

FORK IN THE ROAD



The RSA Food, Farming & Countryside Commission

FORK

IN THE ROAD

A book about a seven-month bicycle ride around the UK
to hear the too often unheard voices.

With thanks to everyone who contributed along the way.



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When I was asked to chair the RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, I knew that I wanted to lead a different sort of Commission. At the Commission launch I talked about convening new conversations, through which we could shape radical and practical proposals, informed by proper appreciation of the real challenges that citizens, businesses and communities face in tackling the huge challenges before us.

I did not know then quite how radical and practical that might be.

This book describes our radical and practical method for getting out of London, around the UK, and talking to people. People who are having to deal with the material impacts of the far-reaching changes ahead for countryside communities and rural economies.

And instead of the usual kinds of consultations – which of course also have their place in our work – the research teams went out to meet people where they are – in their homes, their workplaces, in schools and communities.

In my world we get used to working in a certain language – the language of business and strategy, policy and leadership. This can end up permeating the way we do ‘consultation.’ We ask the questions that make sense to us, from our perspectives, without, sometimes, pausing to find out what people really want to say.

I have been inspired and encouraged by the stories our researchers have brought back. So much of our food, farming and countryside has become invisible to us. Even when we know a part of it, other aspects are still opaque, even though they are intimately connected with one another.

From the high-tech developments, utilising latest robotics and eye-popping technology, to the pared back practices in agroecological holdings; from the

scale and pace of national logistics operations that get food from warehouses to shops, to the community growing projects on village allotments. From fishing to forestry; from festivals to care farming: we saw projects that demonstrate farming at the heart of their communities. Projects like the regular school visits for children with special needs, or working with people with mental health needs, refugees, older, lonely or isolated people.

What will you find as you leaf through the pages of this book?

The UK countryside is incredibly diverse and things work in different ways that can appear invisible or irrelevant to others. People want to be able to shape policies in ways that work for them.

People in cities feel disconnected from the countryside. Rural communities feel disconnected from governments, and sometimes they feel that rural needs and concerns are overlooked.

Creativity and innovation are everywhere. Not just universities but also in farmers networks, putting ideas into practice, and in communities, using their ingenuity to make things work every day.

People demonstrate the most extraordinary perseverance. But this relies on having time and emotional resilience. At times, that resilience is finely balanced on a tipping point.

Frankly it is a humbling story. We are at a fork in the road. Those of us in positions of leadership in business and in government have much to learn from those who just get on and take up leadership in their own communities.

Sir Ian Cheshire

Chair of the RSA Food, Farming & Countryside Commission

This Book

In spring 2018, the weather took an unexpected turn, and the countryside braced itself to face turbulent weather, as well as a turbulent political outlook. Against this chilling and unpredictable backdrop, our first researcher set out from London, with a little trepidation, on a bike, to meet people who live and work in London's nearest countryside, to listen, to chat and find out more about what matters to them.

In the course of seven months, 24 researchers travelled the UK, from Sheppey to Shetland, Cardigan to Cromer, Armagh to St Austell. They met over 300 people, groups and businesses – and they encountered warmth and generosity wherever they went. People shared their stories and their experiences, their dinner and, occasionally, offered a bed for the night.

In the tradition of many before them – from William Cobbett on his Rural Rides, who sought to understand the stories he was hearing about the countryside, to Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard who argued that the point of anthropology was to help people from different cultures to understand and respect each other – our cyclists set out from London to travel to the far reaches of the UK. It was a transformative experience. Challenging, inspiring, heart-wrenching, frustrating, emotional, visceral, enlightening.

We embarked on this journey to inform the work of the Commission, so we could understand in depth and detail the real, grounded stories from everyday life in the countryside. But we soon realised that there was another story to tell, that couldn't be contained in a conventional commission report, one that we wanted to show and share. We didn't want this to be just part of the story; we wanted it to be the story.

In our now worryingly polarised and tribal country, it is more important than ever to find those points of reconnection – going to places which feel very different to those we're used to, beyond what feels comfortable and commonplace, and genuinely curious to find out what you might learn. When it comes to the huge choices before us – our relationship with Europe, how we'll tackle climate breakdown, biodiversity loss, degraded soils, air and water

quality, regenerating our economy and our communities – the path to genuine progress will have to be taken together.

This book curates glimpses of the journey round the country; who our researchers met, what they saw and heard, and what they found when they travelled the UK for the RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission.

And still it barely does justice to the material. Over 500,000 words of notes and 2,158 miles later, their work, and the contributions of all those they met, are informing the FFCC report, with a rich seam of real stories and experiences often lost in conventional research processes.

We haven't been able to include everywhere we went. We could have included stories from the sea – the crab fisherman at Cromer and salmon in Shetland. We've barely scratched the surface of livestock and meat production. The uplands and dairy story is just one part of it, but we've left out here the poultry and pig farmers, who, between them, produce the most popular meats – chicken and bacon. There's nothing on the markets and abattoirs, an essential piece of the livestock story. Forestry and agroforestry are only mentioned in passing. And we could have told many more stories from communities who are working together to solve their most pressing problems.

Some of these are told in the blog series that accompanies the tour; some will be told in our final report; and some are already being well told elsewhere. In making our choices for this book, we decided to pick out the everyday stories that can sometimes get overlooked; and the overarching themes that are both taken for granted and that transcend place. The things that connect us, across the countryside and between countryside and towns.

Sue Pritchard

Director of the RSA Food, Farming & Countryside Commission



Methods

In a conversation in an office in the heart of London.

“So how are we going to meet and talk to people around the country?”

“We need to get beyond the ‘usual suspects’”

“How can we make sure we get to see the right variety of people?”

“And where should we go?”

“How can we get round all the different kinds of places in the UK?”

“Trains don’t go deep into the countryside anymore – and driving all over the place is not ideal...”

“How about we go everywhere? On a bike...?”

“.....”

It is notoriously difficult to do good citizen and community engagement, especially in rural communities. Towns and villages are geographically dispersed; public transport is poor; digital connectivity is patchy. These communities are not easily found through typical consultation processes – inviting people to ‘focus groups’ or ‘town hall’ meetings. And so much conventional public engagement follows fundamentally the same patterns. Citizens are invited into unfamiliar spaces, required to adopt corporate behaviours – sitting round tables, or in circles, using unfamiliar language, engaging in strange practices with post-it notes, or flip charts. Sometimes this can work very well. It is, after all, how many large and small group processes are designed. But there’s no getting away from the fact that it sets up a particular power dynamic, tipped in favour of the ‘consulting’ body. Even when it works well, asking the same people similar questions, for subtly different purposes can quickly generate ‘consultation fatigue.’

And when it doesn’t work, it’s not unusual to blame the citizens – calling them ‘hard-to-reach.’

There’s no such thing as hard to reach groups; only badly designed processes.

So we used a different method to guide us.

Ethnography is a deliberative and systematic way of learning about people in their communities. It is designed to understand as far as possible peoples’ worlds from their points of view. Researchers engage in extensive field work; data is collected through interview, through observation – symbols, artefacts, images, and most of all, everyday experiences.

In ethnography, we’re looking for patterns, for ideas and beliefs expressed through language, but also through commonplace practices – what people actually say and do, how they live and work, their habits, their rituals and culture – in short, how people do things round here. Often such things are so much part of what we take for granted that they become invisible to us. But to outsiders, they stand out. What one group considers unremarkable and normal, another group sees unfamiliar and different. And in this way the taken for granted is rendered visible.

Few of our researchers had food or farming backgrounds and some were not even that conversant with the UK’s countryside. They knew they would be encountering something new to them, sometimes unfamiliar and sometimes meeting people with very different values, beliefs and experiences.

For most of our researchers, this was a new way of working. Before they set out, they were briefed; this included trainings on how to gather information through observation, journaling, photos, but also what to expect themselves. We explained; you’ll be learning a lot about the people and places you’ll see. You’ll also learn a lot about yourself. When they returned, they were debriefed and they wrote up accounts of their travels.

Why does this matter? Any policy is only as good as its capacity for implementation. And so much policy falls by the wayside in its journey from Westminster (or Senedd, Stormont or Holyrood) to where it’s supposed to be delivered. There are many explanations. Experts in developing and drafting policies are not necessarily expert in all the detailed content of those policies. Centres of government are far from some parts of the country – and differences across this small island can be forgotten. And because, so often, policy crafted in one department can have unintended or unforeseen consequences on policies developed in others. In our everyday lives, we don’t inhabit policy silos, but we do live with the disruptions, the irritations caused by them. Mostly, we can get away with the workarounds. But for many, especially those with fewer resources, this can be more than frustrating; it can be life altering.

So it is essential that people who recommend policies do so with a deep appreciation of what it will mean for the people most affected by them – and who have to make them work. And better still, invite people who have to implement policy to help craft policy.

As critical ethnographers, we also want to amplify the voices of people who feel they are unheard, ignored, marginalised, and misunderstood.

By getting on a bike and going to where people are, mainly by invitation but otherwise simply through showing up out of interest and curiosity, we wanted to demonstrate that we are serious about involving the broadest cross section of citizens and communities in our work, understanding their concerns and fears, as well as their hopes and dreams.

So how do we know if we’ve done a good job?

In evaluating ethnographic research, we ask ourselves some different questions.

1. Has it contributed to our understanding of the people and communities we’re researching?
2. Does it demonstrate reflective self-awareness on the part of the researchers?
3. Does it affect me emotionally? Does it move me?
4. Does it seem true – is it a credible account of the real?
5. Does it add up to something that is both attractive and respectful?

Through the pages of this book, we invite you to judge for yourselves.



The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
 And sorry I could not travel both
 And be one traveller, long I stood
 And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;
 Then took the other, as just as fair,
 And having perhaps the better claim,
 Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there
 Had worn them really about the same,
 And both that morning equally lay
 In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!
 Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
 I doubted if I should ever come back.
 I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:
 Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
 I took the one less travelled by,
 And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

Weather

Talking about the weather, that favourite British pastime. Oscar Wilde said it was the refuge of the unimaginative, but it would be unimaginable to publish a book about food, farming and the countryside in 2018 without mentioning it; it was a year of extremes.

Children up and down the nation enjoyed superb sledding conditions in spring whilst sun worshippers made the most of the dry, Mediterranean weather throughout the summer. But for farmers and land managers, whose livelihoods depend on favourable conditions at the right time of year, the conditions were anything but welcome. The year was marked by a slow start and late spring, leading to poorer stock performance, feed shortages, lower crop yields, water shortages and loss of income. A salad farmer from Shropshire told us,

“I reckon this year was the hardest we’ve ever had, and in all the years I’ve been farming I’ve had some difficult years. They are getting more and more regular, it definitely feels like things are changing.”

Late February saw the beginning of an unseasonably cold passage of Siberian polar air move west across Europe, the so-called Beast from the East. The below freezing temperatures, heavy snowfall and biting winds damaged crops and left fields waterlogged. Farmers were pulling ewes and lambs out of snowdrifts. The prolonged wet conditions damaged land, which took longer to recover.

