

# PRESS RELEASE

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## NEW AGRICULTURE BILL SOWS SEED OF HOPE AND CONFUSION



An unusual, and unexpected, offer to help farmers to retire and encourage a new generation into the industry is being proposed in the first Agriculture Bill to be put forward in the UK since 1947.

But clarity is still needed about many of the aspects of farming that are not covered in the Bill, which majors on environmental issues, says Hampshire land agent Tom Bishop, an associate partner at BCM Rural Property Specialists in Winchester.

“The document runs to more than 60 pages but doesn’t mention food production, a major plank of any agricultural policy,” comments Mr. Bishop. “It does outline how direct farm payments will be reduced, to be replaced by schemes that benefit ‘public good’ such as public access and landscape preservation.

“Here in the south, where there are vast acreages of arable land, qualifying for environmental payments could be difficult so the large farms that have previously received subsidy on the land area they farm will now find they could be getting next to nothing.

“An unusual feature is the suggestion of helping the industry to set up a futures market – at the moment only a small percentage of farmers use futures as a sales method. It’s a form of gambling with produce and farmers who sign contracts for futures could find themselves losing in a year like this one, where terrible weather has had a big impact on some yields.

“But there’s no doubt the opportunity to roll up the diminishing subsidies as the system is replaced and take them as one payment will be of interest to many farmers. It could help them exit the industry and open up new opportunities for fresh blood to enter the industry or give those who intend to ride out the storm the capital to make significant investment so they are ready with new income streams ahead of the changes.

“One thing’s for sure. Farming is going to see the biggest postwar shakeup it has ever experienced and for some it will be a very stormy ride. The nature of the proposed de-linking of current payments from production post-2021 also means that farmers will need to carefully consider any business changes in the lead up to that, to make sure that they are not removing themselves from eligibility to any new payment.”





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