice and support. As long as the functions of the Rural Payments Agency remain remote and unresponsive these problems will persist, with major impacts on cash flow, hampering the success of ELMs in contributing to a more profitable future for farming. As part of the reform of ELMs the Government should consider requiring the Rural Payments Agency to provide named local contacts for all applicants, so that in the future farmers can have access to face-to-face conversations and on-site advice when needed.



## 4. Secure greater investment in public goods

It has been estimated that funding the necessary land management actions by farmers to meet the UK's legally binding nature and climate targets will require investment of up to £5.9 billion a year for the next ten years.<sup>ix</sup> Given current constraints on our public sector finances, this scale of funding will not be achieved through ELMs alone. To ensure that the roadmap to greater farming profitability aligns with other areas of public policy, including the ambitions set out in the Food Strategy, the Government must utilise other opportunities to channel investment into paying farmers for resilient and nature friendly land management practices.

To meet climate targets, the Government has already pledged £22 billion to Carbon Capture and Storage facilities to offset emissions from difficult to abate sectors like concrete and aviation.<sup>x</sup> However, while questions remain regarding the scalability and ultimate effectiveness of this technology, we already know that our soils have important potential as a growing carbon reservoir with the right management practices. To maximise these opportunities, the Government should work with scientists and land managers to develop a nationally recognised farm-level soil carbon measurement and accreditation scheme. This could then provide a framework for the hardest to decarbonise industries across our economy to confidently contribute towards their net-zero obligations by paying farmers for actions that deliver long-term measurable increases in their soil carbon sequestration.

Similarly, as the Government seeks to accelerate housing delivery across the country, developer financial contributions to meet Biodiversity Net-Gain (BNG) obligations are likely to increase significantly. With estimates suggesting that the soil is home to 59% of the species on earth<sup>xi</sup>, the Government should consider updating BNG policies to include soil biodiversity in site calculations alongside above ground habitat areas and wildlife features. Where off-site soil biodiversity net gain proves necessary, an updated BNG system could then incorporate mechanisms to pool funds from new developments to provide farmers with long-term payments for improving their soil biodiversity, securing both vital environmental public goods and enhancing the soil fertility which is essential for our food security.

## 5. Land matching for new entrants

One of the widely recognised challenges facing the farming sector are the high barriers to entry, especially access to land. The latest Government statistics show that the average age of farm holders in England is now 61 years old, with just 15% of farm holders below the age of 45.<sup>xii</sup> To be a success the 25-year roadmap must address this head on.

Previously, council farms played an essential role in providing access to farmland for new entrants, especially for equipped farms. However, the total area of these estates in England has more than halved from 170,000 hectares in 1977 down to 82,000 hectares in 2020, fundamentally eroding access to land through council farms.<sup>xiii</sup> The Government should prevent further decline in the availability of council farms by putting them on a similar statutory footing as allotments, requiring Secretary of State approval for their disposal. A long-term target should also be set for increasing the number of council farm holdings over the duration of the roadmap.

In the short to medium-term the Government should improve access to land by working with the farming sector and consulting on the introduction of a national land-matching scheme. This would build on existing efforts to connect new entrants with existing landowners who have potentially suitable plots that are not integral to their business and could be made available at peppercorn rents. A land-matching programme of this kind could prove particularly valuable not just in giving many more people the chance to begin a career growing food, but also hopefully provide them with opportunities to learn from and share facilities with expert established farmers. Given the concentrated nature of land ownership in England, participation in such a scheme could be considered as an essential requirement for farmers seeking 'Contracts for Food Security' described in section 2 if they have greater than 1000 acres in landholdings.

## 6. Protect domestic food production

To rebuild the profitability of British farming over the next 25 years, the roadmap must include a clear commitment to reset our agricultural trade policy based on a clear recognition that international price competitiveness is of secondary importance compared to a farming sector that restores our lost biodiversity and ensures national food security. We cannot escape the fact that exposure to competition from international producers with lower animal welfare standards, who are more willing to increase yields at the expense of nature, and who farm on an industrial scale that we would never want for our own landscapes, puts our farmers in a near impossible situation.