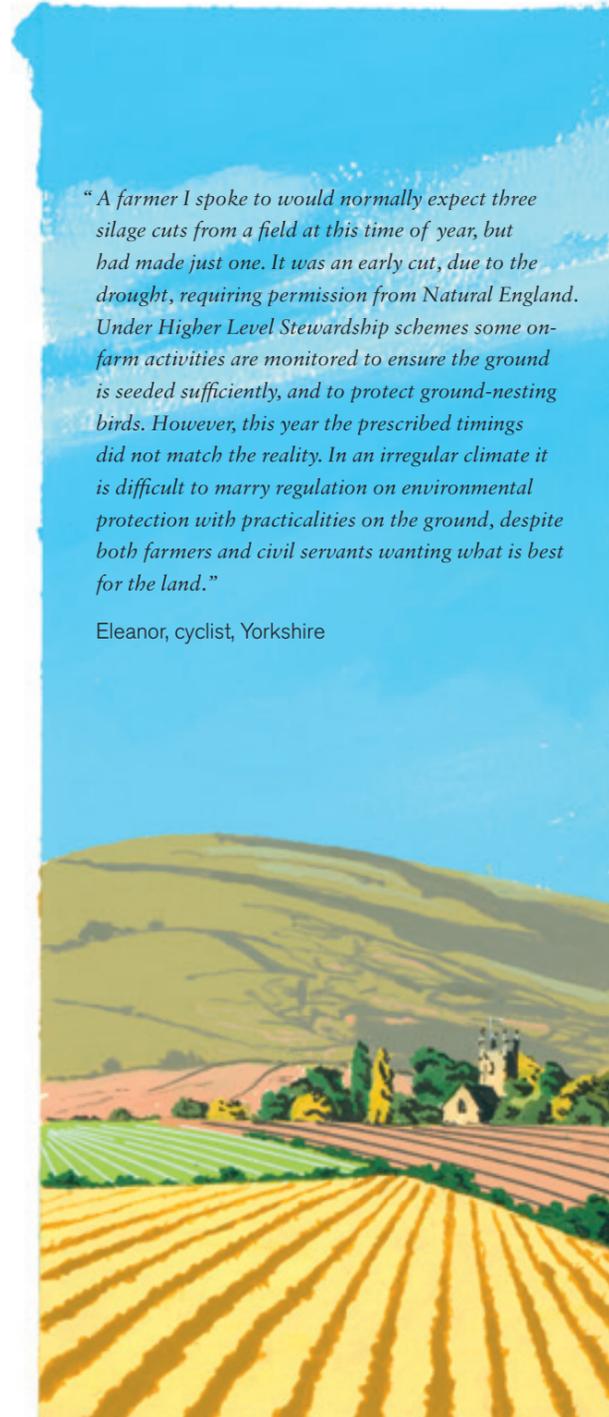
Seemingly no sooner had the snow cleared, but the length and breadth of the UK was consumed by one of the most severe heatwaves and droughts since 1976, baking the soil hard. At the peak of the hot weather, our cyclists criss-crossed the scorched brown uplands of Yorkshire and Northumberland, hearing first-hand stories of wildfires destroying whole fields of crops.

With a changing climate and ever more frequent extreme weather events, what changes will the UK and global agricultural systems have to make to weather the storms ahead?



“During the Beast from the East freeze a lot of the buds on the blueberry bushes got frost-bitten, even though they’re in polytunnels. Yields will be considerably down this year.”

James, soft fruit farmer, Scotland



“A farmer I spoke to would normally expect three silage cuts from a field at this time of year, but had made just one. It was an early cut, due to the drought, requiring permission from Natural England. Under Higher Level Stewardship schemes some on-farm activities are monitored to ensure the ground is seeded sufficiently, and to protect ground-nesting birds. However, this year the prescribed timings did not match the reality. In an irregular climate it is difficult to marry regulation on environmental protection with practicalities on the ground, despite both farmers and civil servants wanting what is best for the land.”

Eleanor, cyclist, Yorkshire



“As the grass didn’t grow over the summer we have a shortage of silage and hay. I’ll have to dig in to my winter stores early. I’m hoping for a mild, short winter otherwise I’ll likely run out.”

Mark, farmer, Sussex

Suffolk

To cycle through Suffolk is to see the tensions between different land uses play out in real time. From the protected nature reserve on the coastal strip, through farms of arable and turf, past large houses with swimming pools and tennis courts, and all within commuting distance of London; land in Suffolk is in high demand.

Farming round here is changing. The common agricultural policy has encouraged agglomeration; small farms have been bought up by large. Growing grass for turf is more lucrative than growing food crops. Farmers often resist these changes, with one telling me that farming on huge units just didn't feel like farming. But the economic imperative to scale up can feel, to some, irresistible.

There are alternative models for land use and food production that work hand in hand with activities that support a sustainable environment and strong communities. The work of cooperatives such as Oak Tree Low Carbon Farm and the People's Community Garden in Ipswich, which helps troubled kids connect to and work the land, hints at an alternative future.

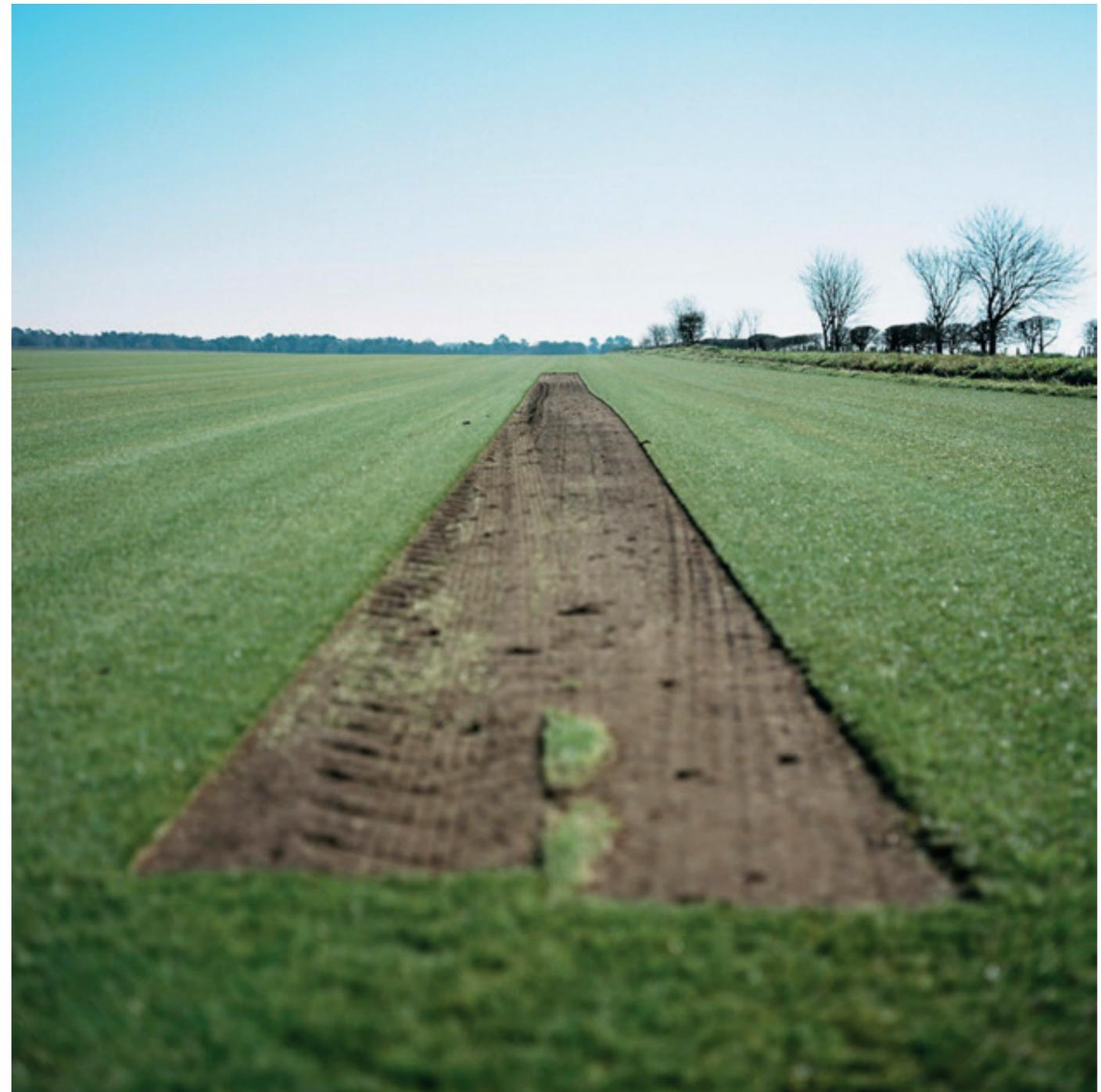
But these small groups struggle to break out of the margins and are reliant on the goodwill of members, as well as small grants from trusts and funds. And there is often mutual distrust between farmers and environmentalists, a tension that plays out in Writtle Agricultural College, as more students from non-farming backgrounds come with new ideas about how to manage land.

Demand for housing from families seeking a better quality of life in the countryside places additional pressures on land. This movement of people brings with it tensions. A pig farmer admitted,

"It's a sore spot around here. People moved out here years ago to get away from all the people. But more and more people come."

The question of how to balance the interests of agribusiness and traditional agriculture, environmental experiments and nature reserves with housing and associated infrastructure is central to the future of the county.

Lynne – cyclist



Lincolnshire

The first thing you notice is the sky. A land with few obvious features draws your eye over an expansive horizon, only disrupted by the biting westerly winds, which I can tell you make for tough cycling! Field after field, Fenland to the Wolds, Lincolnshire is a food producing powerhouse, with over half of England's grade one agricultural land within its borders.

Agriculture and horticulture bind many of the communities here. Lincolnshire produces over 12 percent of England's food, and processes 70 percent of its fish. Pointing to the bottom of a closed-up cauliflower, a man in a car park tells me you can tell a fresh one by the cut mark underneath,

"If it's dried out it's yesterday's cauli, which will get you a worse price at the auction."

Spalding Auction was created for the local community and offers a place for growers who aren't large enough to attract supermarket contracts to sell their produce. A tough winter in 2017 combined with Brexit uncertainty has made it difficult for horticultural businesses. The auction's general manager, Mike, tells me,

"DEFRA has lost its voice in Europe and we're suffering."

He was concerned that European businesses are now looking elsewhere where they can.

Despite the challenges, the farmers I spoke to were confident in the agricultural sector's future in Lincolnshire. Precision farming, a field-by-field, data-driven approach to farming has been taken up by many here who are keen to understand what innovations work. Simon, a future-focused farming director, told me about their experimentation with direct drilling, a practice yielding both environmental and economic gains. He said,

"Where we are going is efficiency with soils – it is our foundation. Spot sprays, robot weeding, mechanical harvesting and much smaller equipment is the future."

The people I met in Lincolnshire are used to tough conditions and are keen to get on with what they do best – feeding the nation.

Kenny – cyclist



Mike Knight,
Spalding Auction



Simon Day,
Worth Farms

Landscapes

There are some things we heard almost everywhere we cycled.

*“This land is different to that land.”
“This place is different to that place.”*

In the countryside, the landscape shapes communities and the people in them.

