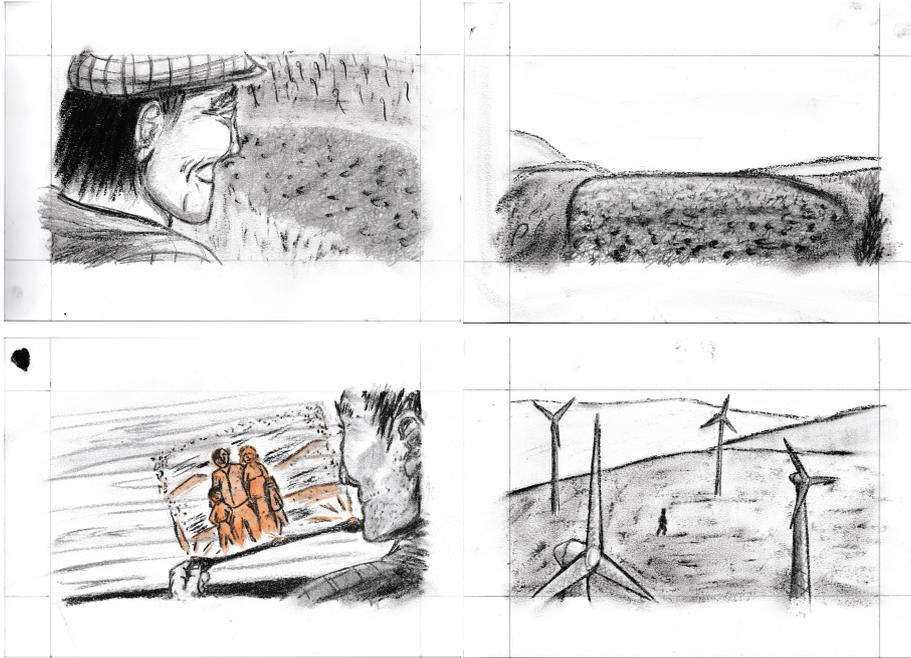


# The Carbon Farmer

## Stakeholder Considerations



The following document has been prepared as a summary of the views, needs and interests of all stakeholders consulted to date in the research underpinning the production of *The Carbon Farmer*. This summary will be used as the foundation for the pitch delivered through *The Carbon Farmer* to the UK public, practitioner and parliamentary audiences



Prepared by Andy Clark, January 2018.

## Environmental Considerations

### Capping Carbon Emissions

Greenhouse Gas emissions from degraded peatland has long been acknowledged, but never quantified or included in national emissions statistics - until recently.

A recent DEFRA-commissioned study, undertaken by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology has found the UK's degraded peatlands to be a source of 16 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>(equivalent) annually (Figure currently under final review from BEIS, to be published shortly). That's equivalent of half of our annual national efforts to reduce GHG emissions from all other sources (Net UK GHG emissions reductions for 2015-2016 = 29MtCO<sub>2</sub>(e), [BEIS Statistical Summary March 2017](#)). In the face of climate change, these are emissions that we simply can't afford.

When the UK's peatlands are healthy and functioning Blanket-Bog ecosystems, they are active sinks of Carbon. This is, however, a slow process, even in a pristine ecosystem. The UK's peatlands will take up to 30 years to become net carbon positive, after restoration practice has taken place, for the mean time remaining net carbon neutral.

