

Exmoor offers a blueprint for future of farm support

Anyone involved in farming or countryside management will have gathered by now the general sense of direction for rural Britain once we exit the EU and any transition period has expired. But if the broad thrust of future subsidy support is clear – majoring on delivering “public goods” – and the ambitions of the UK’s EU negotiating team to maintain tariff-free trade well understood, there is still little practical information on the table. So all credit to Exmoor National Park, the Exmoor Hill Farming Network and moorland farmers for putting their own meat on the bones, with an offer to act as a test bed for what could be the basis of an agricultural policy suitable for much of the rest of the country.

At its heart the Exmoor Ambition, as the initiative has been titled, simplifies the structure for farm support with two integrated measures that would, in the words of those behind the plan “replace the current complex and flawed EU farm and environmental schemes.” Exmoor’s plan would reward “Good Farming” – the management of land in ways that are good for nature and for people. And it would pay enhanced benefits for targeting specific objectives. That could be, in Exmoor’s case, improving heather moorland for wildlife, opening up

coastal access for walkers or planting and managing woodland to help reduce flood risks.

None of the initiatives would hamper the production of good food or impact on the profitability of farming – in fact they may well enhance them. The benefits for Exmoor would be significant, helping to identify the national park more widely with the very best farming and environmental practices. But the benefits to Britain more widely could be worthwhile too, providing a real-life test bed for policies that the UK needs to develop once it falls outside the jurisdiction of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy.

The National Farmers Union, busy electing new senior officers in Birmingham yesterday, supports the plan, not least because farmers have helped to devise it. Mel Squires, the South West regional director of the NFU, puts it succinctly. “A locally-led approach for Exmoor, sitting within an overall national policy, can be part of better rewarding and recognising farmers for the work they do and helping them deliver more for society, the economy, tourism and the environment.” Add that to producing food – which for farmers is a given – and you have the right recipe for the UK’s bespoke farming policy for the next 50 years.



We want to hear your views

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On this day

- 1732:** George Washington, first president of the United States, was born in Virginia.

1797: French soldiers landed at Fishguard, but were soon captured. No other foreign force has managed to invade Britain since.

1810: Frederic Chopin, Polish composer and pianist, was born near Warsaw.

1819: The United States bought Florida from Spain.

1857: Lord Baden Powell, founder of the Boy Scout movement in 1908, was born in London.

1886: The Times became the first newspaper to institute a classified Personal column.
- 1972:** An IRA bomb killed seven people at Aldershot barracks.

1980: British ice skater Robin Cousins won the gold medal for figure skating in the Lake Placid Olympics.


Birthdays

- Sheila Hancock** actress, 85 *(pictured)*

Judy Cornwell actress, 78

Niki Lauda former racing driver, 69

Julie Walters actress, 68

Drew Barrymore actress/director, 43.
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Thought for the day

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones .
Proverbs 14:30



Imports of firewood have soared, due to the popularity of wood-burning stoves

Buy local, burn local to boost economy and protect UK trees

Importing firewood is unnecessary and poses risks, writes **Caroline Harrison**

The growth in popularity of wood-burning stoves has put pressure on firewood supplies. As a result, imports have increased; latest available figures show England and Scotland combined imported 32,000 tonnes of firewood in the first nine months of 2017, predominantly ash.

This might seem harmless, but it actually poses a substantial risk to our economy and environment. Bringing in firewood from outside the UK can also mean importing pests and diseases, in the firewood or packaging.

Pests we want to keep out include the emerald ash borer beetle, which has killed millions of ash trees in Canada since it arrived from Asia. There is uncertainty about the bug spreading towards Europe from Russia but the evidence from North America is devastating – firewood has been a major factor in the rapid spread of the beetle. We need strict controls to prevent such pests arriving here. If they arrive and spread, trees will be killed, affecting air and water quality, bio-diversity, and the economy , in areas like the South West.

Firewood imports into the UK are inspected under the Statutory Notification Scheme implemented by the Forestry Commission on a risk basis. In the first nine months of 2017, spot checks revealed 28% did not comply with UK regulations.

These cases mostly relate to paperwork inconsistencies or packaging being non-compliant. However, they

raise a fundamental question: why take the risk and import firewood at all?

As England manager of Confor, which represents 1,500 forestry and wood-using businesses across the UK, I helped produce a report on plant health. It made a very simple point: the UK’s elm, larch and ash trees have all been devastated by imported pests and diseases and we need to take action before another catastrophe.

The UK should refuse to import firewood with bark still attached or firewood that hasn’t been properly dried. This would reduce the risks of importing pests and diseases

dramatically, but also help to stimulate domestic firewood markets – and there are huge opportunities to do this in the South West.

Phasing out firewood imports will protect the UK’s native broadleaf woodlands from pests and disease, and deliver wider economic benefits by fulfilling the demand for firewood from home-grown sources.

Managing native woodland by thinning (cutting down certain trees to allow others to flourish) can deliver a regular firewood supply. Thinning makes woods better for wildlife by diversifying their structure and allowing in light. The remaining trees grow better, increasing the

amount of carbon they can capture and providing high-quality timber.

Another 8,000 hectares (about 20,000 acres) of managed broadleaf woodland could provide the 32,000 tonnes of firewood imported in the first nine months of 2017. There is plenty of opportunity to do this.

The latest Forestry Commission statistics show there are just over 110,000 hectares of woodland in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Around 60% is classed as ‘unmanaged’; it is not looked after to produce any kind of crop or to deliver the environmental and

economic benefits produced by thinning and general management. So there are lots of woodlands out there which could be playing a part in building firewood markets, helping the local economy and reducing the risks posed by imports.

The clear message on firewood is “buy local, burn local”.

This has been well-illustrated through the DR Company’s support for Moorwood, a small business on Dartmoor which has invested in kilns to dry firewood – a perfect example of supplying high-quality local firewood to reduce the risks from imports.

Husband and wife team Max

and Jo Bayles used Greater Dartmoor Local Enterprise Action Fund money to grow their innovative business. The £22,000 award allowed them to buy a cone splitter and excavator and improve the production area, which will ultimately increase sales of kiln-dried wood and secure Moorwood’s future.

The improvements have created a circular business: waste from timber felling is used to fuel a biomass boiler, which heats the kiln to dry the firewood logs.

“I want to see every pound reinvested, replanted, or recycled in our business,” said Mr Bayles. “For some, the waste from a timber business is useless, but by investing in biomass we have created a way to make our waste an incredibly powerful tool that distinguishes our products from others in the market.”

There are plenty of opportunities for other South-West businesses to follow Moorwood’s example.

In my England-wide role, I am fortunate that I often have the chance to speak about these issues – recently on Radio 4 and at a plant health conference attended by Alan Titchmarsh and the environment secretary, Michael Gove. I stress the same key points: we do not need to import firewood. It is risky and it is unnecessary – so let’s support our own local firewood markets and Buy Local, Burn Local.

Caroline Harrison is a Director of The DR Company and England Manager for Confor, promoting forestry and wood