“Men and women are hefted in those hills just as much as the sheep they care for.”
Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

“Beauty is more than a service to us. It fulfils something other, material, things cannot, and it enriches our lives in all kinds of unexpected and vital ways.”
Dame Fiona Reynolds



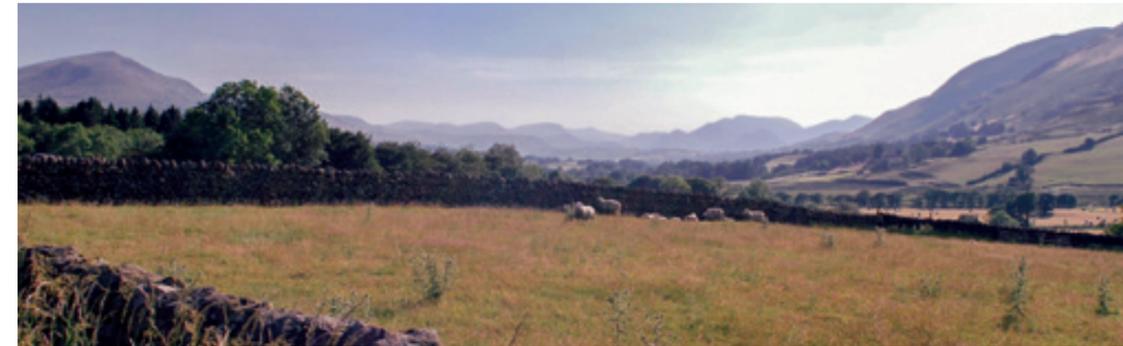
Arable
In the UK, 72% of the total land area, around 17.5 million hectares, is agricultural land. Over a third of this is croppable – cereals, oilseed, potatoes, horticultural crops, and other arable crops.



Coast
Nowhere on this island nation are you more than 80 miles from the coast. The British Cartographic Society calculates that the coastline of the UK and its islands is 19,491 miles long.



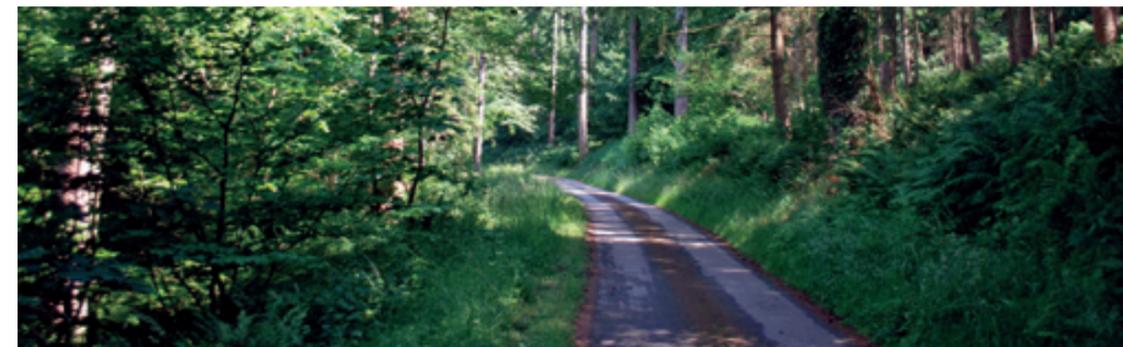
Lowland pasture
Around 40% of the UK's surface is grassland, the vast majority of which is used for farmland and grazing.



Upland pasture
Most upland comprises land which is designated difficult to farm. In Scotland this is 84% of all land, 80% in Wales, 69% in Northern Ireland and 16% in England.



Rivers
For centuries, rivers have been the life blood of communities, providing water for drinking, farming, industry and transport. Most of the world's chalk streams are found in England.



Woodland
Essential for habitats, carbon sequestration, and timber production, the UK's woodland cover is one of the lowest in Europe, at just 13%. Average woodland cover in the EU is 38%.

Nottinghamshire

Almost every major UK city is located where it is because of its proximity to water: for drinking, for power, for transport. Rivers have shaped our world for millions of years. And yet, rivers have almost disappeared in our contemporary topographies, hidden in comparison to the hard landscaping of urban infrastructures, roads and railways, housing and industry.

The River Trent runs west to east through the Midlands, from Staffordshire through Nottinghamshire before joining the Humber in Lincolnshire on its way to the North Sea. It is said to mark the divide between the Midlands and the North.

Newark, an old wool and cloth town, is perched on the south side of the river. Surrounded by a mixture of old pit villages and more prosperous countryside, it is an attractive town in a desirable location.

Here, fields are being developed for housing – a lucrative option for a small number of farmers and landowners. But Newark has faced centuries of flooding and developers are expected to mitigate flood risk once they have bought the land. The trouble is that the desirable developments and most effective farming is downstream, while it is in the upstream fields that flood mitigation is most needed and effective.

On the road I met Roger Pykett, who runs a diversified farm just outside the town. He proposed that by working together farmers, landowners and developers could all win: schemes could link downstream developers to upstream landowners to absorb and store water before it becomes a flood potential. These fields are the most flood-prone and difficult to farm. And it means developers could build more homes per acre downstream.

Cycling through Nottinghamshire you see the ways in which natural geography and history are still writ large in contemporary social conditions and inequalities. Roger's suggestion made me think of how cooperation between unlikely partners could lead the way to a flourishing countryside.

Jonathan – cyclist



Roger used a Forestry Commission grant to employ 26 students to plant 64,000 poplar trees in one of his fields by the Trent. Although the grant wasn't associated with flood prevention, the poplar forest soil is a sponge for flood waters, helping to mitigate and filter peak flows, rather than contribute runoff as might happen with ploughed and cultivated fields. Despite providing an important ecosystem service, the woodland wasn't eligible for area-based subsidy under the EU's common agricultural policy, and also lowered the value of the land – in part because land values for farmland reflect the anticipation of future farming subsidy.



Newark-on-Trent

Highlands & Islands

This is the most remote land in the UK. The population density is among the lowest in Europe, on a par with northern Finland. Harsh weather conditions, distance from markets, lack of infrastructure and few public services define rural life, but through this shines a strong identity and sense of place, forged through a deep connection to the land.

After some long, hilly cycles through ancient glacial landscapes I ended up in Achiltibuie, a small hamlet 24 miles northwest of the port town Ullapool. My conversations with langoustine fishermen and North West Highlands Geopark staff touched upon everything from the burgeoning Chinese market for Scottish crab to the old crofting communities that once lived here, but connection to place was the common thread throughout. Over a cup of tea at her house, Laura told me;

“It’s important to keep these kinds of places viable to live in. Some people can’t live in cities, they need to be out in nature like this. It’s important for their mental health.”

Politically, Edinburgh can feel as far away as Westminster and the lack of public services makes life tough, but people stay because being a Highlander means something much deeper, and it’s crucial these communities are supported.

On the Isle of Skye, I encountered an example of how embracing place and culture had become an effective tool to create a thriving community. In 2005, the Gaelic language medium was reintroduced to some schools, with much controversy, but had a transformative effect on young people;

“You used to have to go away and leave the island to be a success. Now with the Gaelic college you can stay, young people have a future.”

Janette, crofter

Elliot – cyclist, Highlands

Shetland is another part of the incredibly diverse landscape of the Highlands & Islands. It is closer to Norway than to Edinburgh. Flying in, on a bright sunny day, the green-grey rock, blanketed by black peat, appears out of the deep, blue-black North Sea. It is far from the mainland, and right up against elemental forces, breathtakingly beautiful – even as you’re holding your breath landing on the (surely too short!) airstrip. Shetlanders can resent being coupled up with the other ‘Highland & Islanders.’ They have a different culture, different climate and conditions, a different language. And their economy has been booming, bringing wealth and prosperity to these islands. But it’s based on fast shifting sectors – oil and gas, fishing and aquaculture. They see change coming too, but, as they say, they know how to weather a storm here.

Sue – train, plane, automobile, Shetland



Education

Sometimes it seems that, whatever the big social problems, the answer is always ‘we need to educate the children.’

In our travels, we spent time with children and young people in schools, community groups and at agricultural shows to find out what they thought. Their answers surprised us.

Asking three and four-year olds to draw their favourite foods, we probably expected to see a fair smattering of treats and sweets. What we got were pictures that included their friends and family eating with them. When they thought about what they eat, what was important to them was who they ate with.

Even at seven and eight years old, children have a pretty clear idea about which foods are healthy and which foods are not. We asked them to create a campaign to help us change food and farming. What they knew about how food was produced, and why people eat unhealthy foods, impressed us and even surprised their teachers. Perhaps this is not simply about lack of knowledge and the need for more education.

We talked to 11 and 12 year-olds about when they eat healthy and unhealthy foods. They told us that eating together is how they socialise. And if that means going to the fast food shops after school, it is mainly to be with their friends, hanging out, sitting down together, somewhere safe and warm, where they feel welcome – learning about friendships and belonging through the social life of food.

So if, as it seems, children already know quite a bit about healthy eating, what else is shaping their choices?



Judging the hotly contested Schools Competition at Lincolnshire County Show, I saw in vivid (and eye-moistening) detail just how much these children and young people understand – and care about – the interconnections between food and farming, their countryside and global environmental challenges – from the nursery classes up.

I needed a tissue before the end of the presentation from St Giles Nursery School on how to grow a sandwich. Castle Wood School’s display on building a quiet communal garden for older people was expertly worked up in thought and in detail. My winner, Scrampton School, had developed an organic ‘carpet mulch,’ to minimise herbicide and pesticide use in horticulture operations, which decomposes to fertilise the soil.

Sue – County Show Judge



Sawtry Day Nursery
Ages 3-4



Barnabas Oley
Primary School
Ages 7-8



Alderman Jacobs
Primary School
Ages 10-11

Dumfries & Galloway

Still lochs, dark skies and enchanting forests, coupled with a rich agricultural history and food culture; it's little wonder that this area has inspired poets, writers and artists for centuries.

It is a region of striking beauty. Yet as I travelled through Dumfries and Galloway I found a proud but undervalued community in which the towns, villages and farms face a flight of industry, opportunity and youth.

While I was there news emerged that Pinneys, a seafood factory owned by food giant Young's, would be closing its factory in Annan. The closure not only threatened the jobs of hundreds of factory employees, it put at serious risk many of the nearby businesses and suppliers that depend on the workforce and supply chain to survive.

Where jobs and opportunity leave rural areas, so too do young people. And with an ageing population the community's businesses struggle to stay afloat. As a dairy farmer told me,

"There's a downward spiral going on – we've lost the last cinema in the town, we've more or less lost everything."

Many look to tourism to arrest the decline. A dairy farm I visited outside Glencaple had borrowed to invest in holiday homes which were finally bringing in a profit. But across the region, demand is simply not high enough.

Sandwiched between the Lake District and the Highlands, Dumfries and Galloway hasn't received the same attention from government, tourists and investors as its better-known neighbours. And even if it did, as MSP Joan McAlpine told me, the seasonal and part-time work it would provide would be unlikely to stem the flow of young people out of the area.

For now, the region gets by on the goodwill of its inhabitants. The full-time care worker who organises the food market in her free time; the dairy farmer who builds a path along a river bank; the locals who raise £4,000 a year through a car park honesty box which last year was pooled to buy a defibrillator.

These social resources are indispensable. But with the long-term prospects for local farming and industry bleak, the community will need more than goodwill alone to sustain itself.

Tom P – cyclist



MSP Joan McAlpine told me that the seasonal and part-time work tourism would provide would be unlikely to stem the flow of young people out of the area.

Collaboration

Policymakers often talk about the need for better collaboration. But the contradictions in how we think about collaboration abound. It seems an obvious thing to do: but it can be complex, requiring cooperation, compromise and trust.

There is still much to be learned about practical ways to support collaboration. How can we support farmers and producers with advice that is independent of sales? Can farmer networks thrive without a proactive individual or facilitator?

And yet for all the talk of needing to encourage more collaboration, we found that it is widespread and happening up and down the country, often hidden in plain sight.

“Jubilee is the first community-owned farm in Northern Ireland; we raised over £300,000 with 156 member-owners. We work with Christians, churches and communities, including with people of differing backgrounds and beliefs. At our Bioblitz Festival, we welcomed more than 400 members of the public to participate in a 24-hour programme of walks, talks and citizen-science. As well as cultivating vegetables and wildflowers, we are cultivating community; using ecology and agroecology as tools to promote reconciliation in our still-divided, post-conflict society.”

