

# GROW BACK BETTER

A resilience route-map  
for post-Covid-19 food,  
farming and land-use



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# Foreword

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It feels to me as if the coronavirus pandemic is nature giving humanity one last chance to stop, take stock of the havoc we are wreaking on this fragile earth, and to set a new course.

So many people are urging governments to 'build back better', to grab this opportunity to tackle climate change, the inequalities in society, the depletion of soils and wildlife, and to invest in the health of this generation and future ones. We have irrefutable proof now, that not to do so is an incredibly expensive and inhumane mistake. At the eleventh hour, we have one last chance.

All of us need to do everything we can to set the right course now, to grow back better. We can all act: in the choices we make as individuals about the way we live our lives, and the influence we have within our communities, regardless of whether your community is the local gardening club, or the House of Lords.

In this resilience road map, we set out some of the most urgent tasks ahead of us all, to ensure that food, farming and land use becomes a major part of the solution, rather than a huge problem. The ten solutions we set out here are areas that we at the Soil Association are working on, or want to do more about....but we are not working alone. There are many voices uniting in this call to arms, and this united voice needs to continue to grow and strengthen. There are many doing practical work, in brilliant ways, and we want to showcase and support their efforts.

So if you read this and want to get involved, do get in touch. If you feel we have missed some vital issue or are working in an allied arena, do let us know. If any of this inspires you, copy and steal the ideas. We will do everything we can to make this decade the turning point; please do everything you can, wherever you are, whatever you do, to do likewise.

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## Helen Browning

Soil Association CEO and organic farmer

The Soil Association is the UK's leading membership charity campaigning for healthy, humane and sustainable food, farming and land use.





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At the eleventh hour,  
we have one last chance.

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Afonso Palma © Soil Association



GROW BACK BETTER

# Introduction

The Covid-19 crisis has created unprecedented disruption to our daily lives, our food system, and the national and global economy.

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We are facing a possible global recession, heightened unemployment, recurring waves of pandemic and lockdown, and escalating levels of social inequality. Covid-19 delivered a shock to the food system, exposing the fragility of our food security, the consolidated and inflexible nature of our supply chains. It compounded the challenges that farmers and food businesses were already facing, and it edged millions of people in the UK into hunger and insecurity.

The Covid-19 crisis is not over, and it is not the only challenge we face. The pre-existing crises of climate, nature and health have not gone away; they have only got worse. COP26, which the UK was set to host, has been postponed due to Covid-19, signalling that international action on the climate crisis might be slipping further behind schedule. The UK's departure from the European Union remains in train, with the transition period expiring on 31st December 2020 and key aspects of the post-Brexit policy agenda still unresolved. Vital pieces of legislation, such as the Agriculture Bill and Environment Bill, are yet to achieve Royal Assent, and the National Food Strategy spent several months on hiatus.

The challenges confronting the UK in the wake of Covid-19 are complex and interdependent. Indeed, one of

the clearest lessons of the pandemic is that complexity and interdependence define the systems in which our lives are embedded – social, economic, and ecological. We have seen how a crisis in one domain can spill over into another, triggering abrupt and unpredictable changes. We have seen how the unthinkable can become the new normal, and with unnerving speed. This poses both risks and opportunities: the risk that ecological and social breakdown might become accepted and normalised; the opportunity to do things differently, and to build a more resilient society.

To tackle complex and interdependent challenges, the response must be transformational. Tweaks to the status quo will not suffice. To that end, this briefing outlines a route-map towards a reformed approach to food, farming and land-use in the UK, post-Covid-19. It draws on the Soil Association's experience in devising and delivering practical solutions, outlining how we can accelerate the transition to net-zero, and regenerate our wildlife and soils, while enhancing the health and wellbeing of the population. It looks a decade ahead, identifying the investment priorities and policy levers that can deliver transformational change, and the lock-ins that we must be careful to avoid.



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**To tackle complex and interdependent challenges, the response must be transformational.**

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# Taking stock

“Nations will begin to emerge from lockdown and look to fire up their economies once again. When that happens, it will be the duty of every responsible government to... rebuild in a way that will stand the test of time. That means investing in industries and infrastructure that can turn the tide on climate change. And it means doing all we can to boost resilience by shaping economies that can withstand everything nature throws at us.”

