

Bulletin - 14th February 2003

By 2005, the Government expects up to a quarter of the UK's farms to close or merge. 50,000 farmers could be forced to leave the land. The closure of each ordinary family farm is a nail in the coffin of the British countryside.

Join farm now and help to keep the countryside alive.

Welcome to **farm's** first bulletin updating you as a member or key contact about **farm's** activities. We intend sending a bulletin out along these lines on about a fortnightly basis. As our first, this one is longer than will be the rule. If you are a member then you will also receive a more detailed quarterly newsletter from us. The first issue will come out this spring.

For general updates, you can also always access the website: www.farm.org.uk (this first Bulletin will be posted on the website, but not generally hereon).

farm was successfully launched on 4 November 2002, when founding members hung 11 boiler suits outside DEFRA HQ symbolising the 11 farmers who have gone out of business every day for the past 50 years.

We also handed in a letter to Mrs Beckett demanding a real future for farming and setting out **farm's** vision in the form of a new Farm Bill.

What's farm been up to since the launch?

Following up on calls

In the 3 months since the launch, we've been following up on the strong national and regional media coverage and public interest.

We've received thousands of supportive calls, emails, voice messages and letters. The **farm** website alone has had over 10,000 visits. Membership is building steadily and now stands several hundred strong. The official total will be declared at **farm's** first Annual General Meeting this autumn (date to be confirmed). Of course, **farm** needs more members if we are to convince Government and the media we are a serious force – to which end, please encourage friends, family and colleagues to join so as to create the critical mass and build the solid foundations **farm** needs to sustain and increase its outputs.



farm is a campaigning and membership organisation, fighting for a viable future for independent and family farms.

'For every pound we spend in the shop now on food and drink, just 7.5p gets back to farmers and rural communities. Half a century ago, it was between 10 and 12 shillings (50-60p) in the pound.'

Professor Jules Pretty, University of Essex

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Going out to the Regions

In the run-up to Christmas, farm went out on the road to meet people and hear their views directly. So far we've held regional meetings in Shropshire, Cumbria and Lancashire.

The response was overwhelmingly positive, even from those suspicious of us, as this comment from one farmer at our first meeting outside Shrewsbury makes plain,

'I'm a strong and active supporter of the NFU and I came along here to be quite hostile. Environmental is a dirty word to me and we've had a lot of trouble from those bunny-huggers. But from what you set out in your presentations, there's nothing I or most farmers could disagree with. I don't think you'll do any harm, in fact I think you'll do a lot of good. I want to thank you for coming along here to speak to us tonight.'

Getting Research Ready

Good research is essential to underpin the campaigns we want to work on and to ensure what we say is backed up by solid facts.

Areas we've been looking at include:

The Values of Farming

farm commissioned Seale Hayne Agricultural College to identify the wider values farming provides to society – above and beyond producing food – and to challenge Government advisors like Lord Haskins who say that **'50,000 farms need to go'** because they're **'inefficient'**. We can show the disastrous effect that would have, not just on farming, but more widely on the countryside, rural communities and their culture.

Farm Bill

We've been investigating the legal and parliamentary processes and timetable to turn our proposed Farm Bill into reality. This is a long-term project, but the process is as important in driving change as achieving an eventual Act.

farm's aim is to create a coalition of farmers, farming groups, consumer and environmental organisations to build a powerful lobbying platform to push the Bill's objectives forward. If we get this right we'll make Mrs Beckett's arm ache with writing letters back to MPs who are being harassed by their constituents demanding they support the Farm Bill.

Food Chain Analyses

We've also been looking into where the money goes in the food-chain, with analyses of staple items like milk, bread and beer. These studies back-up our concerns about the increasing concentration and power supermarkets hold over producers and consumers and give us powerful ammunition for campaigning in this area.



farm's future relies on you. Your active support in our campaigns, and your subscriptions and donations, will provide farm's fighting force.