Jonny Hanson

Jubilee Farm Co-op

“We work closely with growers in our area on water, irrigation, pooling resources, and labour to ensure we can all maximise yield and quality of our crops. We take part in a benchmarking group where we compare cost of production for all crops to ensure we are staying competitive, as well as machinery ownership and pooling labour. Having these conversations with a wider group is a great way of sharing ideas and learning from others to ensure we stay at the top of our industry.”

Simon Day

Worth Farms

“The spirit of Ennerdale Valley influences how the land is managed today. It’s a place of change, dominating conifers are slowly being softened by native trees, stark boundaries between forest and open fell are blurring, and grazing is moving from intensive sheep to more extensive cattle. Prior to Wild Ennerdale, land management was functional and restricted to boundaries influenced by ownership. However, the ecological restoration opportunities thrive best when we work together at a landscape scale bringing together farmers, foresters, water specialists, ecologists, local people and tourism providers. Utilising each other’s skills and experience we are learning to work alongside natural processes with a future natural vision for a wilder valley.”

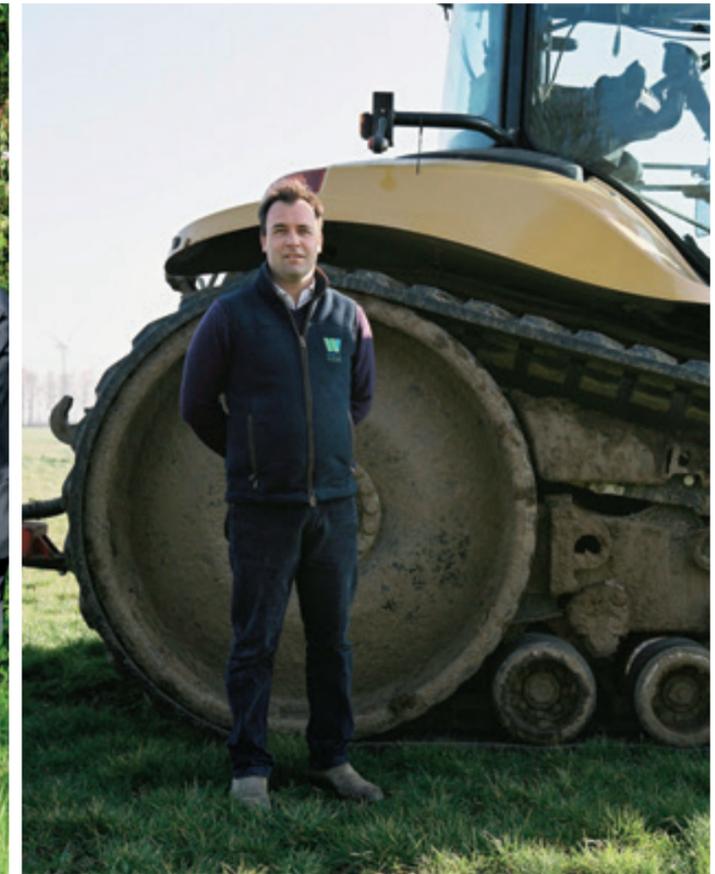
Gareth Browning

Wild Ennerdale

“The initiative was one of the Duchy College’s most successful recent projects because it was underpinned by strong links across sectors and networks. It boosted farm productivity through better animal health using preventative rather than reactive measures. It brought together vets, farmers and livestock specialists to introduce proactive farm health planning for producers across the region. In some cases, it cut calf mortality rates by 10% and boosted calf growth rates, in turn increasing profits.”

Paul Ward

The Southwest Healthy Livestock Initiative



Images clockwise from top:

Jubilee Farm Co-op

Simon Day

Ennerdale Valley

Cumbria

'Sheepwrecked hills.' The phrase coined by George Monbiot for what he calls the 'biodiversity desert' in the uplands. My cycles and conversations through Wordsworth's craggy hills were peppered with his name and the debate that it symbolises; feelings either side of the debates ran high. Brexit and the change to common agricultural policy payments has added further fuel to the fire, and the debate burns on. But it comes back to a simple question; what do we value as a society? The traditions and skills of uplands farmers who have been working the land for generations? Beauty? The ecological and environmental benefits of ceding less productive land back to nature?

In the Lake District, Herdwick sheep have been bred over centuries to be hardy and territorial, safely roaming the commons unfenced. Each flock has their patch – their heaf. Attachment to land and place isn't reserved to sheep, as one person I met poetically put it,

"Farmers, sheep and dogs walk all over the hills in synchronicity, flowing down the valleys like water."

Like the Herdwicks, farmers knowledge of the heaf is passed down. One farmer told me,

"There is no value attributed to local knowledge; if you remove the livestock from the hills, you remove the labour, and then you remove the next generation. There won't be a way to replace what is lost. If you take young farmers out of the landscape, you are stripping it of its true capital."

Through the beating late June sunshine, I cycled to the chocolate box village of Ambleside to meet staff from the University of Cumbria and a local adventurer, to discuss the challenges the uplands are currently facing. One of them painted a vivid picture of the realities of the all too often polarising viewpoints,

"There is a vociferous aura around rewilding. There are some within the movement who understand the complexities, yet the ones who speak the loudest are extremists who drown out the realists...farming communities are turning inward, they are feeling under attack by environmentalists. Since the 1980s there have been two opposing forces between farming and conservation and that has eroded the middle ground."

Rob – cyclist



Festivals

There is a long, colourful tradition of rural festivals and celebrations in the UK. Historically bound by the land and seasons – May Day, Plough Sunday, Harvest Festival – times have changed, and so have the festivals.

Commercial opportunities have in part driven the rapid rise in their number and variety. The seasonal revenue and associated tourism play a significant role in economic diversification for rural communities, responding to the economic challenges of decreasing populations and limited employment prospects.

But festivals are about much more than money. They provide tangible social benefits – places to meet, to reconnect to culture, heritage and people; to share ideas; to volunteer; broaden knowledge and understanding; and for fun and enjoyment. The County Shows held throughout the UK are shining examples: they are a core part of the countryside calendar, celebrating heritage, local food, agriculture, artisans, businesses, and artists alike.

We visited festivals and shows on the bike, seeing how they create jobs, support local entrepreneurs, restaurateurs and hoteliers and boost tourism – the owner of a BnB in Hay-on-Wye told us they make a large portion of their annual income during the ten-day festival.

In Abergavenny, our cyclist spoke to Aine Morris, Chief Executive of Abergavenny Food Festival, who told us,

“The festival plays an essential role in bringing tourists into Monmouthshire and driving spending, as well as being a delicious and informative weekend event. Over a period of 20 years, the festival has gained a national reputation as one of the UK’s leading food events, bringing together farmers, chefs, food producers, and food writers from across Wales and the UK. A 2012 economic impact report calculated that approximately £4m worth of economic benefit is brought into the region by the food festival each year. The impact of the food festival reaches not only local bars, restaurants and B&Bs, but also the wider community by attracting enterprising and entrepreneurial young people into the area as they open new food businesses. Rural communities across the country are searching for ways to maintain resilient and robust regional economies. Abergavenny has been able to deliver in this area, as the food festival offers a fun, creative and engaging visitor experience, through which better regional economic development can be delivered.”



Images clockwise from top:
Abergavenny Food Festival
RSA at Wilderness Festival
FFCC at Hay Festival

Northern Ireland

A distinct line spans across the map. Peddling up a winding path to Helen's cider farm in County Armagh on a bright summer day, it was easy to forget the complex history that has made the border here a major sticking point in the Brexit negotiations. Less than 20 miles from the orchard, boxes of Helen's apples currently move freely over the border to be pressed and bottled in the Republic of Ireland before returning to be sold in Northern Ireland. Helen fears that disruption to this flow of goods or additional costs through tariffs could bring the end to her business, which has been in her family for five generations. She told me,

"Those who believe no deal is better than a bad deal are not earning a living from the land."

In border cities and towns like Armagh, people cross the border on a weekly or daily basis to visit their bank, fill up on fuel or drop in to pubs and restaurants. The owner of a local convenience store noted the futility of trying to impose control over the border. The conversation moved on to the smuggling that used to happen over the border. When I asked about the possibility of smuggling being revived, another quipped,

"You got to get your name in early. There are already offers being made!"

I headed east to the Mourne Mountains, cycling through a verdant patchwork of fields and hills. The landscape is breathtakingly beautiful. Communities here are still connected to agriculture. I was told it's not like the rest of the UK,

"We're less industrialised, here you're at most two generations from the land."

I stop by at Castlescreen Farm, where they have a new herd of native Dexter cattle. The Dexters are gaining in popularity due to their size and quality of meat. Since they're smaller and live more lightly on the land, you can keep two and a half per acre compared to one per acre of the heavier breeds.

In this uncertain political climate, people's connections with their land shows no sign of changing – and the resurgence of the hardy, well adapted and resilient native breeds seems like a fitting symbol of that.

Brhmie – cyclist



Work

Hard work with hard hands on hard land. Long hours through beating sun, unrelenting rain or falling snow in sheep-flecked southern downs and northern hills. This is the traditional image of work in the countryside; and farmers carrying on these traditional skills are proud of what they do.

Yet work in the countryside has always been much more than this. A fraction of the rural population works in food and farming, and of those, a minority are farmers and their families. What's more, where we produce our food is changing. Urban horticulture is growing, moving closer to the towns and cities, where the markets are, shortening traditional supply chains.

Much farming work is seasonal. In the last two decades migrant labour has dominated fruit and veg picking. Farmers and growers are asking how they can fill that gap with the slow-down in migration.

Then there are those who are already creating new rural futures. From farming robots to care farming, from forestry to festivals, the face of food, farming and rural economies is changing, to meet new and pressing environmental and social needs and rapidly evolving market trends.

As well as being integral to the rural economy, farming and food – from field to fork – employs over 3.5 million people. We all eat food. We all have a stake in what we grow, how we grow it and where it's grown. But food debates have become symbolic of the polarisation permeating the UK. Omnivore or vegan? Intensive or extensive farming? Lamb or chicken? Fresh ingredients or ready meals? Cheap food or foodie fads?

These divisions are played out in sharp relief in the urban centres too. From the young chef, passionate about provenance, to the foodbank founder, who is filling in for failures in a fragile economic system;

"I founded Tower Hamlets foodbank because people couldn't afford to eat, though quickly learnt that lack of access to food was a symptom of a much bigger problem – absolute poverty, austerity and welfare reforms."

Denise Bentley



Mitch Pearce
Chef, Garden Museum Café



Denise Bentley
Chief Executive, First Love Foundation Foodbank



Kayianna Hatzimanolaki
Baker, Jolene



Robin Asquith
Care Farm Manager, Botton Village



Beverley Parker
Chief Executive, Rural Action Derbyshire



Paul Hayward
Farmer, Cold Harbour Farm



Mike Knight
General Manager, Spalding Auction



Abbie Sands
Food technologist apprentice, National Centre for Food Manufacturing

Greater Manchester

Last year marked 70 years since the founding of the NHS. This was celebrated in the traditional way: with cake and sweets. At Tameside Hospital, with central Manchester to the west and the Peak District just a few miles east, catering and services manager Emily Hewitson was disappointed;

“There are so many other food options we could celebrate with, it just sets the wrong tone.”