A credible public policy framework to secure profitable farming that is environmentally sustainable, resilient and meets our nutritional needs cannot continue to allow these outcomes to be undercut by cheap imports. Therefore, the Government should commit to a wholesale review of agricultural trade policy, including processed as well as primary produce, with the aim of ensuring that British farmers working to provide the public goods we want are not exposed to competition based on lower standards. Where regulation alone is insufficient import tariffs should be meaningfully considered, with any resultant revenue ring-fenced for re-investment in food affordability schemes.





## 7. Build a fairer supply chain

To ensure that farmers get a fairer return for the food they grow the 25-year roadmap for farming must address the monopsonistic power of the major supermarkets. Fundamentally, when nearly 95% of groceries are sold through the top nine supermarkets<sup>xiv</sup>, and farmers regularly receive less 1% of the profit from everyday food stuffs<sup>xv</sup>, it is clear that the Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) has failed in its role as the regulator in the supply chain.

As part of the roadmap for farming the Government should commit to a clear target for reducing the market concentration within our food system over the 25-year period. This should begin by replacing the GCA with a powerful new regulator tasked with preventing high market shares in any part of the supply chain that create price setting powers, breaking up not just the supermarket oligopoly but also addressing other concentrations in agri-business from fuel to fertiliser and feed.<sup>xvi</sup>

However, while these are essential reforms for ending the position of our farmers as price takers—often struggling to secure a decent return for their produce—they will inevitably take substantial time and careful implementation to bear fruit. In the interim, the Government should introduce measures to ensure that supply chains begin to rebalance and provide fairer returns to farmers.

This could be achieved by supporting the development of more farmers co-operatives that use collective bargaining to create a more equal bargaining position with supermarkets. To ensure that the regulation of grocery retailers also supports profitable domestic food production in tandem with new public procurement rules, the Government should consult on the introduction of a requirement for all supermarkets to source at least a third of the produce on their shelves from a suitable local catchment area.

## 8. Strengthen land workers' rights

There is no harvest possible in this country without the contribution of land workers, including seasonal labourers on temporary visas, but these key workers often face appalling exploitation that must be tackled.

For instance, research has found that due to broker fees and other costs, the average pay of migrant farmworkers in the UK is below the absolute poverty threshold.<sup>xvii</sup>

We will only achieve a thriving and successful future for farming in this country if proactive Government intervention secures the fair wages and working conditions essential for a full and well-motivated workforce across the whole sector.

The abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board (AWB) by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in 2013 was a seriously retrograde step and it is notable that Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have all maintained a devolved counterpart to the AWB. The Government should re-establish parity of protection for agricultural workers in England by restoring the Agricultural Wages Board with an enhanced role for trade unions and representatives of workers on horticultural and small-scale businesses to drive up standards across the sector.

With up to an estimated 60,000 seasonal employees needed each year to bring in the UK harvest, the Government should also take comprehensive action to address the specific risks of exploitation these farmworkers face. This should begin with reform of the Seasonal Worker Visa (SWV) so that all SWV holders can easily move to other farms on the scheme, can change their visa sponsor if needed, and have the right to switch to other jobs on the shortage occupation list. Simultaneously, the Government should invest in regular inspections of all SWV workplaces and immediately consult on the best way to implement an Employer Pays Principle funded by supermarket retailers to ensure that, as in the US, seasonal farmworkers are protected from rip-off charges and are not liable for any recruitment fees or related costs.

## 9. Planning reform that protects and promotes farming

Current planning policies too often fail to secure the future of agricultural land for food production whilst simultaneously proving a challenging barrier to low-impact sustainable farming developments that are especially important for new-entrants.

The Government's development of a Land Use Framework is an important step in the right direction on this front, but more action needs to be taken. Under the previous administration, large swathes of our Best and Most Versatile (BMV) farmland were lost to development, marking a permanent decline in our most important asset for national food security.<sup>xviii</sup>

Whilst individual decisions to sell land are wholly understandable for farmers facing enormous challenges making a living out of growing food, the Labour Government's vision for a long-term improvement in farming profitability through the roadmap should provide a clear context for protecting productive agricultural land into the future. To ensure that we have the land necessary to meet more of our nutritional needs through environmentally sustainable domestic farming, the Government should use the forthcoming review of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to set a far stronger presumption against development that causes permanent loss of BMV land.