### Other Ecosystem Services

Capping emissions is by far not the only environmental / public service offered by the restoration of the UK's peatlands. Further benefits include:

- **Flood Risk Management** – a wetter, rougher peatland is better able to store and slow rainwater in times of high flow.
- **Drought Risk Management** – a wetter, rougher peatland is better able to hold groundwater in the system and mitigate severe low-flow periods.
- **Water Quality** – healthy blanket bogs naturally filter runoff water, preventing the runoff of peat sediment that otherwise requires expensive removal by utilities companies before delivery to the public.
- **Freshwater Ecological Health** – Healthy blanket bogs maintain steadier flow rate and provide a buffer to sedimentation and pH fluctuation.
- **Grazing Space** – Contrary to long-held beliefs, upland grazing of sheep can continue effectively on blanket bog ecosystems.
- **Grouse** – Grouse production has been found to benefit from the re-wetting of peatland due to increased insect life providing food for chicks.
- **Enhanced Biodiversity** – Restored Blanket Bogs provide nesting grounds for a wide diversity of ground nesting birds, insect life and floral diversity, including some of the UK's rarest species of sphagnum moss.
- **Enhanced Recreation** – Healthier ecosystems, physically more stable, aesthetically pleasing and more abundant with wildlife offer enhanced opportunities for recreation and wellbeing.

## Societal Considerations

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### The Needs of the People: Farmers

Regardless of why any individual farmer is a farmer – be it inheritance of heritage, personal vocation or a new business venture – the bottom line of profitability is imposed ubiquitously throughout the farming community. Farmers have to make a financially viable living, to survive, and to provide food for the people.

That is not to say that farmers are uncaring of people and planet, or ignorant to the wider environment – every consensus states quite the opposite. Most farmers are very aware of their impact on the wider environment, and are at least open to opportunities to have a more positive impact upon the environment (there is a range in enthusiasm from 'Open to facilitation' to 'Actively ambitious').

Schemes like Countryside Stewardship are generally welcomed as a way to improve one's environmental impact and sustainability. However, Basic Farms Payments leave something lacking, and many feeling under-valued.

Particularly notably in the uplands, many farms receive a significant proportion of their income from Basic Farm Payments, and not from the financial viability of their produce. However, the practice of sheep farming in these areas is deeply culturally engrained and valued, and many upland farmers feel that their real value is in managing an aesthetic environment – a value that is currently unrecognised in agri-environmental policy.

Bizarrely aligned and simultaneously juxtaposed with this ideology is the growing ambition in younger generation farmers to take on the mantle of 'environmental stewards' – appreciating that the services they could provide to society and the environment are multi-faceted and harmonious.

### The Needs of the People: The Tax-Paying Public

Basic Farm Payments, and other non-produce payment schemes are governmentally (ie. publicly) funded. For many it is seen as unjust that public money is used to 'prop-up' otherwise financially inviable farming practices – in extreme cases this leads to outright anger that public money is given to practices that have, over decades, caused the degradation of peatland (ie. Digging drainage grips and maintaining 'dry' peatlands) and continue to lead to negative effects, such as increased flood risk and loss of biodiversity, that cascade from peatland degradation.

*[This has most severe incarnation in the grouse shooting and heather burning debates. However, the most established consensus is that these practices can continue in a sustainable manner if a healthy blanket bog can be established as a foremost priority. It is worthy of note though that there is a public feeling of injustice that public money, primarily in the form of basic farm payments, is used to support practices that do not have widespread positive returns for the public.]*

Fundamental public needs, however, include food security and security from extreme weather events and the effects of climate change. These needs should not be approached as mutually exclusive.

### Implementation of Needs – Adaptation over Change

In many farming areas, there exists deep-set heritage and cultural identity. This is true both in the Northern uplands and the East Anglian Fens, and while there may still be a desire for sustainable practice from farmers, landowners and land managers, the concept may be at odds with 'traditional' practices. (Even if those practices, the current status-quo, are fundamentally unsustainable and over-exploitative of natural resources – either on the larger scale of global climate change, or directly in the degradation of the peat that is the foundation of the farm itself.)

However, there is no need to manufacture a compromise between longstanding cultural identity and desires for a more sustainable form of practice when common ground can be reached.

Instead of insisting from a policy level that all detrimental practices must stop, an adaptation of established practices is needed to facilitate more sustainable outcomes whilst satisfying core stakeholder needs, such as identity, culture, and national heritage.