While we can forgive a momentary lapse, the conversation prompted me to consider the ways in which public bodies procure food and the type of food we eat in their care. The NHS is the largest provider of food in the UK, serving on average one million patients a day, as well as a large proportion of its 1.2 million strong workforce.

As in-patients, we are routinely served processed food which damages our health, at the same time as doctors seek to remedy our ailments, which often come in part from eating those very same foods. Vending machines in hospitals meanwhile offer fizzy drinks and high-sugar snacks at low prices.

Yet as I cycled through Greater Manchester I found places bucking the trend. Not least Emily’s hospital, Tameside. Here they have adopted a ‘fresh food first’ approach to procuring their food, avoiding processed food and prioritising fresh local produce instead. They work with the community to finetune their menus, holding open kitchen and open taster sessions for the public.

The significance of public procurement is often underacknowledged, and when working well, like at Tameside, can engage and strengthen local food and farming economies, making it easier for them to supply the hospital system. This is clearly a wider contribution of public institutions, both socially and economically, rather than their activities being purely seen as a cost to the public purse.

A nutritional advisor for East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust told me,

“The UK seems to view food as either reward or sanction. We tend to think of food first as a comfort or a treat and second as a source of shame or punishment.”

The question is how to go beyond this simplistic characterisation and combine comfort, health, nutrition, taste, and sustainability in food sourced from local farms and producers.

I saw first-hand at the hospitals I visited that large public sector organisations can improve the economy, environment, and the health and wellbeing of everyone they serve through effective public procurement. Just imagine what could happen if more hospitals followed their example.

Tom H – cyclist



Emily Hewitson, catering and services manager at Tameside Hospital

Wales

*Cawsom wlad i'w chadw, darn o dir
yn dyst ein, bod wedi mynnu byw.*

We were given a country to keep, a piece of land, as proof we insisted on living.

For those who want to find a piece of land, on which to live and work, the obstacles can seem insurmountable.

In Wales, the One Planet Development guidance has started to change that. At its simplest, it is planning guidance for low impact developments in rural communities. But it's also part of a distinctive and inspiring vision for a sustainable future for Wales. That is, in the lifetime of one generation, Wales should only use its fair share of the Earth's resources.

Lammas Ecovillage are pioneering a new approach to living and working sustainably on the land. A community of nine smallholdings, with seven and a half acres each, they blend traditional craft skills and modern green technologies, showing how it is possible to live a one planet life. The community design follows permaculture principles, in harmony with their landscape, regenerating the depleted land, using natural building techniques and conserving energy use, with a low ecological footprint.

In Carmarthenshire, Erica Thompson talked about her own One Planet Development experience. At Rhiw Las, a cluster of four new smallholdings gained planning permission at appeal in 2016, with land-based enterprises ranging from beekeeping to Celtic Harps. Erica also chairs the One Planet Council, a voluntary organisation dedicated to supporting and promoting One Planet Development in Wales and beyond. She told us,

"The OPD policy supports the creation of new ecological smallholdings. It sounds like a no-brainer but it's actually a very radical departure in UK planning policy; hence the long list of conditions and intensive monitoring. It was a long journey to get our planning permission but at this early stage I think each new application makes it easier for the ones that follow – we're certainly seeing that more recent applications have a clearer path and are getting through the system more quickly. Of course, to meet Wales' own aspirations, we all need to be living a 'One Planet' life, not just those of us on OPD smallholdings. I think there's a great challenge and opportunity here, to understand how we can be part of that bigger picture as individual holdings and as a community."

Jane Davidson lives in an adjacent county, in her own smallholding. As a Welsh Government AM, she was the architect of One Planet Development. Now Vice Chancellor at University of Wales Trinity St David, Jane acknowledges that progress has been slower than she'd hoped. With about 26 approved applications so far, Jane says:

"We thought it would take five years. It will take ten years, for planners and councils, and applicants, to learn how to make this work. But we will."

*Mi gerddaf gyda thi dros lwybrau maith.
I'll walk beside you over many paths.*

Fabian – cyclist

Images clockwise from top:

Jane Davidson

Erica Thompson

Rhiw Las smallholding (x2)



Logistics

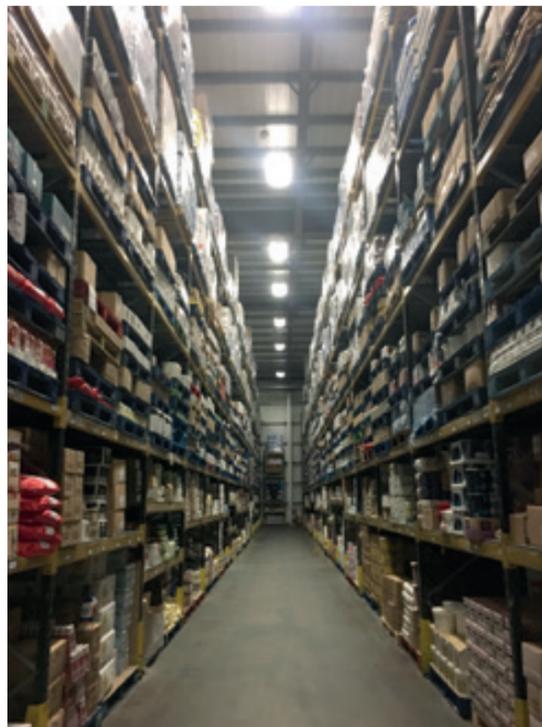
When we think about food and farming we tend to think of grazing livestock and fields of pasture and arable in shades of green. Perhaps if we are inured to the romance of the sector we think of factory farms and food processing units. Just as important, however, are the networks of distribution centres and vehicles transporting our food around the clock.

The Bidfood Birmingham distribution centre is located on an industrial estate a short train ride from the city centre. The large, square warehouses of the industrial estate, some 10 stories high, had a constant flow of lorries moving in and out – from the UK, France, Germany and further afield. There were parcel depots, car manufacturers and waste disposal centres. This was not somewhere you would typically associate with food.

Yet Bidfood is the UK's largest food distribution company with depots from Inverness to Ivybridge and over 4,500 employees. The Birmingham depot's 77 lorries deliver to schools, hospitals, care homes, caterers, retailers and restaurant chains across the West Midlands.

The inner workings of the warehouse were an intricate dance of incoming customer orders, deliveries, route planning, packing, haulage and distribution. Forklifts weave their way up and down aisles of pallets stacked six high. Trucks are packed and unpacked, bringing in food from across the continent and shipping it out across the country. Turnover times are kept short as warehouse space is an expensive overhead. The Birmingham warehouse has an 18-day stock depletion period. Goods in high demand run out in just a few days.

This 24 hours a day, 7 days a week flow illustrates the 'just-in-time' nature of our food system. The scale and complexity is hard to comprehend. Systems like these feed our essential public services, keep our supermarkets stocked and ensure the country has access to affordable food every day of the year.



It is a well-choreographed dance – without a single choreographer. Bidfood felt a long way from the nearby sheep farms but it brought home the enormity of feeding 66 million people every day.



Shropshire

In Shropshire I visited the country's largest cut-leaf salad producer. Travelling by bike gave a proper sense of the size of these fields. No room for coppice, woodland or hedgerow, just a vast expanse of identical rows of green leaf.

This was farming done at scale and across borders. Seedlings are bought in plugs from the Netherlands and planted by mostly migrant workers in spring for the summer harvest, and again in autumn for the spring harvest. GPS tractors set perfectly aligned rows optimising the amount of harvestable salad per acre. Huge machines and conveyor belts wash and bag the salad. People step in again for the final stage to pack the salad into crates for shipping.

Here we could see clearly how a high-tech, cheap migrant labour business model has replaced 'agri-culture' with 'agri-business.' Yet Brexit makes this every bit as precarious as smaller farms.

The risks to the value of the pound and the prospect of ending freedom of movement make the UK less desirable for migrant workers, with employers already finding it harder to recruit. I was told by one employer,

"We try to recruit UK workers but most leave after one day."

Pay is just over the minimum wage and the work is hard and unfamiliar to those brought up with different experiences and expectations.

For all the promise technology brings, every iceberg lettuce in the country is still harvested by hand. This work cannot yet be automated and requires skill. I left Shropshire with a greater awareness of the mechanics of producing a simple salad and wondering whether the sector will need new models to restore its resilience and profitability.

Lynne – cyclist



Gloucestershire

New to Gloucestershire, I read up on the area before leaving. The county has three main landscape areas: the Forest of Dean, the Severn Vale and the Cotswolds. I had the impression that the Cotswolds and the Forest couldn't be more different – one clean cut and affluent, the other rugged and wild. Instead of polarised opposites, I found much in common: I discovered projects in both areas working to bring consumers and producers together.

In Stroud I met Sam of Stroud Community Agriculture and in the Forest of Dean I met Rebekah of Blakeney Hill Growers. Both projects bring together the local community to share the costs of the farm, including wages for farmers and staff, and producing fruit, vegetables, meat, dairy, eggs and honey.

“I believe it's important to build a community with your neighbours,” explains Rebekah, *“and even better if it's around food.”*

Neither project relies on large EU subsidies or cheap migrant labour and so both are surprisingly resilient as Brexit threatens the livelihoods of their more established industry equivalents.

I also met Oliver of StroudCo and Judith of Dean Forest Food Hub. Both local food hubs operate like an online farmers' market, with many local food producers selling through a website and the food hub managing packing and distribution. Judith told me,

“The food hub also functions as a community for staff and volunteers, that come together each week to celebrate the local produce they help pack.”

I've always been a bit sceptical about the concept of food-commons, but this week on the bike showed me that commons-based enterprises not only exist and thrive, but can also be more economically sustainable than some of their conventional counterparts.

Fran – cyclist



Wellbeing

Farming can be lonely work, especially for farmers living alone. Days and weeks can go by with no one to speak to. In few professions is suicide so common, with one farmer dying by suicide every week in the UK. Loneliness is a growing problem in rural communities. Older people are particularly at risk, especially when their families move away to find work, or when public services and public transport are cut.

On the tour we came across many imaginative and effective ways in which people in the countryside are responding: communal gardens building community, getting disadvantaged kids to discover the joys of gardening, growing and the outdoors, care farms giving disabled people purposeful work and a richer life, and, of course, the peaceful spaces which offer rural and urban people alike a place to visit, to play and for respite from life's daily stresses.

“A lot of what we do is offering a listening ear when life doesn't always go according to plan and things get tough – you can't underestimate the power of a listening ear. Sometimes it can be a five-minute conversation, sometimes it can be a two-hour conversation. A recent survey found 90 percent of farmers we asked about our service really value our pastoral support. It's good to know we're helping to make a difference.”

Reverend Alan Griggs
Agricultural Chaplaincy Service

“We work across two wonderful gardens and run outreach sessions to reach the community in Ipswich and surrounding areas. They are our little piece of

paradise in a busy, busy world. Many of our placements are either people who are long term unemployed, living with mental health conditions, living with dementia, are socially isolated, refugees or asylum seekers, or from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. We encourage anybody to don those wellies and come and join us whether it is for the gardening, conservation, beekeeping, woodworking or just a good old cuppa and coming to see a friendly face for a chat.”

Danny Thorington
People's Community Garden

“We talked with our members and discovered that although people joined for the veg, what they found most precious was working together on the land and being outdoors. The theme that comes out is how people come to the farm for an hour or so but inevitably end up staying longer because of the social aspects. How do you quantify and assign a value to that?”

