



# Food, Farming & Countryside Commission

## Grass-roots:

A sustainable future for food, farming and the countryside in  
Devon and the South West









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# Introduction

The RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (FFCC) was launched in 2017 as a two-year independent inquiry, funded by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, to look afresh at the food and farming system, the countryside and rural economies, and to help shape a vision of a more sustainable future.

From the beginning, it was clear that the Commission needed to connect with local communities, learn from those already working on sustainable and regenerative solutions to food and farming at local scales and learn from different policy contexts in the Devolved Nations. The Commission therefore travelled the UK on a bike tour and worked with local partners in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and in three counties in England – Cumbria, Devon and Lincolnshire – to develop locally led inquiries. All six of the detailed inquiries developed in their own ways, responding to the questions that felt most relevant in each place.

## **Role of the locally led inquiries**

Devon's locally led inquiry is chaired by Commissioner and Devonian, David Fursdon, who convenes a group of expert stakeholders from across food, farming, agriculture, conservation, policy and health, with members from Devon and neighbouring Cornwall. This Committee incorporates four working groups, who each produced a report of their findings and recommendations, published in July 2019.<sup>1</sup>

Devon's locally led inquiry also fed into the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission's final report *Our Future in the Land*, which was also published in July 2019.<sup>2</sup>

1 The four individual working group reports can be read on the RSA website at: <https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/public-services-and-communities-folder/food-farming-and-countryside-commission/the-inquiries/devon>

2 *Our Future in the Land* can be read on the RSA website at: <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/future-land>

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## Chair's Preface

Although operating under the title of the Devon Inquiry, from the start the inquiry was clear that the extent of its purview would naturally extend beyond county lines, informed by the landscape in the way that its distinctive characteristics and culture naturally bind together the communities of this South West region.

I was fortunate to be able to convene a group of expert stakeholders from within our region, whose expertise and experience spanned farming, agriculture, conservation, health, and policy. Together we decided to organise our work around four key areas:

- Grasslands and Livestock Production
- Environment and Biodiversity
- Health and Thriving Communities
- New Entrants

Each of these was explored by its own working group between June 2018 and May 2019. The Devon Inquiry were ably assisted by Professor Matt Lobley and Beth Dooley from the University of Exeter who acted as lead researchers and authors.

This report represents the sum of those four parts, bringing together the research undertaken by each of the working groups. Their full reports, findings and recommendations are available electronically and provide useful context and an additional richness of detail. There is, of course, much more work to be done and aspects of our regionally distinctive food system that have yet to be explored.

This report represents a beginning rather than an end: a wellspring from which we hope will flow collaboration with people from across this region, to build a consensus around a vision for the South West as an exemplar of sustainable food and farming systems working in the service of thriving natural habitats and communities. Above all, this report is a confident call to action: for now, as never before, we have both the imperative and the opportunity to act.

We wholeheartedly agree with the sentiment expressed in the FFCC's final report: the time is now.



**David Fursdon**

Commissioner, RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, and Chair of the FFCC's locally led Devon Inquiry

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# A global challenge in search of local solutions

How to live within planetary boundaries is the existential challenge of our times. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) believe we have less than two decades to limit the effect of climate change 'in order to avoid irreversible changes to ecosystems and the planetary climate system.'<sup>3</sup>

To ensure a global population of > 7 billion can live within planetary boundaries so that the planet is left in a better state for each future generation will, in the IPCC's own words require 'rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.'

Food is at the heart of the issue. What and how we produce, control, process, distribute, consume, and dispose of food is central to this challenge, and to all of our lives. The urgent need to achieve a safe operating space for our food system will require significant changes in both production and consumption of food.

The so-called 'Western Diet' consumed across the developed world, is too low in fruit, vegetables, pulses, grains, and fibre, whilst being too high in overall consumption of meat, and added sugars and fats. It is unsustainable and its outcome is a 'lose-lose' scenario where the scale of damage to our biosphere is matched only by the reduction in human health due to year-on-year rises in non-communicable diseases including coronary heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory diseases. All this whilst the other half of the world's population goes hungry.

Obversely, it is widely accepted that a sustainable diet can deliver a 'win-win' result for both environment and health. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation have defined a sustainable diet as:

diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimizing natural and human resources.