## Actions

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### Future Domestic Agricultural Policy

What is currently most unknown is how these concepts could be facilitated. A payments scheme is needed to support practices that are, in most places, currently novel. Thankfully there has recently been open governmental support from Environment Secretary Michael Gove for the concepts of payments for the provision of public services – which conceptually include things like natural flood risk management, biodiversity enhancement, carbon off-setting and public access. The importance of sustainable agriculture and management of *soil* health has also been raised. This ambition has been received warmly by the public, by farmers and landowners, and by organisations that represent these communities. None yet claim to have the answer for how payments for these services will be facilitated, but we do have the time and ambition to work it out.

A likely manifestation of this ambition will promote a 'Mosaic' landscape approach to farming and environmental management, valuing more than basic farm produce and emphasising ecosystem services and the pursuit of other financially viable land uses, such as forestry and renewable energy. In practice, this will facilitate the continuation of

culturally important occupations, with the incorporation of more sustainable and more financially viable practices.

One of the most important sticking points from agricultural communities though, regarding the provision of public services in a future domestic agricultural policy, is that it be an **optional pursuit**. The freedom of farmers and landowners to opt-in to receiving new payments for the provision of public and environmental services is one that should be respected. Essentially the adaptation of more sustainable land management practices should be facilitated with more carrot and less stick.

### Practice Outside of Policy

The mitigation of climate change is not just a locally-grounded public service or interest. It will be important for public money to be utilised for the provision of this unifying public service, but the role of the private sector in climate change and in climate action should not be overlooked.

The IUCN Peatland Programme's Peatland Code offers an opportunity for private-sector investments to financially support peatland restoration as an act of Corporate-Social Responsibility. Targeting corporate financing, this opens up the possibility of restoration at an intensity or scale that would be unfeasible with tax-payer money alone. If the corporate sector is interested in helping restore our degraded peatlands, then that is something that should be supported.

### An Overarching Sustainable Mind-set

A fundamental component of this more holistic and sustainable approach to agriculture and environmental management should be a core ambition of sustainability. A sustainable mind-set will be necessary for the establishment of new practice, and so too will it be a result as the various benefits to the three bottom lines (People, Planet and Profit) are mutually recognised.

Undertaking this adaptation with a business-as-usual approach will not suffice. Over the last two hundred years, the status quo has not been sustainable. The continual growth economy, perpetual exploitation of natural resources and overall short-sightedness of industry has led to it's own downfall, and a substantial shift in attitude and action is needed to facilitate a more sustainable future.

Sustainability *can* beget sustainability. This is a leap into the unknown in terms of policy and practice, but it is deeply necessary. At least one element of the status quo that we can take with us is that we can always strive for more, and for better. We won't create a perfect system on our first try, but with the right ambitions in place we can create strong foundations for a markedly better future, in which we take positive, affirmative action on climate change as an intrinsic factor in day-to-day life.

## Why Produce *The Carbon Farmer*?

As noted above, there is already sound reasoning from climate, environmental and even economic perspectives for supporting the restoration of the UK's peatlands. The concept of sustainability and environmental stewardship is not unheard-of to farmers, nor are many resistant to it, but the simple pressure of economic viability is still significant enough to restrict many of the more ambitious actions. The recent vocal support for payments for public [ecosystem] services from government has been positive, but peatlands specifically are still lacking direct recognition – and it is peatlands that are currently undermining half of our annual efforts to reduce our GHG emissions and thereby fight climate change.

The transition to a mind-set of sustainability, and a core, passionate ambition to achieve sustainability is not something that can be achieved through logic, document or rhetoric. This shift must necessarily occur on an emotional level, with personality and human connection. Expertise can lose-out to Emotion, facilitating radical change – as current times make us all too aware. *The Carbon Farmer* is needed to present a voice for future peoples, and to provide the human connection necessary to inspire real change.