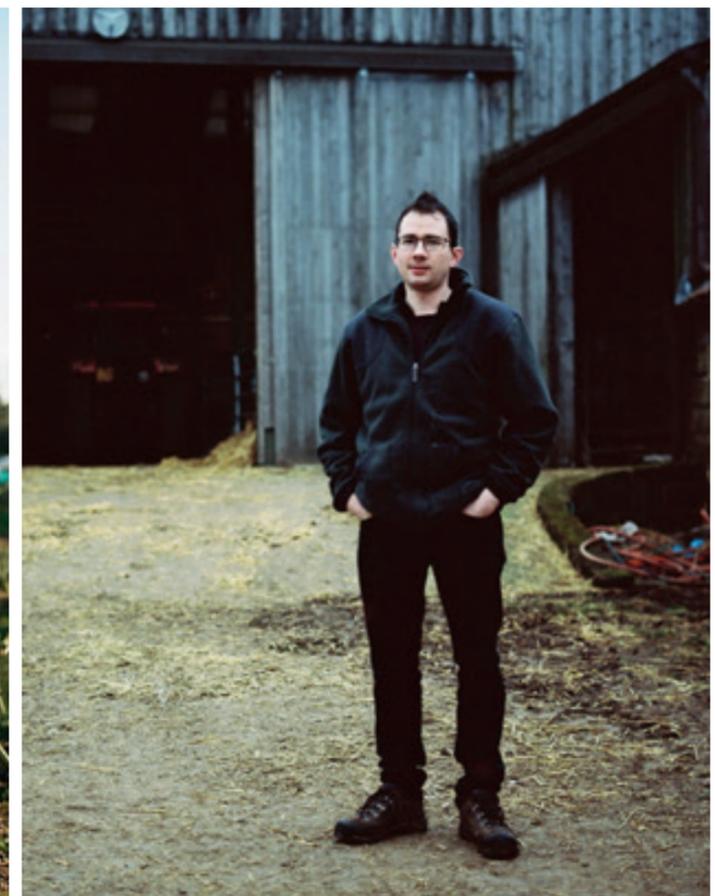
Andy and Sue
The Oak Tree Low Carbon Farm

“The provision of meaningful, purposeful work cannot be underestimated. As a farmer I know how lucky we are to work outside, witnessing some of nature's wonderful sights. Being able to share this with people who have never had the opportunity, or never thought they would get the chance to, is incredibly rewarding. This is what social farming can bring to farms.”

Robin Asquith
Botton Village Social Farm

Images from clockwise top:

Reverend Alan Griggs
Danny Thorington
Robin Asquith
Andy and Sue



Devon

The liberal reformers of the 1880s, Joseph Chamberlain and Jesse Collings, called for labourers to be given ‘Three Acres and a Cow’ to combat rural poverty and revive the rural economy. The slogan was revived and continued to have purchase well into the 20th century.

With 1,200 cows, Brue Valley Farm in Somerset is of an altogether different magnitude to the arcadian visions of rural reformers of centuries past. The Clapp family who run the farm balance the tensions between technology and traditionalism daily.

Cows wear neck collars with activity sensors that can tell when a cow is in season, and ready for insemination. They measure cows’ rumination levels and enable individually tailored feed mixes to maximise yield. The farm is considering investing in GPS tags to save time locating individual cows.

Yet these technological developments have not come without problems or trade-offs. As farm director Dan told me,

“We’re swapping grassroots labour from a man with a box of spanners, to a man in a van with a laptop... I can’t make fixes myself anymore...I have to go online and talk to people in Israel who understand the software...I lose hours and hours and hours to connectivity issues.”

And with 18 employees the farm is losing its family feel; as a result, Dan is not sure if his children will carry on this tradition.

The South West Dairy Development Centre at Beardhill Farm has taken technological development further still. With robotic milking, levels of milk are monitored for each teat, while an automated feeder mixes and drops a bespoke blend of different feeds from an overhead feeder on rails.

When testing how out of touch politicians are, journalists often ask them about the price of a pint of milk. It should be an easy question, because milk prices are generally more stable than other commodities – as Dan from Tesco told me, milk’s part in the routine of daily life means that any change in price particularly upsets customers. In the heart of the UK’s dairy system I found that this apparent stability belies the radical changes transforming the sector.

Rich – cyclist



Cornwall

There are many ways of thinking about where you come from. As I crossed the Tamar river, the border boundary between Devon and Cornwall, the green and white Devon flag of Saint Petroc was replaced by the black and white Cornish flag of Saint Piran. And with the changing of the flag came the distinct identity found in the UK's southwesternmost promontory.

Cornwall, or Kernow in the Cornish language, has a rich cultural heritage and its communities a deep connection to place. The distinct identity of the Cornish people was officially recognised by Westminster in 2014, granting them the same rights and protections as other Celtic groups in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. A Cornwall Council staff member told me that many people don't identify as English, but as Cornish instead.

There are many ways of understanding identity, and there are multiple ways of understanding landscapes. From Penzance to Padstow land is managed and governed across different scales. Rachel from Cornwall Council told me that coordination at catchment scale has been very useful for flood management schemes on the north coast in flood-prone towns like Boscastle.

But there are inherent difficulties with this; catchments and ecosystems don't follow county, district, town, borough or parish council lines. This complexity can lead to a fragmented approach to managing and governing both land and place. Rachel told me,

"There are too many bodies at work – National Parks, Local Nature Partnerships, catchment-level schemes... Defra has created a fractured, inefficient system."

Sector-specific initiatives too often ignore the cross-sector linkages, for example, between farming, forestry, water management, nature conservation, and economic



development. And yet it is these linkages which are so crucial to effective place-based management, which integrates both natural and social ecosystems.

Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) have been established across the UK to drive economic strategies for an area, but in many places they are disconnected from rural issues. However, here in Cornwall because the LEP is coterminous with the county and led by a champion of local food and identity, it seems to be an exception.

To build cross-sector participation across all civil society, Cornwall Council has created strategies extending to 2065 to reconcile multiple aspects of sustainability – economic, social and environmental – which all work alongside each other.

It is the kind of thinking across sectors and silos that is most effective at creating change, at the landscape level and beyond.

Elliot – cyclist



NATIONAL TRUST

DOYDEN CASTLE

CORNWALL

A COUNTY FULL OF
FOLKLORE AND LEGENDS

Innovation

Climate change is accelerating, biodiversity has plummeted, soil fertility has collapsed, and pay is low in farming and the food sector.

Creating a more sustainable future for people and planet will require a substantial shift in practices; innovation and adaptation will have to happen at pace and scale.

But discussions about the future landscape of agriculture and the food system too often concentrate on the ‘tech will save us’ aphorism; an image of the future driven by advances in automation and AI. Undoubtedly these technologies have huge potential, but on the bike we saw countless examples of practical, often low-tech, innovations that had no less scope for a step change in the way our food is produced and our land is managed.

We saw innovations in agroforestry, cropping techniques, distribution systems, supply chains, agronomy services, farmer networks, climate change mitigation, procurement contracts, as well as robotics and automation. Instead of just talking about ‘scaling up,’ let’s also do better ‘joining up.’

“Our herd of Holstein, Swedish Red and Montbeliard cows produce rich, creamy milk that is a world away in taste from the centrally pooled pasteurised and homogenised milk you get in supermarkets. Raw milk straight from the cows is what we have always drunk, and we sell it directly through a vending machine on the farm. This allows us some protection from the cyclical price fluctuations of milk traded on the global commodity market.”

Alison Park
Low Sizergh Farm

“Our work is hugely varied – from robotic harvesting to monitoring soil carbon and improving anaerobic digestion. We’re supporting research, development and innovation throughout the agricultural sector.”

Dr Robin Jackson
Agri-tech Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

“Research has shown that the European truffle industry will be severely threatened by climate change, with production in the current heartland forecast to collapse by 2071. The UK is uniquely positioned as it is currently favourable for truffle production and the area of land that is suitable is forecast to increase rather than contract. We’ve been cultivating truffles in the UK for just over a decade, and our goal is to develop the UK into a major international truffle producer.”

Dr Paul Thomas
Mycorrhizal Systems Ltd.

“The hemp industry is very young in its development, so we are pioneering new practices that we hope will be replicated by other farms. We currently have a range of food, cosmetic and food supplement products, but in the future we hope to build and develop more products with the special fibres held within the hemp stem.”

Rob Kinghan
Hempen

“We’ve integrated apple trees into our wheat, barley, clover and vegetable fields, which reduces soil wind erosion and enhances biodiversity. It’s getting more for the same area, through three-dimensional farming, while helping to manage risk against climate change by having a mix of perennial and annuals.”

Stephen Briggs
Whitehall Farm

Images from clockwise top:

Mycorrhizal Systems Ltd.
Hempen
Low Sizergh Farm
Whitehall Farm
Agri-tech Cornwall



Hampshire

In 1079 the Nova Foresta was created for the personal pleasure of William the Conqueror. Villages were burnt to the ground to make space for the King to hunt deer. Over time, however, the rights of the commons were restored. Pannage, estover, agisement, turbarry; these middle England words gave commoners the right to feed pasture to pigs, collect firewood, graze livestock and cut turf for fuel.

Poet John Clare wrote that enclosure “came like a Bonaparte” and “let not a thing remain.” Yet the New Forest did remain. It resisted the pressures of enclosure and the commons endured and grew. In 1877 the Court of Verderers, the forest’s governing body, was affirmed as representative of the commons, not the Crown.

As I travelled the New Forest by bike and foot, I found this remaining vestige of Merrie England standing strong. Nearly a thousand commoners graze ponies, cows and pigs in the forest. Little meat is sold or money made from the animals but they play an important role in making the forest what it is. As the New Forest Commoners Defence Association told me, the grazing animals nibble leaves to head height; this lets in the light that opens up the forest to people.

Yet the Forest faces problems too. A member of Friends of the New Forest told me outsiders and the National Park authorities alike have an urban bias. Visitors expect a sanitised picture postcard forest, without dead animals and other sticky reminders of the realities of nature. Or they see it as a site for their leisure, for walking their dog and feeding animals, rather than a living and working landscape.

Many commoners meanwhile cannot afford to live in the affluent villages nearby, often populated with wealthy commuters and retirees, and are blocked from building small cabins in the park. The children of commoners often move further afield to Southampton and must commute in themselves. The connection between people, place and land risks being lost.

This ancient pastoral system embodies a living tradition that connects us to our ancestors and their way of life. And in its aversion to wastefulness – the bracken fern that is cut back is sent to Kew Gardens to be used as mulch, for example – it has an almost permaculturist feel that speaks to the possibilities of the future. It was striking how little even local residents knew about the commons on their doorsteps. To protect this way of life for future generations, we will all have to appreciate the role we must play in the stewardship of the New Forest and landscapes like it.

Ben – cyclist



Oxfordshire

Every January, thousands of farmers, businesses, NGOs, and individuals descend on Oxford for the Oxford Farming Conference and its younger, spikier sibling, the Oxford Real Farming Conference. People gather to talk about the tricky issues in food and in farming. How will farming need to adapt to help halt and reverse climate breakdown; how can farmers make a living from farming; where is the innovation coming from? And how to make the most of the opportunity to set our own agricultural policy for the first time in decades.

The two conferences don't always see eye to eye. Depending on who you listen to, one represents proper farming or destructive agri-business: the other represents a sustainable future or dangerous eccentricity. Finding the common ground between these perspectives is essential, to regenerate our countryside – ecologically and economically.

As I cycled through the county a couple of months earlier, in a disconcertingly warm October, I met farmers of all stripes, from those intensively producing many tonnes of milling wheat on thousands of acres, to small, cooperative hemp ventures reliant on volunteers. The conflicting views about the future of farming between these two poles were stark. In one week on the bike I heard just about every conceivable view you could imagine, from diversification to rewilding, intensification to organic farming, technological innovation to climate breakdown.

