



WITH MARTIN LINES

# Nature NATTERS

## Planning for change in 2026

**“As 2025 draws to a close, it’s a time for reflection on what’s**

**undeniably been a challenging year. Whether it’s the weather impacts, low commodity prices, or government policy changes, it’s been one heck of a rollercoaster for farmers.**

As such, the current business model has to fundamentally change. Contract farm agreements and farm business tenancies have to be revised; as a sector, farming is currently completely unsupported. Many of you reading this will have contracts that were written when area-based payments were still in place, so many of the public goods or services you provide in other areas of your farm aren’t being duly remunerated.

Future government funding and schemes will be targeted at actions and outcomes. Farms will receive payments for delivering these actions, but they have costs associated with this delivery, so it can’t be

seen as pure income compared with the past area-based payments.

I really don’t see any future schemes being as generous with payments or as simple in terms of actions as in previous iterations. SFI26 will have a limited funding pot, so it’s not going to pay for a huge amount

on many farms. Many of our core business costs have been and continue to be maintaining the landscape and its natural features. Receiving public money to manage these and enhance them should be seen as an opportunity to reduce overhead costs, but also to improve our businesses by increasing pollinators, predatory insects, shade and shelter on our farms.

The old contract farming agreement model – in which the farmer takes a fixed sum of money before the contractor has grown the crop generating the income – will need to end. There’s no longer a guaranteed amount of money being put into that pot before the crop is grown. Therefore, those not taking a whole-farm approach in terms of possible revenue streams and opportunities across our farmed landscapes are increasing the risks on their businesses.

The next few years ahead currently don’t look very stable, with unpredictable weather patterns and commodity prices not seeing

standards could see rapid changes in pesticide product availability. Are we ready for that?

The Prime Minister wants to secure a deal by summer 2027, which means our standards also have to be aligned by then. We could see a significant number of products and active ingredients removed from use across the UK. Next year, we may have to refocus and plan for how the removal of these products will affect our crop management and weed control.

Many of the weeds and diseases we face in our crops are the result of problems within the intensive farm system. Instead of waiting for the next product to fix it, we could spend some time addressing the management or rotations to solve the problem in a natural way that supports itself over time.

Some are hoping that AI, new technologies or enhanced breeding will plug the gaps left by chemical bans, but realistically, will

these be approved, rolled out and available for use in time for our autumn crops? Unfortunately, I don’t believe they

will, and not all farmers will be able to access expensive new offerings.

Starting to plan ahead now for this scenario will give us a head-start on building in resilience across our farms. There are many growers out there who are already tweaking their approaches, significantly

reducing inputs or looking at biology and what nature can do to help them for free.

Going back to basics to focus on good management of soil, nutrients and putting the right crops in the right places are all affordable management changes, and once a new system is in place, nature begins to look after itself.

Attending webinars and on-farm workshops to hear how other farmers are managing this transition can help lessen the fear of the unknown. Learning what really works in practice rather than from a textbook provides confidence, opportunities to ask questions, share problems and make connections with farmers in the same position as you.

Our autumn-sown crops are off to an excellent start, which bodes well for 2026. And however you celebrate the winter holidays and the coming of the new year, make time to spend with others – there’s nothing like it for our mental and physical health. ●

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the significant increases required. The government wants to align many of our standards with those of the EU to enable straightforward trading; for some products and farming sectors, this could reduce costs and make the movement of products easier, but the alignment in pesticide

### YOUR CORRESPONDENT

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