FAO, 2017. p.7<sup>4</sup>

Globally, food production accounts for about a third of all greenhouse gas emissions, and in the UK, the farming sector is currently responsible for ~10% of the UK's emissions. At the same time, however, agriculture is unique in being the only primary industry that is both a carbon source and sink. Whilst farming does contribute to the problem, it is also part of the solution.

Whilst the challenge is global, it is increasingly recognised that the solutions need to be local. The focus to date on what we put on our plate is increasingly recognised as being too simplistic: how it is produced is a critical, but

3 The IPCC's Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5oC (2018) available to read at <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

4 FAO (2017) Sustainable Diets and Biodiversity. Directions and solutions for policy, research and action. Rome: FAO. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/i3004e/i3004e.pdf>



Schematic representation of the key components of a sustainable diet. Source: adapted from FAO 2017

often overlooked factor. Food production needs to be focused on nutritional quality rather than

quantity, and be regionally appropriate to the geography, topography, climate, and local culture in order to deliver the most good with the least harm.<sup>5</sup>

5 Eisler, M., and Lee, M.R.F. (2014) 'Steps to sustainable livestock', *Nature*, vol.507, pp. 32-34

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# A grass-roots approach: the work of the locally led Devon Inquiry

The holistic approach to sustainability, as discussed above, was at the heart of the RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission's work, and its final report *Our Future in the Land* recognises farming's role in delivering a win-win scenario:

- Producing healthy, nutritious food whilst respecting cultural traditions, adding value to local communities, and connecting people with their regional, cultural gastronomies.

And

- Supporting healthy ecosystems alive with biodiversity, and a natural environment abundant with life-sustaining clean air, water, and healthy soils.

This holistic approach to sustainable food and farming was continued by the Devon Inquiry and is clearly reflected in their choice of four key areas of work. The individual reports, findings and recommendations are available online. Their key messages are summarised in this report.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. Grasslands and Livestock Production

Grassland forms an important part of Devon's landscape for agriculture, the food industry and leisure and tourism.

- Significant improvements are available in grassland production and utilization, which will lead to benefits in agricultural productivity. Further research and policy development work is needed.

- Grassland farming enables non-human-edible foods (i.e. grass) to become human-edible through conversion into animal protein from agricultural land that cannot be used to directly produce human-edible foods. Research and public engagement should focus on communicating the health, environmental, cultural, and dietary benefits arising from grassland pastoral livestock farming.
- Meat from these animals has different nutritional compositions that may have less of an impact on human health than meat produced in grain-fed systems. The region's farming sector needs to work proactively with researchers and government to co-produce a holistic approach to assessment of healthy, sustainable meat production and consumption.
- Agriculture has the unique ability to offset not only its own carbon production (principally through areas of grassland), but also contribute to wider carbon reduction targets.
- Agriculture, while nationally small in its employment and output, is the basis for the much larger food industry and forms a vital part of local, regional and national identity, traditions and heritage, culture and the landscape. Collaboration between the farming industry, educators, and government is needed to co-produce a practical action

6 The four individual working group reports can be read on the RSA website at: <https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/public-services-and-communities-folder/food-farming-and-countryside-commission/the-inquiries/devon>



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plan to engage young people to become informed food citizens, and to open up career pathways into farming.

- There are significant gaps in our knowledge of how to optimally manage grasslands for the multiple functions they provide; thus, on-going research and knowledge exchange is vital. Funding from government and other stakeholders needs to be made available to improve knowledge, and translate research findings into farm level impacts.

## 2. Environment and Biodiversity

- Acting now is critical, and effective, proactive management of the transition could deliver a greener, healthier, and more sustainable local environment as well as contributing to our very survival on the planet. Our region could become an exemplar of what a post-carbon world could look like.
- Low carbon farming practices and systems must become the norm. The introduction of diverse and regenerative management practices such as agroforestry, silvopasture, and agroecology must be encouraged and supported.
- To achieve this, the whole farming sector will need significant support to transition to a net zero future, with the emphasis changing from solely one of productivity, to profitable sustainability. The Natural Capital accounting approach to farm support provides the economic framework to support the transition to regenerative, sustainable agriculture. Agricultural support will reward farm businesses for delivery of both a clean and biodiverse environment. Farmers will be paid for public good outcomes such as carbon sequestration, and flood mitigation, but will also need to bear the cost of any environmental degradation it causes,

embodied in the ‘polluter pays’ principle. Soil health must be a key indicator of success going forward.