We exist to protect and promote the interests of farmers, to get their voices heard by decision-makers, and to campaign for a positive future for farming, rural communities and the countryside.

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Supermarkets

Following the announcement that Safeway's is up for grabs and likely to be swallowed up by one of the remaining 'Big Four' retailers, **farm** has joined with a number of groups lobbying to ensure that any amalgamation is looked at by the Government and in particular the Office of Fair Trading. We've signed a joint letter to Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade & Industry demanding that the competition authorities investigate any such deal, along with groups including the British Independent Fruit Growers Association, Friends of the Earth, and the National Federation of Women's Institutes. Our views were also covered in Farmers Weekly's Talking Point (Jan 31 – Feb 6) www.farm.org.uk in news and views.

Footing the Bill for Foot & Mouth

Although **farm** had not yet launched, we decided that we had to challenge the Government's decision not to hold a full public inquiry into Foot & Mouth. So in February last year, we supported a judicial review of that decision in the High Court. Sadly, we lost and have just been hit with a bill for £14,000 as our share of the Government's costs. We have no regrets about enabling those affected farmers and other rural businesses make their case – but it's galling to have to cough up for the Government's cover up.

The Year Ahead

Before **farm** launched, we canvassed the views of over 500 farmers about what they were looking for in a new organisation. Those views which helped shape **farm** are summarised on the website - http://www.farm.org.uk/FM_Content.aspx?ID=27.

We've since been running a more detailed survey on the website asking supporters their views on our priority targets and tactics for our first campaigns. These will help us in drawing up **farm's** campaign strategy for 2003-4. That survey's shortly to be analysed and a summary of its key findings will be put up on the website and feature in the spring newsletter. But some top lines for now – your overall priority is for us to get **farm's** messages out to the public; you'd also like to see us challenge the rest of the food-chain to meet the same assurance and transparency standards as farmers are forced to; and a fair number of you are willing to take peaceful direct action.

Your Voice and Involvement

From the outset, it's been a key objective to ensure **farm's** members have a real say in how the organization is run and what it does. So we've also been working with our lawyers to finalise our legal and democratic structures. These will be fully in place for the AGM in the autumn.



farm is run by working farmers for working farmers, backed by a professional team. Our job is to ensure that farmers' voices are heard – by the public, politicians, business and the media.

'A Country which cannot afford art or agriculture ... is a country in which one cannot afford to live.'
John Maynard Keynes

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We're on the Web!
www.farm.org.uk

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We need more farmer members to get more directly involved in the running and direction of *farm*. Our founding farmer members have shouldered the burden right through from the months spent shaping the organisation before we launched, to going public, up to the present day – but would welcome some fresh faces and additional input to carry *farm* forward. In particular, we want to build the organisation's ruling body, **The Roundtable**, up to full strength. If you'd be interested in getting more involved please contact us on 020 7349 5831 to find out more.

Job Opportunities with *farm*

farm is expanding. Given the seriousness of the crisis facing farming in the UK and globally, *farm* has got its work cut out – and we're well aware of the high expectations on us. That's why we're taking on a further member of staff to spread the workload and increase our outputs. We're currently drafting the job description, which will be posted on the website as well as advertised in the national and farming press.

Materials

If you could make use of any *farm* leaflets, car stickers, or lapel badges to get our name out there and persuade more people to join *farm*, please contact Linda Jackson on: 020 7349 5831 or via email: Linda.Jackson@farm.org.uk. The materials up to a maximum of 3 sets of each are free, but we'd be grateful for a nominal payment of £1.00 in the form of stamps to cover post and packing. For larger amounts, please contact Linda directly.

We hope you've found this bulletin useful. We'll aim to send a shorter summary out on a fortnightly basis to keep you informed of our activities and how you can get involved.

If you don't want to receive this bulletin please contact Linda Jackson on: 020 7349 5831 or via email: Linda.Jackson@farm.org.uk.