In the spirit of inquiry for which Oxford is world famous, in a farm just 10 miles from the conference centres, the Real Farming Trust and Sustain hosted a conversation for the Commission to gather some of these different voices together. The discussions weren't always easy, but they – together with our chats on farms throughout the county that week – revealed both the tensions and dilemmas in farming and began to identify the common ground.

Tom C – cyclist

“There’s a real disconnect between consumers and producers, farmers too often get vilified for the way they farm. It’s tough to be told that your way of farming is bad, especially by people who don’t do it. Does anyone else feel that?”

“I feel attacked by people who don’t really understand farming, not by the people that come to my farm. Activists, vegans, environmentalists continually snipe the industry, but locally I feel valued as a farmer. The public don’t understand – they don’t have a connection to where food comes from. But we do.”

“But it’s crucial that we break down those barriers – I think change is largely driven by consumer trends. Supermarkets play a big role in this. We need as many people as possible in the conversation so that different voices can be heard.”

“We need an agrarian renaissance with everyone involved because food is at the heart of everything!”

“I think meetings like this, led by consumers and farmers, do change things – it’s a good start. We hear each other.”

“One of the problems with farming at the moment is that it’s too old – we need to get more young people into farming.”

“But how do we do that? The barriers to accessing land are so high!”

“I don’t have the answer to that, but I know the younger generation want to change things up but there’s no opportunity for them – I have four teens, they are incredibly aware of global and climate issues and want to do something about it.”

“Mine too. The other day my son said, ‘are you ruining my future by farming in the way you do?’ It was hard to hear.”

“But getting young people into farming isn’t a silver bullet is it? I’m sure there’s plenty we don’t know, but there’s plenty they don’t know too!”

“I think it’s going to require a policy change for how we manage our land – I can’t see much changing otherwise.”

“I agree, there are some great schemes out there geared at new entrants, but they aren’t enough. The Prince’s Countryside Fund are doing some great work in this area.”

“There’s also a lack of representation in farming – we need to get more minority ethnic groups and communities involved too. Everyone has a stake in the future of our food and farming.”



Choice

Choice is a good thing, and therefore more of it is a better thing, surely? It is one of those taken for granted ideas that underpin so many of the conversations about food and farming. Consumers want choice; and people can make their own choices about the foods they eat. And, perhaps most insidiously, it is our individual choices that determine people's life outcomes. But there are so many factors that affect our food choices, not just availability, or affordability, or allergies, or even our perceptions of food.

The World Health Organisation research shows how our food choices are shaped by intensive and pervasive marketing, no longer only in the usual places – TV, magazines and billboards – but now through social media – ‘influencers’ on Instagram or Facebook. We are, say WHO, being persuaded to eat food that is bad for people and the planet. And affordability masks some serious questions: in a cheap food culture, who is really paying the price?

In some rural communities, choice has unicorn-like properties – a lovely idea but it just doesn't exist. There may be one village store, if you're lucky; or perhaps you can drive to the town 15 miles away to a supermarket – if you have a car, or can catch the one bus a day, or afford the taxi fare. You are more likely to be in the catchment for one school; have to travel for your primary healthcare; have one broadband provider; and few employers in travelling distance.

Throughout the UK, the cyclists and the people they met experienced choice in very different ways.



“Why is it that I work in a factory making food and my wage stays low? Over the years the price of a car has got more expensive. And we just expect that that's normal. But why not food? Why does that stay cheap? And all of us that make food, our wages stay low. I work in a factory and I make food, but I can't afford to buy whatever food I want. I buy food in the discount section because that's what I can afford to buy. But I get free cakes from the factory.”

Warren, Birmingham



‘I met with Tom, a salad farmer. What this guy doesn't know about growing iceberg lettuce isn't worth knowing. “How often do you eat iceberg lettuce?” I ask. He laughs, “Mostly in a BigMac.” To be fair, I'm not a fan either, but iceberg is the most popular lettuce in the UK.’

Lynne, cyclist

“During the Beast from the East the Co-op had kumquats, durians and yams but we couldn't get bacon, eggs or milk. Something strange is going on with our food system.”

Pam, Isle of Skye



“The only shop in Achiltibuie, a small, coastal hamlet in the Scottish Highlands, is the lifeblood of the place and its population of 300. The town is 24 miles from the next shop, so if you're looking for something and it isn't there, you aren't having it! Though the shop, which doubles as the post office, does take local residents' orders for food and supplies. Without it I'd imagine life would be much harder.”

Elliot, cyclist

“I found a lack of options to buy the (expensive) local produce, which means that people, including those producing food themselves, end up with poor diets. Food poverty seems to be more hidden in rural areas.”

Mark, cyclist



“There's a lack of farm shops around here, even though we live in the heart of the Scottish soft fruit growing area. The only farm shop nearby sells their strawberries for more money than the local supermarket, so I always end up buying them from the supermarket instead.”

Wendy, Arbroath

“The food available was basic – just cheap salads and sandwiches. I couldn't find a proper bite to eat anywhere.”

Fran, cyclist



“The only thing I could get to eat for miles around was a packet of crisps and a Mars bar at the pub.”

Josie, cyclist

Sussex

There is a familiar story being told about rural communities. The pubs, post offices, sports fields and markets are shutting down and being sold off. Housing is being bought up for holiday lets and sold off to second-homers and wealthy retirees, while the cost of living and house prices squeeze settled communities out. The lights turn off in winter and the civic assets that constitute community life in the countryside are shrinking.

There is certainly some truth in this tale of decline. Yet as we cycled through Sussex we found civic institutions in good health. The Women's Institute, with over 200,000 members across the country, is one such institution. In the small village of Partridge Green north of Brighton, WI members extended their hospitality by organising a meeting of around 30 members and friends from nearby villages to discuss food, farming and the countryside to coincide with our visit.

The discussions were broad-ranging and interesting. We talked about what the countryside means to them, and how we need to support farmers transitioning sustainably

and young people getting housing. People took care to give space and listen to one another, especially if they disagreed.

Above all it was the WI itself that was so impressive. Coffee mornings and craft projects, recipe and knowledge sharing, local walks and national campaigns; it is these voluntary efforts that bind rural communities together. They may seem parochial but, as Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh wrote, all great civilizations are based on the parish.

Edmund Burke called these local institutions the little platoons upon which everything else rests. Nourish them and the rest will fall into place; without them, people are isolated, communities decline and society is divided. There may not be one solution to the problems rural communities face. Instead people across the country are creating and maintaining civic institutions that give shape and succour to rural life.

Josie and Rebecca – cyclists



RECIPE OF THE WEEK

SUSSEX POND PUDDING

THE RECIPE FIRST APPEARS IN HANNAH WOOLLEY'S 1672 COOK BOOK THE QUEEN-LIKE CLOJET. THE SWEET, BUTTERY FRUIT FILLING IS ENCASED IN A SOFT, RICH PASTRY CASE. IT SHOULD BE EATEN IN THE WINTER MONTHS, WHEN THE CITRUS IS AT ITS MOST DELICIOUS AND THE WEATHER CALLS FOR SOMETHING MORE COMFORTING.

220g SELF-RAISING FLOUR
110g CHOPPED FRESH BEEF SUET (OR VEGETARIAN SUET)
120ml MILK
110g WATER
110g SALTED BUTTER
1 LEMON (ORGANIC AND UNWAXED PREFERABLE)
PINCH OF SALT

MIX THE FLOUR, SUET AND SALT IN A BOWL. ADD THE MILK AND WATER TO MAKE A DOUGH. BUTTER A PUDDING BOWL. RESERVE A QUARTER OF THE PASTRY FOR A LID. ROLL OUT THE REMAINING PASTRY AND SPREAD AROUND THE PUDDING BOWL, MAKING SURE IT ISN'T TOO THIN. PLACE HALF THE BUTTER AND SUGAR IN THE BOTTOM. SLASH THE LEMON WITH A KNIFE SO THE JUICES CAN RUN INTO THE FILLING. PLACE REMAINING BUTTER AND SUGAR OVER THE LEMON. ROLL OUT THE RESERVED PASTRY AND LAY ON TOP OF THE FILLING, PRESSING THE EDGES TO SEAL. COVER THE TOP WITH FOIL AND TIE IN PLACE WITH A STRING. PUT A LARGE PAN OF WATER ON TO BOIL AND LOWER THE PUDDING IN. THE WATER SHOULD COME HALF WAY UP THE BOWL. COVER AND BOIL FOR 3-4 HOURS. REPLENISH WATER AS NECESSARY. TO SERVE, EASE THE PUDDING FROM THE BOWL AND QUICKLY TURN UPSIDE DOWN ON TO A PLATE.

NOTE: CONTAINS LOTS OF FAT AND SUGAR - TO BE EATEN ONLY OCCASIONALLY!

Findings

Whilst Brexit debates raged in the corridors of Whitehall and chambers of Westminster, our cyclists were touring the UK's roads, towns and villages.

Yes – we heard questions, frustrations and sometimes anger about EU exit negotiations. But mostly, we found people preoccupied with more immediate matters – finding workers for farms; keeping local shops, surgeries and schools open. And often we found that people had longer term, and bigger picture issues on their minds. Climate breakdown, soil fertility, biodiversity crash, water quality, and how to keep their businesses going in the face of uncertainty and rapid change. We saw how farmers are investing in the long term, sometimes at considerable cost and risk – new dairy parlours, no-till cropping systems to protect soil health, new crops to take advantage of changing tastes. People broadly agree that things need to change; but what this really means, and how we get there remains hotly contested. What they need, they say, is a *practical plan to transition to more sustainable – even regenerative – farming systems*, in a manageable timeframe. And they want to know how they can get there from here in a way that supports not just the early adopters and the well-resourced, but those farmers who do not have the same access to capital, resources or training. How can we shift the whole system of UK farming to both provide healthy food, sustainably, and improve and protect the natural world, in the way it is uniquely placed to do?

Questions of land and landscape acquire a new significance by bike. Suddenly the different topographies come alive when you're tackling the steep hills; or cycling through featureless fields; or noticing the soil colours change; or welcoming the shade of a copse in the midday sun. As you travel slowly, taking time to notice the land

through which you travel, the pressures on *land use* come to life. Food crops, or woodland? Housing or business units? Fast trains between big cities or better connections between towns? More space for production or for rewilding and ecosystem regeneration? It is at the local level that the hard choices are felt. From pressures on affordable housing close to London, to competition for the future of the landscapes in Cumbria, how land is used requires careful, respectful and extended mediation.

People talked about the economics of living and working in the countryside. The loss of migrant labour after Brexit caught the headlines; but countryside employers talked about how hard it is to recruit anyone when housing is scarce and unaffordable, and people can't get the education and health services available in larger towns and cities. We saw how the larger enterprises are establishing more systematic recruitment and development, even providing accommodation and work for families. For many working in the countryside, they're not just doing a job; it is who they are, in their bones; their family history, their place in their community, and what they want to pass on to their children. This chimes with aspirations expressed by many young people about *good work* and the kind of life they want for themselves – a balanced life and work with purpose and connection. We met so many people full of passion for what they do, people who turn their hands to many tasks – the gig economy is alive and kicking in the countryside. Farming is a small part of the rural economy; farmers themselves are diversifying into tourism, contracting or care farming. We don't know what jobs we will be doing in 10 years' time; but we do know the jobs we need to be doing – jobs that restore and regenerate the social and natural world.