- Devon and the wider South West region is well placed to implement more nature-based solutions. Collaboration will be a key factor. Farm clusters that manage land at a landscape-scale will be important in enabling farmers to work co-operatively to deliver multiple outcomes from their land and move towards a more diverse and resilient farmed landscape. A co-benefit of this co-operative approach is the potential added-value that can be returned to farmers via co-operative marketing of their food products.
- Given the complexity and interconnectedness of climate breakdown mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity health, access to independent, trusted advice is key, especially to support farmers in the transition from the Common Agricultural Policy to the new public goods schemes. It is imperative that Government continue to invest in farmer-facing advice, and that this provision is reflected in future policy.

## 3. Health and Thriving Communities

### Mental Health & Wellbeing:

- Public and/or private funding is needed to support the many initiatives working to address and improve mental health within the farming community.
- Mental health is everybody’s business. Training should be offered to those people who frequently interact with farmers; from vets to land agents, and feed and machinery reps.
- More research is needed to map what exists and how it can be effectively scaled up.

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There is often only one chance to approach someone on the subject of mental health, so resources should be invested in equipping people with the skills to handle those conversations sensitively, effectively, and with appropriate signposting to other services.

#### Education:

- The many different organisations doing excellent work in the area of outdoor learning, must all work with each other to achieve strategic and sustained outcomes. Sustainable Outdoor Learning in Devon (SOLID) is an example of an umbrella organisation working towards collaboration within the sector.
- Outdoor learning should be integrated into schools' curriculum design. The changing Ofsted inspection framework should provide the incentive, but significant support and resources to help schools to adopt more innovative approaches will be vital.
- Teacher training has to develop to ensure teachers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to lead outdoor learning activities. Rather than reinventing the wheel, existing expertise within the region, such as SOLID, should be up-scaled and utilised to deliver teacher training in outdoor learning.

#### Procurement:

- There exists a good body of evidence to show that local public procurement of food benefits the local economy, employment, learning outcomes, health outcomes, and reduces environmental impact, and in most cases, requires no extra cash investment.
- The government should raise awareness of the Social Value Act 2013, and create a statutory duty to buy local and sustainably

grown food, initially for schools and hospitals, and then ultimately for all public sector bodies.

- Any food policy, including public procurement, can only achieve its goals when government, parliament, and the entire food system are committed to a common strategy and long-term implementation.
- We are in a good position to run a pilot scheme in Devon, working with established examples of sustainable procurement (such as BathNES council, CATERed, and Fresha), in close working relationship with farmers and growers. By working first at a manageable scale, researchers could fully evaluate every stage of the pilot project in order to provide a blueprint for scaling up across the region.

#### 4. New Entrants

- Young people, even in a rural county like Devon, are by no means guaranteed to understand, or take an interest in, the breadth of careers in food, farming, and agriculture. The results of the working group's survey showed that over 1 in 5 young people reported having no connection at all to food, farming or agriculture.
- Similarly, living in a rural area is no guarantee that young people will have any clearer understanding than their urban peers of what it takes to get food from farm to fork. Whilst the survey is limited in scale, the results indicate that there is real scope for improvement in the way the agricultural industry engages with young people in the region.
- Increasing the prevalence of agriculture as a career choice as part of the formal careers counselling service for young people may be part of the answer. However, young people



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may find real-life examples of people closer to their own age working in the sector more relevant and relatable. Young farmers can have a role to play here.

- Food, farming and agriculture need to work together more effectively to promote the full range of career opportunities available to young people throughout the food chain, utilising not only social media channels, but also by engaging at the school level with ‘real-life’ young farming ambassadors, and organising ‘real-world’ off-school events on farms and other relevant settings.
- Collaborative roundtables are recommended to bring together educators, farmers, recent entrants to food and farming, industry representatives from across the food chain, administrators and policy makers.

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# How we get there: our Unique Sustainability Proposition

## A vision for the South West

To be an exemplar of sustainable food and farming systems in action, respectfully utilising our unique assets of climate, landscape, and regional gastronomy to support the health, well-being and prosperity of current and future generations of people, communities and landscapes of the South West.

And in so doing, positively contribute to our shared global mission to arrest climate change, and halt the degradation of habitats and precious natural environments around the world.