Moreover, since the current Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) used to assess the inherent capability of land to support food production is based on out-of-date climate data, leading to large overestimates of the BMV land across the country,<sup>xix</sup> the Government should urgently review and update the ALC system to provide better data for guiding planning decisions. This is essential to provide an accurate assessment of the total area of high-quality farmland available to support national food security and to properly understand our strategic resilience to shocks from growing risks including climate change and international instability.

In addition, as we seek to boost domestic food security, meeting more of our nutritional needs especially through locally grown fruit and vegetables, the availability of suitable land for market gardens on the periphery of our towns and cities is particularly important.



Therefore, Government should add 'the protection of agricultural land close to urban areas' as an official sixth purpose of Green Belt designations within the NPPF.

Equally, as highlighted above, a thriving future for a more profitable farming sector will both encourage and necessitate a generation of new entrants into the industry, strengthening the sector's resilience with new innovation, enthusiasm and experimentation. To facilitate this, recognising that many new farmers will begin their career working on smallholdings, the Government should ensure that future planning policy extends Agricultural Permitted Development rights to farms below 5 hectares. National planning policy should also expand these rights to include low impact on site dwellings needed for the effective operation of the enterprise and where the holding does not currently have an associated farmhouse.



## 10. Enhance agricultural education and research

Expanding the knowledge of how to grow nutritious food in the most sustainable way at all levels of society must be an essential part of the 25-year roadmap for farming. Securing long-term public support for farming of the highest standards, including a willingness to pay for best practice, is dependent on improving the understanding of how our food is grown, the effort it takes, and how it impacts our natural environment. Currently the wider public is far too detached from the realities of farming. As part of the roadmap DEFRA Ministers should work closely with their counterparts in the DFE to introduce practical knowledge and skills in food production into the national syllabus of both primary and secondary schools. This should combine more support for school visits to farms with a long-term commitment for all schools to develop space for growing fruit and vegetables.

It has also been widely noted that the offering from agricultural colleges, especially in relation to horticultural expertise, has declined in the UK over a number of years. The roadmap for farming should interweave with wider tertiary education reform and set a target to make the UK the best country in the world to study for qualifications in nature-friendly climate-resilient farming.

Furthermore, developing sustainable farming practices that replace reliance on artificial chemicals with cutting-edge ecological science, requires farms with the secure long-term funding to take risks and innovate regardless of short-term losses in yield. While there are many farmers already proving brilliant results in this field, including in North East Hertfordshire, there will always be a role for trailblazers focused on proof of concept over year-to-year viability. The Government should establish new 'model farms' in a range of landscapes across the country, dedicated to long-term studies trialling new practices providing open access research for commercial producers on the biggest challenges for the agricultural transition, such as improving nitrogen cycling and replacing artificial fertilisers with green manure and more mixed farming with integrated livestock.