What we eat and how we eat it – the relationship between *farming, food and health* – has become as polarised as any debate. Farmers talked to us about feeling unappreciated, beleaguered and even attacked by people with strongly held views about what we should be growing and producing in the UK. Alongside the big changes they can see coming, and the patchy support to help them respond, this is impacting farmers mental health. The hotly contested policy questions – what is a sustainable and healthy diet, and how can we make it affordable – take on a different hue in the real-world stories we heard. Nowhere does a splintered system show up more starkly than in the proliferation of foodbanks around the UK. One foodbank founder told us,

“...so-called ‘food poverty’ is actually a symptom of absolute poverty – leading directly to poor health outcomes, homelessness, increasing levels of mental illness amongst children as well as adults.”

The gut-wrenching absurdity of it, when a tenant farmer talks about having to go to a foodbank because he can't afford to shop for food that he has helped produce.

Off the motorways and A roads, travelling the old roads between towns and villages gives you a glimpse of the everyday experience of living in rural communities. Immense inequalities can exist right next to one another, but rural poverty can easily be hidden from view. We heard frustrations when local and national policies just don't work together – when a school closes, when a surgery closes, when the pub closes, when the broadband doesn't work, when all the local employment opportunities dry up, and it becomes impossible for young people to stay. When families and friends want to stay close together, perhaps to support each other with childcare or eldercare, but cannot, it depletes the assets and the resources of a community.

Decision-making seems far removed from most people's lives, framed in institutional language that doesn't resonate. And it's not just about how local and regional government bodies work. It's about *more than money*, too. When large agriculture businesses buy up farms and run them all with a manager, so that the local villages lose yet more families; or when second home owners start to outnumber residents, and there's no one left in the village to do the everyday maintenance of community – running the cubs and brownies, opening the church. When rural business leaders, who've never heard of the Local Enterprise Partnership, don't know how to tap into its resources.

We also heard those stories where people work out for themselves what's needed. From the village shop that gives 'tick' so that families can manage problems with their cash flow and still get food, to the community bus service that picks up isolated older people from their door when commercial services don't run. Church and community groups providing mental health outreach; pubs becoming shops, internet cafes, community spaces.

We were reminded on every part of the journey how policy impacts people, business and communities; the big challenges and the everyday realities. Perhaps the most important thing we learned is that while policy improvements are essential, the thing that matters most to people is the quality of relationships – how we show up, how we listen, how we talk to each other. And we do know how to do this, through our everyday practices – living, working, meeting, eating, and journeying together. It's time to focus on what really matters, as the UK approaches this fork in the road.

Cyclists



Lynne Davis
Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk,
Cambridgeshire, Borders,
Shropshire



Kenny McCarthy
Lincolnshire, Northern Ireland,
Devon



Jonathan Schifferes
Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire



Elliot Kett
Highlands, NE Scotland, Cornwall,
West Midlands



Tom Levitt
Cheshire



Mark Londesborough
North Wales



Fabian Wallace-Stephens
West Wales



Sam Grinsted
South Wales



Katie Arthur
Central Scotland



Tom Proudfoot
Dumfries & Galloway



Kayshani Gibbon
Northern Ireland



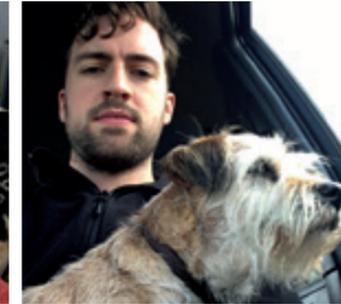
Brhmi Balam
Northern Ireland



Francesca Monticone
Gloucestershire



Rich Mason
Somerset, Dorset



Ben Dellot
Hampshire, Wiltshire



Tom Carman
Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire



Robert Reed
Cumbria



Sophie Freeman
Northumberland, County Durham



Eleanor Toner
Yorkshire



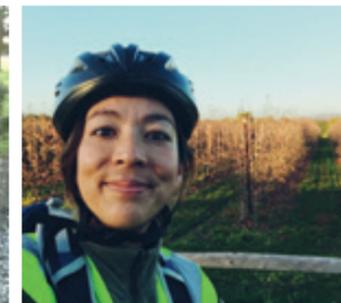
Tom Harrison
Lancashire, Greater Manchester



Josie Warden
West Sussex, East Sussex



Rebecca Ford
East Sussex



Claire Doran
Kent



Sue Pritchard
Shetlands (by plane!)

Outtakes

Thirty weeks on a bicycle around the UK comes with ups, downs, highs, and lows. Our cyclists experienced the lot. Here's a snapshot of just a few of those memorable moments, for better or worse.



The hills are alive with the sound of...panting?

"I set off up the Hay bluff already dreading the climb, everyone I'd spoken to throughout the day had wished me good luck with a knowing glint in their eye. Five minutes in I was feeling like a champion hill climber, there was nothing to this behemoth of an incline that people were wryly warning about. Approximately 3 minutes later, after the gradient and my heart rate had picked up a notch, I had long forgotten how it felt to be positive about cycling. I continued to feel that way for the next 45 minutes. A brief stop on a mercifully flat section up on the ridge provided spectacular views across the Wye Valley floor. This was quickly followed by strong headwinds, rain, and more steep, twisting climbing. At the point where I thought it would never end, I gently rolled over the peak. Within seconds I was once again a champion, flying down the other side of the valley to Llanthony's majestic ruins like I was born to wear the yellow jersey."

Sam Grinsted



5* accommodation

"Booking.com listed this property as having a patio seating area. I'll just leave that there."

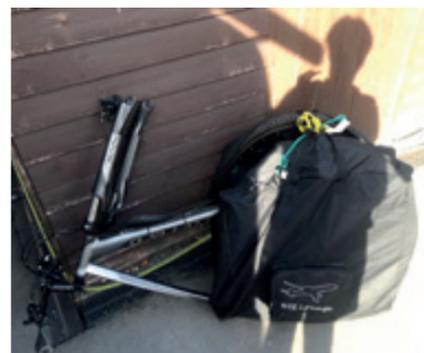
Mark Londesborough



Northern Irish hospitality

"I turned up to a BnB absolutely soaking wet having cycled through an hour of storm, only to realise the nearest place to buy food was three miles back out in the rain! Taking pity on me, the lovely host made me tomato soup and toasted cheese squares, gave me several towels for me and my bike, and told me that the best way I could pay her back was to pass on the favour when I next saw someone in need. Heart stolen by Northern Ireland!"

Kayshani Gibbon



Micro bike bag

"You can only take bikes on buses in West Wales if they're in a bag, so Elliot gave me his bike bag to use. It could barely fit over a wheel, let alone a bike. It took some smooth talking with a few bus drivers to allow me on."

Fabian Wallace-Stephens



The many drenched faces of Kenny

"The summer of 2018 was one of the hottest, driest summers on record - hose pipe bans were threatened, yellow fields in abundance, and colleagues glowed on their return from the bike tour. Not me though. The heavens were consistently unleashed in Lincolnshire, Northern Ireland and Devon. One thing I learned on the bike tour is that this is an unfair land."

Kenny McCarthy



Langoustines

"I was up in a remote coastal hamlet in The Highlands and had met Michael, a langoustine fisherman, in the morning. I told him I was camping just down the road and had picked some mussels and cockles at low tide before the meeting, and he offered me a few langoustines to add to my dinner. Result. I went back to his house at 7pm after his son had got in from the days fishing, said hello, and walked round to his processing warehouse in the garden. Sitting there was a whole bin bag full of langoustine and squat lobster. Surely not all for me? It must have weighed 10kg or more. It would have been hundreds of pounds worth if bought from Billingsgate. It was all mine – such generosity. With a Cheshire Cat grin, I loaded the bag on to my bike, headed back to the campsite and set about getting a fire going on the beach. With enough langos to feed a large party I rallied the troops, knocking on campervan windows and tapping on tent doors in the campsite explaining my predicament and inviting them for dinner. Ten of us sat on the beach eating grilled mussels, cockles, langos and squat lobster with a wild garlic and seaweed butter I'd knocked up for dipping sauce until gone midnight, aided by a dram or two of whiskey. The weather was miserable the next day and I was due to cycle 30 miles back to Ullapool, but a couple who I'd invited for dinner took pity on me, cooked me a full English breakfast in their motorhome and gave me a lift all the way back – cheers Kev and Bren!"

Elliot Kett



Thanks

Quite a lot happened after that conversation in the office, when we first thought that cycling round the UK would be A Great Idea. First, the organisation had to approve it. Thank you to my fellow Directors and Executive Directors, especially Anthony Painter and Matthew Taylor, for holding the organisational space open for this to happen and allowing us to borrow from their teams.

To the Commissioners, and our funders Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, who knew it was important to leave London and talk to people throughout the UK – thank you for backing us – especially when others sometimes questioned its seriousness.

Thanks to the RSA Fellows and friends who suggested places to go and people to see.

A huge thank you to the cyclists, who enthusiastically said, “Yes! We’d love to get on a bike for a week!” This literally could not have happened without you, and the miles you put in.

Thanks to the writers, photographers, illustrators and designers, for your creativity and patience.

To the members of the FFCC engagement team who – apparently – did not imagine that this would be part of their jobs – and who were often tested right to the edges of their capacity – Lynne Davis, Kenny McCarthy and especially Elliot Kett, who put in the most phenomenal effort to make it all work, steering the whole project so well.

And of course; thank you to the people we met along the way. Many of your names are here – but we haven’t been able to list everyone we met, in the groups, schools, businesses and communities. We want you to know; your warm and generous welcome, along with the experiences and insights you’ve shared with us, have already shaped the Commission’s work.

With love and gratitude,

Sue

The Lagoon Cycle

And the waters will rise slowly
at the boundary
at the edge
redrawing that boundary
continually moment by moment –
all over altogether
all at once
It is a graceful drawing and redrawing
this response to the millennia of the
making of fire
...
And in this new beginning –
this continuously rebeginning
will you feed me
when my lands can no longer produce?
And will I house you
when your lands are covered with water?
So that together
we can withdraw
as the waters rise?

**Helen Mayer Harrison &
Newton Harrison**

Tim Middleton • Andy Black • Sue Hall • Emma Black • Simon Amstutz • Danny Thorington • Emily Nolan • Nicola Webster • Kevin Jonas
• Jane Cadman • Richard Cadman • Rob Mutimer • Hannah Claxton • Jane Steward • Ed Jones • Jeremy Buxton • Mel Kemp • Ellie
Savoury • Laura Knight • Amy Keen • Philip Hudson • Rebekah Hoyland • Neil McCorkindale • Alistair Danter • Janette Sutherland •
Siobhan Macdonald • Lucy Beattie • Laura Hamlet • James Porter • Wendy Murray • Toby Lipman • Stuart Scott • Gill Lawrie • Sandy
McGowan • Dave Simmers • Jackie Malcolm • Dave Tollick • Willie Mather • Sue O’Neill-Berest • Sally Findlay • Lou Evans • Iain Herbert
• Mark Borthwick • Jim, Jo & Liz • Sam Parsons • Michele Shirlow • Sarah Deas • Floortje Brandsteder • Jonny Hanson • Adrian Morrow
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Gillian Warden • David & Wilma Finlay • Niomi Brough • Ed Forrest • Andy McNab • Eileen Wilson • Liam McAleese • Rob Fraser • Harriet
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• John Woodcock • Richard Suddes • Andrew Hitchon • Richard Betton • Chris Woodley-Stewart • Carolyn Frank • Paul Hayward • Faith
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