### 1. Our advantage

To misquote – for our own purposes – an old marketing maxim, the South West has a Unique Sustainability Proposition – its USP. Drawing upon the work of the Committee’s four working groups, the region’s USP might be described in three parts:

#### 1.1 Landscapes, Natural and Farmed

First is the region’s main fixed assets: grass and the landscapes where it grows. The landscape is a unique and priceless ecological resource of cultural, social and economic importance: a natural asset delivering health, wellbeing, food, ecosystem, and environment services to residents and visitors of the region. Just taking into account the three main counties of the peninsula – Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset – the region’s landscape encompasses two National Parks, nine Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, countless Sites of Special Scientific Interest, as well as ~1000kms of coastline with unique littoral landscapes and communities.

Due to its favourable climate, the South West is an important food producing region, with natural resources to support the production of fruits, vegetables, grains, as well as its most abundant crop: grass. The region accounts for 20% of the UK’s total farmed area, and 49% of that is under permanent pasture, with a further 12% under temporary grass.<sup>7</sup> Livestock farming is the principle farming activity of the region. Grazing ruminants enable the conversion of non-human-edible food (grass) into high quality human-edible protein (beef, lamb, and dairy), thus making an important contribution to reducing competition for human-edible plant-based food (soya bean and grains) to be used for feed for animals. The South West is particularly blessed with indigenous breeds of cattle and sheep, perfectly adapted to converting marginal grasslands into high quality, value-added meat of provenance and cultural significance.

7 See grasslands report, p. Available at: <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/projects/psc/ffcc/reports-2/4.-rsa-ffcc-devon---grasslands-and-livestock.pdf>



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By focusing on grass-based meat and dairy, alongside more diversified production of fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes, the region can become an exemplar for sustainable farming systems working in harmony with nature, with regionally appropriate food production optimally aligned towards consumption of sustainable diets. Greater diversification of food production, aligned to healthy diets, plays an important role in helping to build a stronger local food system for the benefit of producers and consumers, and other stakeholders in the local rural economy. The South Devon Organic Producers is one of the most successful examples of a farming co-operative collectively producing more than 85 different vegetables over 600 acres for consumption locally and nationally.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.2 Knowledge & Expertise

To this we can add the second part of the region's USP – its human resource: the embedded knowledge of its farming and fishing communities, and the wider food chain of growers, processors, butchers, chefs, and those working within the region's extensive food, tourism, leisure, and hospitality sector.

The region's unique landscapes attract and develop expertise in landscape management, conservation and environment, much of it taking place in our protected landscapes and large landed estates such as the National Trust, the Crown Estate, and Duchy of Cornwall, whose tenant farmers provide irreplaceable multi-generational region-specific knowledge and commitment, working with landlords to sustainably manage land at a farm and landscape scale.

The region is home to some world-class academic and research institutes including the Centre for Rural Policy Research at Exeter University, the School of Biological & Marine Sciences at Plymouth University, Rothamsted Research's North Wyke Farm platform leading research into sustainable grassland management and livestock systems, and leading land-based colleges including Duchy, Bicton, and Kingston Maurward.

The region is supported by pro-active local government and agencies that share a vision for the region as an exemplar of sustainability. By connecting and collaborating with initiatives such as the Devon Climate Emergency Net-Zero Task Force, energy and resources can be aligned towards a common objective.

These lists are not exhaustive, but are an impressive indication of the whole resource available.

### 1.3 Entrepreneurship and Reputation

Finally, our social and cultural resource. The region is recognised for its distinctive gastronomy originating from the region's vineyards, orchards, market gardens, and perhaps most famously, its dairy and livestock farms, with many producers already selling direct to the consumer through local food systems, and on digital platforms.

Whilst it is recognised that globally the production and consumption of meat will need to reduce in order to live within planetary boundaries, the South West is ideally placed to provide high quality, high welfare, low input grass-fed beef and lamb providing high quality, bioavailable protein and micronutrients, with high levels of beneficial Omega-3 fatty acids. The need for the developed world to transition from a western diet to a sustainable diet is a key factor

<sup>8</sup> South Devon Organic Producers Ltd is a farmer owned co-operative, growing organic vegetables, founded in 1998 to meeting the increasing demand for UK grown vegetables. <http://www.southdevonorganic.co.uk/>

in driving consumption patterns towards ‘less but better’ meat. The South West is very well placed to respond to this environmentally and health driven consumption-side demand. Reduced consumption of meat towards less but better leaves considerable opportunities to increase production of vegetables, locally grown fruits, as well as grains and legumes, forming the major part of healthy, sustainable diets. The development of more horticulture has the co-benefit of providing new entrants with realistic entry points into farming.

