

COUNTY FARMS POLICY 2021 TOWARDS 2050

A Vision for a Better Farming Future

THE POLICY

*Supporting the
future of farming
to contribute
to Hampshire's
quality of place and
environment.*



Hampshire County Council has long recognised the importance of farming in Hampshire - since 1892 when smallholdings legislation was introduced we have helped hundreds of new entrants into farming /gain opportunities in the agricultural sector.

The review of the County Farms estate which began last year, has led to the development of this concise and forward thinking new County Farms Policy. Being involved with the review afforded me the opportunity to meet many of our 35 tenants who are managing farming and agricultural businesses across Hampshire. I was so impressed with the skills, knowledge and expertise of our tenants and the range of businesses that contribute to the rural economy of Hampshire.

The review comes at a time when the farming industry stands at the edge of significant change driven by Brexit, the new Agricultural Act, Climate Change and the Environment Bill. There is an increasing requirement for farmers to provide public goods for public money and the County Farms are uniquely placed to meet these changing demands, with support and guidance from the County Council.

I am very proud of our County Farms estate and hope that this policy will strengthen and reaffirm the County Council's commitments to bringing new entrants into farming as well as delivering a whole host of environmental and social benefits for the county.

Finally, I would like to thank members of the advisory group, officers, and tenants for all their advice and contribution to the review and development of the Policy. I hope you agree that it sets out an ambitious and positive future for our County Farms.

Edward Heron
Councillor

PRIORITIES

Tenancy

Our aim is to provide inclusive opportunities for new entrants into a sustainable and innovative farming environment and opportunities for existing tenants to progress to larger holdings.

1. New tenancy opportunities will be offered on Starter Holdings. These will be openly advertised and be subject to a fair and transparent tenant selection process.
2. Tenancy opportunities for Progression Holdings will be offered to current HCC tenants using a fair and transparent selection process. Progression holdings will be offered externally on the same basis if there are no suitable candidates from HCC starter holdings.
3. We will work proactively and in partnership with existing and future tenants to deliver the outcomes outlined in the policy.
4. New entrants to farming will be supported to build sustainable farming businesses and progress to new opportunities at the end of a tenancy.
5. The tenancy length for Starter Holdings will normally be 7 years with a discretionary 3 year extension, subject to satisfactory performance and business plan from the tenant.
6. The tenancy length for Progression Holdings will normally be 10 years with a discretionary 5 year extension, subject to satisfactory performance and business plan from the tenant. This longer period is to enable business growth on a larger holding.
7. Tenant performance will be monitored against the agreed business plan and reviewed according to the tenancy agreement, but at least annually.
8. Tenants will be supported, in the management of their business and their personal wellbeing, through regular dialogue, the provision of timely information and by facilitating appropriate training and mentoring.
9. Collaboration between tenants and with the County Council will be encouraged and the County Farms Service will actively recognise and promote tenants' achievements.
10. As a Smallholdings Authority, Hampshire County Council will follow the requirements of the Agriculture Act 1970 and other relevant legislation.

Land management and farming systems

Our aim is to achieve sustainable and adaptive systems of farming and land management to support high quality environmental, social and economic outcomes for Hampshire.

1. County Farms estate management will focus on sustainable, productive and innovative farming, with food production at its core.
2. Environmental and social priorities, e.g. access improvements, will be identified for each farm to enable tenants to identify how they will achieve the desired outcomes within their agreed business plan.
3. The County Council will work in partnership with tenants, partner organisations and other landowners to enhance the natural capital of the County Farms estate by connecting habitats, delivering ecosystem services and conserving historic features in the landscape.
4. All farm tenants will be required to adopt an adaptive sustainable farming system that delivers the public goods outlined in the Agriculture Act 2020 and Environment Bill 2019-21 (e.g. better air and water quality, thriving wildlife, soil health, measures to reduce flooding) and contributes to the County Council climate change strategy and targets.
5. Tenants will be expected to meet high standards of animal welfare, food safety and environmental protection through membership of appropriate assurance schemes e.g. LEAF, Arla, Red Tractor.
6. Innovative farming techniques, technologies and cropping on the County Farms estate will be encouraged and supported, along with sustainable, efficient and renewable energy solutions.
7. Farm diversification will be encouraged where this supports the financial viability and resilience of the tenant's farm business and contributes positively to the local economy, community and wider County Council objectives.

Financial management

Our aim is to support tenants to establish and grow viable agricultural businesses by providing farms from which they can operate and thrive for the duration of their tenancy.

1. Rents will be set at the appropriate market rate and reviewed regularly. Tenants will be required to meet their financial responsibilities as set out in the agreement. Rental levels may be discounted where farm tenants are able to deliver agreed, clearly defined and substantial value to the County Council through their management of the holding.
2. The County Council will not subsidise the County Farms Service, neither does it seek to make profit. Income from tenancies and other sources will be used to sustain the farm estate.
3. The County Council will deliver a programme of maintenance and investment to maintain the Estate in a sustainable condition, meet its obligations as landlord and maintain the farm rental value.
4. Opportunities for capital investment in the Estate through grants will be explored and developed in partnership with tenants.
5. The County Council's investment in farm improvements that financially benefit the tenant will be subject to a business case and require a rental return on expenditure employed

The Farm Estate

Our aim is to maintain the scale and quality of the land and assets available to the County Farms Service

1. Sound estate management practice will be demonstrated having due regard to the interests, aspirations and responsibilities of both the tenants and the Council.
2. A diversity of holdings will be maintained to support a variety of farm business models. There will be a flexible approach across the wider rural land portfolio when reviewing and creating opportunities for both starter and progression holdings.
3. The County Council will seek to maintain the farm estate at its current scale, quality and diversity through judicious acquisition of new land in line with agreed business case and financial parameters thus mitigating the impact of land identified for alternative uses.
4. The County Council will take a strategic view when acquiring land for the County Farms estate and where land is identified for development or alternative uses, a transition plan will be developed in partnership with any tenants affected.

For more information contact:

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