

c/o
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27th February 2014

Rt Hon. Owen Paterson MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Defra
17 Smith Square
London
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Dear Secretary of State

We the undersigned are writing collectively to express our concern about the decision by Defra, uniquely announced in the House of Lords by Lord de Mauley on 21st January in response to questions from Baroness Miller, not to adopt Pillar 2 agroforestry measures as provided for under Article 23 of the new EU rural development regulation, or to include an agroforestry option in the New Environmental Land Management Scheme still under development. For the reasons set out below, we ask that you reconsider and reverse this decision as soon as possible.

We believe that the environmental benefits, not least in relation to the prevention of flooding and water management generally, and the potential uptake of agroforestry have been underestimated. In our view, its premature rejection is, at least in part, based on lack of familiarity (on the part of officials and of the limited number of stakeholders consulted by Defra) with the subject itself, with the evidence for its benefits and with current levels of producer interest.

As a research organisation which is involved in a developing programme of UK and EU-funded research on agroforestry, the Organic Research Centre was commissioned by Natural England to collate the available evidence and make proposals for possible options. We therefore have an interest in the outcome, but this is one shared by the many other organisations that are concerned about the decision that has been taken.

What is agroforestry?

Agroforestry is the practice of integrating the cultivation of trees, crops and/or livestock on the same agricultural area for greater productivity and biodiversity. Trees are one of the greatest land-based contributors to climate processes, through production of oxygen and water vapour together with carbon dioxide exchange. In addition, tree cover provides many other services including shade and shelter, purification of air and water, production and maintenance of soil, and enhancing biodiversity. Agroforestry integrates these benefits with agricultural productivity, but currently falls between the traditional separation of land uses into forestry and agriculture which also governs much of the policy support framework.



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The current 12% tree cover in the UK (about 30,000 sq km of the total land area) represents a major improvement over the last century, but is far short of the European average of 44%. Given the current area of agricultural land (170,000 sq km) and the need for food production, the area available for increasing tree cover through plantations alone, is clearly limited. However, by integrating trees with crop and livestock production as agroforestry, the tree cover can be expanded considerably with the major advantages that the trees themselves provide resilient sources of food, materials and carbon-neutral energy while helping to increase the yields of field crops and livestock.

Biodiversity

The mixing of cropped species, the different growth habits, the leaf litter generated by the perennial species, and the understorey all contribute to a diversification of habitat and biodiversity benefits, from soil organisms through to bird populations. Where trees are grown in rows between cropped areas, these also act as wildlife corridors, breaking up crop monocultures. The biodiversity benefits of agroforestry can be enhanced through appropriate understorey management prescriptions, including the use of grass/legume and pollen/nectar mixtures, which was a feature of the establishment of agroforestry option developed by Natural England based on the research ORC, with Abacus Organic Associates, conducted for them.

Water quality and flood protection

Trees have the potential to influence water quality, infiltration and drainage, through slowing run-off and capturing water and silt, through micro-climate effects and by purifying water by filtering nutrients and potential pollutants that might otherwise escape into ground and surface waters. In the light of the recent and increasingly severe flooding in England, enhanced integration of trees as agroforestry is strongly urged in water catchment areas and uplands as well as within valley areas. Its potential has been demonstrated by the Pontbren project in Wales, and the role of trees in flood prevention was emphasised by a wide range of expert organisations in a letter to the Daily Telegraph on 21st February.

Soil conservation

Trees integrated with crops also have the potential to support soil conservation, including reduced erosion risks and enhanced nutrient conservation and recycling through leaf litter. The leaf litter is also an important additional to soil organic matter, supporting soil biological processes and soil structure formation.

Climate change

Agroforestry systems provide a simple direct way to mitigate climate change and instability, through carbon capture and storage in timber and soil organic matter from leaf litter depositions.

Productivity

The environmental benefits of agroforestry systems are not gained at the expense of productivity, although the potential for competition among the



different components does need to be managed. The more effective capture of solar energy by trees through longer periods of the year than would be the case for annual crops such as wheat, and other complementarities in land use and exploitation of water and nutrient resources, can lead to significant increases in productivity. This may be enhanced by reductions in the spread of pests and air-borne disease pathogens. Research has identified that total productivity can be increased by 30-40% when trees and arable crops are grown in combination, compared with growing the crops separately. Defra-funded research carried out by FAI at Oxford, as well as other research, has also shown direct economic benefit in poultry and other livestock systems where agroforestry has been included, leading to changes in industry standards.