Significantly, the region’s economy is driven by micro and small businesses with a strong social enterprise and entrepreneurial culture. The region has one of the most productive and diverse small business sectors in the UK, agile and able to respond to market demand.<sup>9</sup>

These attributes can be leveraged further with the support of important strategic actors like the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP), and third sector organisations such as Devon Communities Together, who can advocate and organise at a regional level across private and public sector spaces to maximise opportunities.

## 2. Our opportunities

To achieve the vision of the South West as a leader in sustainable food and farming systems, will require a transformation in our scale of ambition and ways of working, to turn challenges into opportunities:

<b>Position</b>	<p><b>Challenge:</b> Poised with strong Unique Sustainability Proposition, not yet sufficiently differentiated and articulated as a regional USP.</p> <p><b>Opportunity:</b> Clear, shared vision for the South West as an exemplar of sustainable food, farming and rural economic region.</p>
<b>Promote</b>	<p><b>Challenge:</b> Lots of independent, excellent voices but too many messages creating cacophony rather than harmony.</p> <p><b>Opportunity:</b> All sectors communicating the same, differentiated message to key stakeholders: including the public as consumers and as citizens, government, policy makers, funders, food system actors and visitors.</p>
<b>Partnership</b>	<p><b>Challenge:</b> All parts working hard but lacking the structures and support to join up, within the region and beyond, to share/learn from other food and farming regional trailblazers.</p> <p>Actions tend towards tactical rather than strategic. Good at moving quickly to exploit near-term opportunities, but at risk of missing the big, long-term prize.</p> <p><b>Opportunity:</b> Think locally, act strategically. Create an umbrella of strategic leadership to ensure coherent co-operation and collaboration across and within sectors to ensure the sum is greater than the many parts.</p> <p>Reach out beyond the region to create strategic alliances that build national traction.</p> <p>Aim for win-win collaboration rather than win-lose competition.</p>

<sup>9</sup> State of Small Business Britain Report (2018) published by the Enterprise Research Centre, available at <https://www.enterpriseresearch.ac.uk/publications/state-small-business-britain-report-2018>



<b>Policy</b>	<p><b>Challenge:</b> Lack of voice at the top table, with policy done to us rather than shaped by us.</p> <p><b>Opportunity:</b> A pro-active and strategic approach to influencing and informing policy-makers and government.</p> <p>Make the South West the ‘go to’ source on sustainable food and farming systems.</p> <p>Be recognised nationally as a proactive voice within one movement for food system change.</p>
<b>Pilot</b>	<p><b>Challenge:</b> Not sufficiently recognised as sustainability innovators, particularly in agriculture, despite research excellence and entrepreneurial culture.</p> <p><b>Opportunity:</b> Be innovative, progressive, and courageous.</p> <p>Close collaboration with local government and SWLEP to increase visibility and awareness of upstream opportunities.</p> <p>Engage early with the academic research community, government and NGOs to pilot innovative sustainable food and farming system approaches.</p>
<b>Procurement</b>	<p><b>Challenge:</b> Now need the ‘last mile’ effort to make our region a national exemplar of local procurement.</p> <p><b>Opportunity:</b> Public procurement of local food is the catalyst that can make sustainable food systems a reality for local producers, processors and everyone eating in public institutions – particularly our young people at school.</p> <p>Collaborate with regional partners to build on progress already made to take South West local procurement through to implementation phase.</p> <p>Hold government to account; make public procurement the economic engine to drive the region’s sustainable food transformation to a relocalised, reterritorialised supply chain, improving health, environment, and economic outcomes for the South West.</p>
<b>People</b>	<p><b>Challenge:</b> Great human resource in need of over-arching strategy to ensure the sum is greater than its parts.</p> <p>The lack of connectivity and understanding between young people and farming sector is a key threat to achieving the vision.</p> <p><b>Opportunity:</b> Harness our human resource. Use the process of collaboration and co-operation to break out of silos, reduce isolation, and build bridges – particularly with the younger generation.</p> <p>Relocalise the food system to build stronger, more cohesive communities with greater diversity of skills, retaining and returning more of the value to South West communities.</p> <p>Engage young people with the region’s vision to be an exemplar of sustainability for people and planet. Catch the ‘Greta vibe’, make food and farming sector the sexiest, most important career a young person could imagine.</p>

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### 3. Rising to the challenge

As can be seen by each of the four working groups' reports, optimism is tempered by an acknowledgement of the challenges ahead. Not least of these is the political turmoil and uncertainty of the past few years, still ongoing at time of writing.