**Prime Minister Boris Johnson, April 2020<sup>1</sup>**

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It takes no more than a cursory glance at how Covid-19 unfolded to see that there are vulnerabilities and dysfunctions in our food system. Supermarket shelves were emptied of fresh produce, even as farmers and growers struggled to locate workers to pick this season's crop. Producers supplying into food service lost their market overnight when lockdown measures were introduced and struggled to re-route their produce. Dairy farmers were forced to pour millions of litres of milk down the drain, even as millions of children went to bed hungry.

Most scientists agree that Covid-19 originated in a wild animal, but they also warn that intensive animal farming increases the risk of infectious disease.<sup>2</sup> Animals reared in intensive systems are more prone to diseases caused by bacteria and viruses, which is why an estimated 73% of all antibiotics used worldwide are used in livestock.<sup>3</sup> Keeping large numbers of genetically similar animals in close confinement allows viruses to keep circulating and mutating, until one emerges that can infect humans. Covid-19 is unlikely to be the last pandemic we face.

The crisis has reanimated discussion of the UK's 'food security', a term that is sometimes conflated with a crude metric of self-sufficiency. Covid-19 has revealed our food security, in its true sense, to be complex and multi-faceted, rooted in both our supply infrastructure and

domestic production.<sup>4</sup> If the UK is to grow back better from the crisis – more food secure, with a healthier population and a more resilient food system – then the UK Government will need to address the following three questions:

## **1. Is UK farming diverse enough to feed its people a healthy diet in times of crisis?**

In the past half-century, food production in the UK has become increasingly specialised, and farmers have become more reliant upon inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides, antibiotics and imported animal feed. Many farmers produce few healthy foods for human consumption, but plentiful raw materials for the processing and intensive livestock industries. Half the cropland in the UK is used to produce feed crops for animals,<sup>5</sup> primarily for poultry, pork and dairy production, yet the UK is only producing 17% of the fruit and 53% of the vegetables that it consumes, even as 90% of children are failing to eat their five-a-day.<sup>6</sup>

Can we afford to use our land in this way? How can the specialisation of UK farming be undone, and diversity woven into our production systems? What would it mean for the UK to achieve 'healthy food security', self-sufficiency in what people need for a healthy diet? How can we shift diets onto a more sustainable footing, while supporting farmers to move into agroecological production?





## **2. How can we build on the examples of more resilient local and direct food networks springing up everywhere, and help them persist beyond the crisis?**

Our national food supply chains have become specialised in recent decades; they are now highly efficient but lacking in resilience and adaptability. This consolidation has occurred in tandem with farming becoming more specialised. As supply chains have become more linear and centralised, with power at the end of the chain, farmers have been forced into a market that does not value diversity, and which prioritises shareholder profits over public health. The paradox of food waste and food shortage is one consequence of this. The fact that one in four farmers in the UK is living in poverty, while one in three children finishes school overweight, is a sign that something has gone awry.

Can the examples of local and direct supply which emerged out of the crisis, including new forms of food aid and a network of local delivery, be harnessed to create a more resilient and healthier food system? How can our national supply chains be regionalised and re-localised? What more could be done to support SMEs, who have been left exposed by this crisis, to gain access to market? Can we develop supply chains that benefit farmers, food businesses and public health, while helping the UK to resolve the climate and nature crises?

## **3. Is our food system undermining food security by making crises – from pandemics to antimicrobial resistance to droughts to pollinator extinctions – more likely?**

The Covid-19 crisis has illustrated the value of a precautionary approach to societal threat. It has shown that remedial action pays; that inaction can incur costs further down the line; that prevention is preferable to the search for a cure. It has also exposed flaws in our relationship with the natural world, particularly with respect to our mistreatment of animals. While the pandemic has been a human and economic disaster, the threat it poses is minor compared to those posed by ecological breakdown and the climate crisis, both of which are being exacerbated by our food system.

Can we afford the further intensification of livestock production? Should we view zoonoses and antimicrobial resistance as the final nail in the coffin of cruel and unsustainable industrial animal farming? Can we build a food system that is more resilient in the face of future crises, and which alleviates the likelihood that crises will arise? How do we return diversity – biodiversity, and diversity in plant and animal breeds and species, including genetic diversity – into our farming systems?