European recognition of the benefits

At a European level, these benefits are increasingly recognised and supported through policy initiatives, including under Article 23 of the new Rural Development Regulation and as a component of Ecological Focus Areas under Pillar 1 greening measures, but in the case of new plantings only if supported under Article 23. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are continuing to explore options to integrate agroforestry into their rural development plans.

The EU has recently funded two major projects focused on agroforestry: AGFORWARD (2014-2018), a new 20 partner European FP7 research and implementation project co-ordinated by Cranfield University, and AGROFE (2013-2015) a new European Leonardo framework project on improving education and training on agroforestry. In October 2013, the European Parliament also adopted a pilot project to raise awareness among farmers of the multiple benefits of agroforestry.

Stakeholder interest and potential uptake

We understand that a major reason why the option was rejected by Defra was a belief that there was no interest on the part of stakeholders. While it is difficult in the case of a new option to forecast likely take up, the training and other events our various organisations have held have been very well attended, indicating significant potential interest. The existence of an agroforestry option within NELMS, supported by relevant information, training and advice, and the opportunity to see working systems in practice, would further enhance this interest.

On the basis of the benefits outlined, we urge you to review your Department's decision and to make both the following options available to English producers:

- The adoption of CAP Pillar II Article 23 measures, either:
 - by making an establishment of agroforestry option with appropriate biodiversity prescriptions available as part of NELMS, or
 - or by including the establishment of agroforestry in the proposed NELMS universal capital grant scheme on a similar basis to hedge planting, although this is less desirable in terms of the biodiversity prescriptions and expenditure caps, or
 - as a stand-alone measure.



- The inclusion of supported and traditional agroforestry as Ecological Focus Area (EFA) options in CAP Pillar I greening. (If not supported under the new RDP, new agroforestry plantings will not be eligible for EFA status, representing a double blow).

We would like to thank you for your consideration of this matter and to request an early meeting to discuss how this issue can be resolved.

Yours sincerely



Prof. Nicolas Lampkin, Executive Director, Organic Research Centre

together with:

Ian Knight, Director, Abacus Organic Associates
 Pete Riley, Co-ordinator, Agroecology Alliance
 Dr Robert Brook, Senior Lecturer, School of Environment, Natural Resources and Geography, Bangor University
 Prof. Steven Newman, Managing Director, Biodiversity International
 Dr. Michel Pimbert, Director, Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, Coventry University
 Joyce D'Silva, Ambassador *for* Compassion in World Farming
 Sir Tim Smit KBE, Executive Chairman, Eden Regeneration Ltd and Co-founder, the Eden Project
 Stephen Briggs, Vice-Chair, European Agroforestry Federation
 Mike Gooding, Managing Director, FAI Farms Ltd.
 Dr Paul Burgess, Secretary, Farm Woodland Forum
 Vicki Hird, Senior Campaigner, Friends of the Earth
 James Campbell, Chief Executive, Garden Organic
 Mike Turnbull, Chair, International Tree Foundation
 Dr PB Spillett, President, Institute of Fisheries Management
 Rob Macklin, Head of Food and Farming, National Trust
 Andy Goldring, Chief Executive, Permaculture Association
 Dr John Rae, Head of College, Schumacher College
 Helen Browning OBE, Chief Executive, Soil Association
 Kath Dalmeny, Coordinator, Sustain
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 Prof. Tim Benton, Faculty of Biology, University of Leeds
 Prof. Martin Wolfe, Wakelyns Agroforestry

cc.

George Eustice MP,
 Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Defra
 Dan Rogerson MP,
 Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Defra
 Lord de Mauley,
 Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Defra
 Anne McIntosh MP,
 Chair, EFRA Select Committee
 Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer
 House of Lords
 Dave Webster, CEO, Natural England
 Dr Paul Leinster, CEO, Environment Agency
 David Kennedy, CEO, Committee on Climate Change