Optimism alone will not be able to achieve the far-reaching changes identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and others, but transformation will certainly not be achieved without it. The task ahead is daunting, and the window of opportunity is narrow, but it may be precisely for those reasons, that we now have a uniquely good opportunity to act.

Radical action is now in all our immediate interests. Achieving it is everybody's business and will require a holistic and multi-level 'bottom up, and top down' approach. It cannot be done without a government committed to an enabling policy environment and a willingness to use both soft and hard policy interventions to change the system in which our food and farming systems operate. This is clearly stated by Olivier de Schutter, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, and current co-chair of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems:

The shift towards relocalisation and re-territorialisation of food systems must not be seen as a threat but an opportunity for fairer and more sustainable food systems. . . change in production must go hand-in-hand with changes in consumption . . . unless conventional farming is made to internalize its costs to society, agroecological farming shall find it difficult to emerge beyond the niche markets it currently occupies.

De Schutter, 2019<sup>10</sup>

This report identifies three main areas of challenge:

#### 3.1 Funding & investment

The need for targeted and sustained public funding was identified by each of the four working groups as being essential to unlocking the region's potential. Whether it is to support farmers in their transition to a net zero future, or close the gap between our food system and young people through improved education and information, or fund further research in improved grassland and habitat management, the current approach to funding is seen as unfit for purpose both structurally and in terms of the amounts available.

The region's economy is driven by entrepreneurial micro and small businesses. Ensuring those businesses can invest in the growth of their businesses via access to capital, is one of the enabling factors business needs to build a profitable and sustainable economy.

#### 3.2 Building connections with the next generation as consumers and citizens

It is essential that we close the gap between farming and the wider public. The disconnect, particularly with young people, is the most serious threat to the region's future as a leader in sustainable food and farming systems. We have to find ways to engage young people, encourage and assist them into careers in agriculture and the local food system, provide them with the tools and information to become interested and informed consumers of food, take ownership of their gastronomic inheritance, and help them to be active citizens, aware of the connections between food, health, environment, and climate.

10 De Schutter, O., (2019) 'Towards a Common Food Policy for Europe', IPES-Food Report



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We know young people are highly motivated activists in the service of biodiversity, environment and climate. Part of the challenge is for the farming sector to engage with young people on their terms to help make the direct connections between these three big motivating issues and farming.

Engaging with young people and helping them to connect farming with the future of our planet is an action we can take now, but it is also important to recognize that part of the lack of engagement results from real and perceived difficulties gaining entry into farming, and financial returns that do not compare with many other career choices. It is important to maintain pressure on Government to implement transformative changes in regulation, and financial and fiscal policy, to make sustainable farming an achievable and economically rewarded option for present practitioners and future entrants.

### 3.3 Strategic leadership & cross-sectoral coordination

There are many good and talented people doing great work in our region and some strategic initiatives in progress sharing our vision. It is important to ensure good visibility and knowledge of what is already out there in order to focus energy and resources towards collaboration in order to accelerate the transformation.

Each of the working groups identified a lack of strategic leadership as the key issue. This is not to suggest leadership should be remote or imposed 'from above'. As the Food, Farming, and Countryside Commission states in its report *Our Future in the Land*, we need a new kind of distributed leadership by people with 'real skin in the game', but it does need to be structured to provide strategic direction:

- to build the network
- to facilitate collaboration in order to

maximise opportunities

- to work well at the scale appropriate to the task
- to spread leading practice within and between sectors
- to engage effectively with local and national government to create an enabling policy and economic environment.

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## Next steps: words into action

### **Nationally: the work of the RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission**

The recommendations in the final report *Our Future in the Land* have been widely supported. As well as the recommendations, the innovative approach the Commission has taken has been welcomed, demonstrating a way of working that has engaged and involved people and perspectives from around the country, recognising the diversity of the UK countryside. Many national intentions fall by the wayside on the route to implementation and so the Commission is committed to more effective two-way flows, learning from experiments and prioritising practical actions that support flourishing rural communities and economies.

The vehicle for this has been to work closely with the different manifestations of local leadership in the devolved and local inquiries, who want to continue to develop and extend their work.

