



FarmWell

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Q & A WITH NFU SENIOR ADVISER, RICHARD WORDSWORTH & FCN

Introduce yourself?

Hi I am Richard Wordsworth and for the last 19 years I have worked for the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales (NFU). During that time I have been involved mainly with farm support schemes in England, such as the Arable Area Payment Scheme, Single Payment Scheme and latterly the Basic Payment scheme. I have also been involved in a number of other schemes and changes coming down the tracks under the Government's Agricultural Transition Plan.

The work I do for NFU members can be broken down into four key themes:

- 1) development of support scheme policy;
- 2) implementation of scheme policy;
- 3) assisting NFU members with scheme issues and;
- 4) educating and raising awareness of scheme issues with members.

Prior working for the NFU I was a farm business consultant working with farmers in the eastern counties on a range of administration issues, such as applications for farm support, farm budgeting and contact management.



**NFU Senior Adviser,
Richard Wordsworth**

Do you have an interest in farming and the welling being of farmers and those that work in the industry?

Absolutely, I come from a farming family on my mother's side, though sadly was not brought up on a farm, but relatives still farm across a number of locations in the south. When I am not working for NFU members, I will try to be out on farm, meeting farmers and staff and understanding what is happening. This helps me understand why decisions are made a certain way and if I can, I will help them with I any knowledge I have in return. I also grew close the FCN base at West Haddon and through that connection and NFU work on delayed scheme payments in the past have met and come across many FCN staff and volunteers. Again, where I can I have helped FCN with issues that have arose. There have been some challenging times in the past with the early days of the rollout out of the Single Payment Scheme in 2005 and to a less extent the introduction of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) in 2015.

Why did you want to get involved with Time to Plan?

I have over the years seen many changes to the way farmers have been supported by the EU under the CAP and each one of those transitions has come with its challenges as well as opportunities. So I wanted to share through this programme some of my thoughts and observations I have gained over the years to help those feeling like it is an insurmountable challenge up a head.

Where do you see challenges going forward from here in farm support development?

We as an industry have rightly or wrongly got used to a certain way of implementation, delivery and development of farm support schemes, which clearly have originated from Brussels. Whilst farmers would love to farm without financial support, the economic realities paint a different picture. There have been many layers of both decision making and regulation before support schemes manifest themselves on farm.

With the new suite of schemes being developed domestically by Defra this will mean things will probably be done in many different ways to the past. However, on the other hand, there will still be things farmers will need to appreciate, such as audit trail of public money to individuals with associated rules and checks. The clear drive for sympathetic environmental management of land going forward and how that can be reconciled with production agriculture is going to be a key area to consider. Also that the transition from the old CAP based direct payments scheme like BPS to the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (E.L.M) will be key to understand. It is important to bear in mind that E.L.M, is not a replacement for BPS, even though a significant amount of money is going to be redirected from BPS to E.L.M.

What I know will be frustrating also is that E.L.M and other new schemes are going to take time to be fully developed, in the interim there is going to be significant uncertainty and evolution of Defra's plans which will not seat easy next to farming businesses needing a certainty as to what is required and when.

Where do you see opportunities in the development of the new farm support?

I see a great opportunity in the way final scheme design actually works for farmers and is based on our landscape, farming systems and future developments. Whilst change will always bring concerns, it is key to engage and work through what it means for a farming business, as well as those working and earning an income from it.

Change is happening, it is not going to be completed overnight, there is time to work through the implications of change and the opportunities that may arise for a farming business. Whilst sounding unnerving to a degree, but everyone is on the same journey of change, but equally many of the challenges and opportunities that will be faced will not be new ones, but have a different name.

Opportunities many come for farming businesses to take on more land, develop environmental services and schemes on their own farm or in collaboration with neighbours in the same situation and that could be a catalyst for greater cooperation in other areas and thus perhaps help to solve and share some of the future of future investment and labour demand for the farm.

What would you say to anyone who is feeling anxious about the changes ahead?

It is totally understandable that people will feel anxious, it is normal. After all we build our current approaches on what we know, so when some of what we know changes, that can cause concerns as that current approach is likely to need to be reviewed and also likely to need to change going forward. To give some comfort, accepting every farming business is different and perhaps in a different place to where the future may look like for them, is the fact that everyone is in the same boat here. So the entire farming community is going to be working their way through the farm support changes that are now being communicated. Yes, some will be more advanced in their thinking and in a better place to adapt than others, but actually at this time no one knows everything.

Key for me is to address the challenge and not avoid it, which will not help and will undoubtedly lead to bottling it up of anxieties. To alleviate such a situation talk to those that are trusted or perhaps someone that does not know anything about the farming business. As they say a problem shared is a problem halved. Equally, it is also important if it has not already started, to have a conversation with all those family members associated with the farming business, as well as those perhaps not directly involved. To talk through the changes that are coming down the track.

Again in any of these conversations no one has a monopoly of ideas, solutions or approaches and collective thinking and discussion will hopefully start to address some of those anxieties and move the business forward. This is I know easier said than done, but there is a bit of time over the coming months to work through thoughts and how to approach this. What is essential to help manage the anxiety is to understand what is changing and with the information that is being published now by Defra, it is important to read it and seek to understand it. Equally sharing it will help to trigger conversation and the catalyst to discuss the future.

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