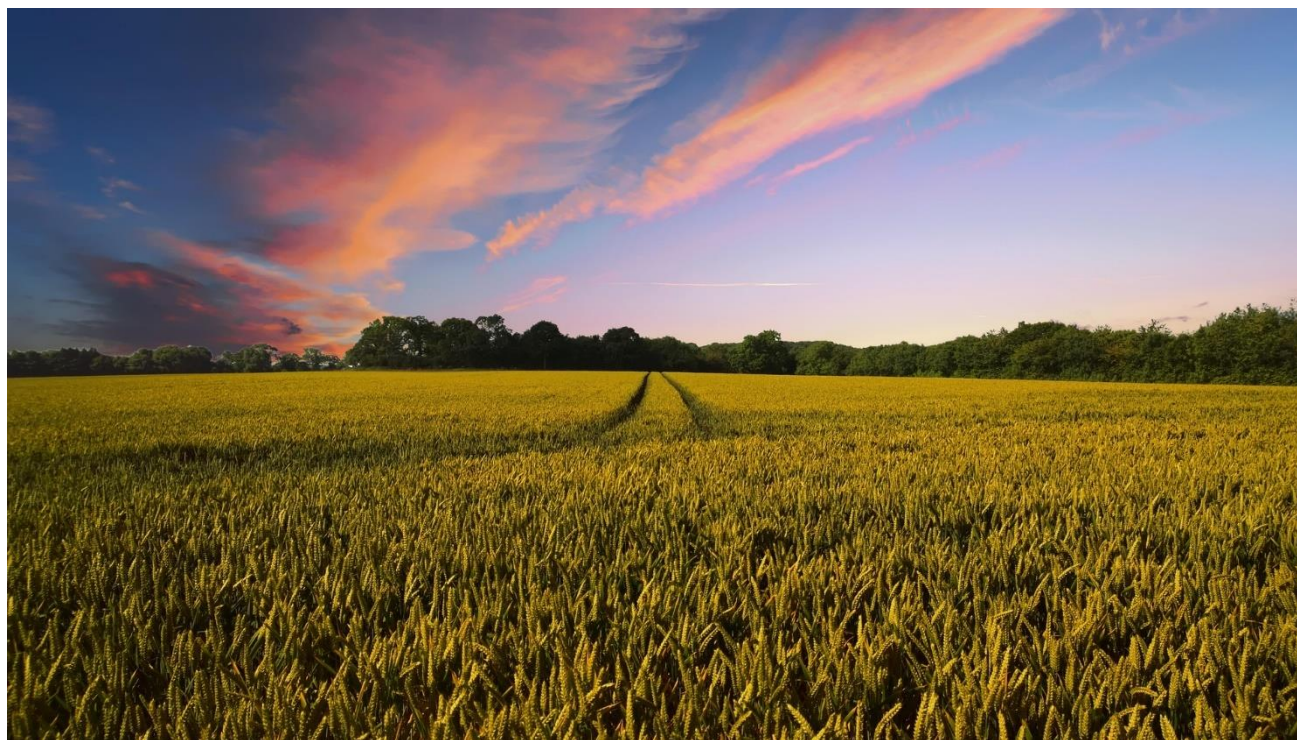


## Conclusion

The challenges facing British farming are not inevitable—they are the result of choices. For too long, those choices have failed to reflect the true value of farming to our economy, our environment, and our communities. The 25-year roadmap presents a rare opportunity to correct course: to build a farming system that is fair, resilient, and rooted in the public interest.

The ten policy shifts outlined in this report are not exhaustive, but they are grounded in the lived experience of farmers and the insights of organisations working tirelessly to support them. They reflect a growing consensus that farming must be treated not as a marginal sector, but as a cornerstone of national wellbeing and security.

If we are to secure a future in which farmers thrive, landscapes are restored, and everyone can access healthy, affordable food, then bold and coherent action is needed—starting now. I urge my colleagues across Government to engage seriously with these proposals and to work with farmers, not against them, in shaping the future of food and farming in Britain.



## Endnotes

---

- <sup>i</sup> [Steve Reed speech at the 2024 CLA Conference – GOV.UK](#)
- <sup>ii</sup> [A UK government food strategy for England, considering the wider UK food system – GOV.UK](#)
- <sup>iii</sup> [The Eatwell Guide – NHS](#)
- <sup>iv</sup> [Peas-Please-Veg-Facts-2021.pdf](#)
- <sup>v</sup> [Horticulture statistics 2024 – GOV.UK](#)
- <sup>vi</sup> [Farming for change: charting a course that works for all – Food, Farming and Countryside Commission](#)
- <sup>vii</sup> [Sustainable Farming Incentive action uptake data January 2025 – GOV.UK](#)
- <sup>viii</sup> [Sustainable Farming Incentive action uptake data January 2025 – GOV.UK](#)
- <sup>ix</sup> [Scale of Need Report July 2024 FINAL.pdf](#)
- <sup>x</sup> [Government pledges nearly £22bn for carbon capture projects – BBC News](#)
- <sup>xi</sup> [Enumerating soil biodiversity | PNAS](#)
- <sup>xii</sup> [Agricultural workforce in England at 1 June – GOV.UK](#)
- <sup>xiii</sup> [Reviving county farms – CPRE](#)
- <sup>xiv</sup> [nffn-rethink-farming-report\\_digital-final-release-2.pdf](#)
- <sup>xv</sup> [Unpicking food prices: Where does your food pound go, and why do farmers get so little? | Sustain](#)
- <sup>xvi</sup> [Paying the Price – Food, Farming and Countryside Commission](#)
- <sup>xvii</sup> [LWA-Debt-Migration-and-Exploitation-2023 .pdf](#)
- <sup>xviii</sup> [Review of Agricultural Land Take to Development – NECR578](#)
- <sup>xix</sup> [Grounded-Insight-ALC-report-for-CPRE-Feb-2025.pdf](#)

All images sourced from Pixabay.



Chris Hinchliff MP  
**North East Herts**