The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation has supported the Commission's work from the start and sees its real importance lying in the implementation. As such, they have invited the Commission to submit a bid for a long-term programme of work that will help unlock a just transition towards sustainable food and farming systems, building on the evidence and momentum the Commission has already gathered. One of the main ways the Commission will take this work forward is to support the locally-led inquiries to put their plans into action. The planned programme of work includes three streams:

- Convening the leadership for a just transition, working on the difficult questions together and connecting national and place-based leadership.

- Implementing recommendations for radical and practical actions, starting with a ten-year transition plan for sustainable, agroecological farming by 2030 and a national land use framework.
- Winning and aligning resources and directing them where they are most needed and best utilised, supporting the local inquiries and working up a National Agroecology Development Bank.

### **Locally: what's happening next in our region**

Looking forward positively to the next phase of the Commission's programme, the Devon Inquiry met in early January 2020, together with people from organisations closely aligned and supportive of our work, to discuss this report and consider our next steps.

What is clear from that meeting, and all the work that led up to it, is the extraordinary energy and commitment that exists across the region, across sectors, and at every level of our community, all aligned behind a shared vision to make our region an exemplar of sustainable communities with health and well-being of people and our natural environment at the heart of everything we do.

Through the process of bringing this report together, and discussing its themes with like-minded people and organisations, we have identified opportunities to collaborate and align our work to ensure that the sum of our efforts is greater than the individual parts.

Opportunities where we can start to immediately focus on turning words into actions, fall into four broad areas of work:

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**1. Engaging with young people** – through collaboration with local authorities, schools and college networks to provide young people with meaningful and memorable experiences, to help them make the connection between farming and the bigger picture of climate, food, health, environment, and their own futures as citizens, and for their careers.

**2. Protecting and enhancing ecosystems and environment** – through collaboration with local government, farmers, researchers, conservationists, and enterprises in the voluntary, community, private and public sectors, to build our capacity and reputation as an exemplar of sustainable food and farming as an integral part of managing our landscape for a clean and biodiverse environment.

**3. Relocalising our food systems** – through collaboration with farmers, growers, processors, local and national government to improve or create the infrastructure to build shorter, fairer and resilient food supply chains to drive private and public procurement of more locally produced food as an integral part of a distinctive, thriving rural economy.

**4. Resourcing the transition** – through collaboration with local and national government, providers of professional services to the farming sector, educators, finance and funding organisations to ensure people, enterprises and communities have easy access to high quality, relevant advice and training, funding and finance to build their capacity.

This is not to prescribe or limit the scope of our action plan. Above all, we want this to be a dynamic and inclusive process, continually evolving as people come on board and work together with us.

We want to involve as many people, sectors and organisations as possible. To that end we will be holding meetings in Spring 2020 to discuss the emergent themes highlighted in this report, and practical ways of working together to put ideas into action.

This is an exciting time. So many people and organisations are prioritising the need to create more sustainable ways of living, working, eating, and caring for our wonderful landscapes and nature. The RSA Food Farming and Countryside Commission has been the catalyst to bring us to this point of action. We are very grateful to them, and with their continued support we look forward to working with a wide coalition of people from across our communities to make the vision a reality.

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### **A vision for the South West**

To be an exemplar of sustainable food and farming systems in action, respectfully utilising our unique assets of climate, landscape, and regional gastronomy to support the health, well-being and prosperity of current and future generations of people, communities and landscapes of the South West.

And in so doing, positively contribute to our shared global mission to arrest climate change, and halt the degradation of habitats and precious natural environments around the world.



Supported by:



THE ASHDEN TRUST



8 John Adam Street  
London WC2N 6EZ  
+44 (0)20 7930 5115

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The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes in a world where everyone is able to participate in creating a better future. Through our ideas, research and a 30,000 strong Fellowship we are a global community of proactive problem solvers, sharing powerful ideas, carrying out cutting-edge research and building networks and opportunities for people to collaborate, influence and demonstrate practical solutions to realise change.

The RSA has been at the forefront of social change for over 260 years. Today our work focuses on supporting innovation in three major areas; creative learning and development, public services and communities and economy, enterprise and manufacturing.

Central to the RSA's current work are the concepts of 'convening' and 'change making'. The RSA has also developed a distinctive approach to change: 'Think like a system, act like an entrepreneur' which now runs through our projects.

The RSA: uniting people and ideas to resolve the challenges of our time.