

# PRESS RELEASE

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## SOUTHERN FARMERS COULD BE AMONG THE HARDEST HIT BY DEFRA PLANS



Farmers in south east and central southern England have almost as much to fear about farm subsidy payment cuts as those in north east England, a new consultation paper infers.

Figures from DEFRA show that only farmers in the north east, at 88 per cent, rely on subsidy payments more than south east and central southern farmers, at 77 per cent to make up their farm income.

But the consultation proposes a variety of scenarios where subsidy payments could be removed over periods varying from five to 10 years. Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Berkshire, and Oxfordshire farms are included in this area, but farmers in neighbouring Wiltshire and Gloucestershire will see the threat affecting only 67 per cent of their income leaving them in a better position to fend off the financial hit.

“Environment Secretary Michael Gove is asking for industry responses to his 64 page document which states a lot of what we already know about his intentions but not a lot about of detail to clear up existing uncertainty,” believes Tom Bishop, an associate partner with BCM Rural Property Specialists in Sutton Scotney who is also director of a business managing and farming more than 6,500 acres of arable land and around 1,000 acres of pasture in southern England.

“The consultation papers suggests varying ways in which subsidy payments could evaporate over different period of time ranging between five and 10 years but the explanation as to how they will be replaced is thin on the ground.

“What concerns me most is that with the detail of Brexit as the focus of Government, less than sufficient attention will be paid to agriculture which many farmers fear is already seen as a sacrificial lamb in concluding future trade deals that would allow imports of cheaper food produced to lower standards that would have the magical effect of cutting food prices for consumers who would initially see it as a winning situation.

“But Britain needs to be more self-sufficient and less reliant on imports to keep food security at least in its current situation of producing around 60 per cent of what we consume. Anything less could see the country suffering under future trade deal negotiations.



“The consultation closes on May 8<sup>th</sup> and I would urge everyone who could be affected to submit a detailed response and that includes both farmers and the wider rural community.

“To see farm incomes here in the south potentially reduced by 77 per cent in a very short period – even a decade is not much time to adjust crop and livestock programmes to cope – and for farmers to be left at the mercy of volatile world markets or becoming little more than country park keepers to earn Government money could be devastating.

“Mr Gove must be forced into providing more detail – in the meantime I can see the need arising for joint venture, share farming, and resource sharing to reduce costs and maintain sustainable incomes.”

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