## Ten years ahead

“Imagine a landscape where farming is working in harmony with its physical and social geography. Soils, trees and grasslands soak up carbon, and provide the habitats for wildlife. Grazing livestock recycle nutrients and maintain biodiverse pastures, while pigs and poultry live mostly on waste streams, competing less with humans for food.

A far greater range of crops are grown and eaten, and we produce the fruits, nuts, timber, pulses and vegetables that we need which are suited to our climate. Pesticide, herbicide, antibiotic and soluble fertiliser use is minimised, with new knowledge flowing rapidly between farmers on how to utilise natural processes to generate fertility and manage weeds, pests and diseases. Regional processing, marketing and distribution infrastructure allows sufficient fresh, delicious, wholesome food to be delivered efficiently to customers, at prices that are fair to them and to producers. Farmers benefit from the technologies, and the investments, to make the successful transition to an agroecological system which feeds society well, without offshoring our responsibilities or undermining the opportunities for future generations.”

**Food, Farming & Countryside Commission, 2019<sup>7</sup>**

Ten years from now, the UK’s food and farming systems must be in a radically different state if we are to have ‘grown back better’ from the Covid-19 crisis. We will need to be farming differently, eating differently, and organising our society differently.

The strongest vision of a reformed farming system is found in the ‘Ten Years for Agroecology’ study written by thinktank IDDRI.<sup>8</sup> The study models a fully agroecological Europe, where diverse, mixed farming systems designed according to organic principles, and healthy and sustainable diets, are the norm. The study stresses that we can wean farming off synthetic fertilisers and pesticides while producing enough nutritious food to feed a growing population and ending the offshoring of our food footprint; we can preserve our soils and our biodiversity while resolving farming’s contribution to the climate crisis; we can achieve widespread

ecological regeneration, bringing trees and wildlife back onto the land, without needing to intensify food production or relinquish large areas of farmland.

In the UK, the Food Farming & Countryside Commission – backed by a wide range of farming, health, conservation and consumer groups – has called for a ‘Ten-Year Transition to Agroecology’ in the UK. The Commission’s report says: “Government should urgently set an economic and regulatory framework that allows farmers to plan confidently for a sustainable future. It should focus on a bold and honest ambition, recognising that farmers would rather plan for change than react to a moving target.”<sup>9</sup> The Commission notes that, in parallel with this “ten-year transition plan for sustainable, agroecological farming,” action must be taken to shift diets, with

changes in production and consumption progressing in tandem, and increases in land under agroecology matched with market development for more sustainable produce.

The UK’s post-Covid-19 and post-Brexit policy and legislative agendas are still in development, but the European Union has outlined a series of ambitious targets angled towards a similar transition, aiming for 25% of agricultural land in Europe to be farmed organically, and for pesticide and antibiotics use to halved by 2030.<sup>10</sup> In several nations, these targets are matched by government-led efforts to develop the market for sustainable produce. If the UK is to grow back better from the Covid-19 crisis, and deliver this agroecological transition, then we should be setting targets that are equally as ambitious.



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**Ten years from now, the UK’s food and farming systems must be in a radically different state if we are to have ‘grown back better’**

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# This would mean that by 2030 in the UK we would see



A minimum of **25%** of land  
farmed **organically**



A minimum reduction  
in **pesticide** use of **50%**



A minimum of **5%** of farmed land  
under **agroforestry** systems



A minimum of **10%** of farmed  
land used for **natural habitats**



A 'good life' for all farmed animals, cutting  
**soy imports and antibiotic use** by **90%**



**Soil organic matter** increasing across  
all UK farms year-on-year



Every child eating a **healthy diet**



**Ultra-processed foods** forming  
no more **than 15%** of the national diet



'**Less and better**' **meat** in all  
public institutions

# How we get there

Around the world, governments, businesses and individuals have responded to the Covid-19 crisis with innovation and imagination, re-writing political, social and fiscal norms.

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While there are risks in rapid and radical change, the response signals that such change is possible in a time of crisis.

An equally bold response must now be mounted in response to the threats posed by the climate, nature and health crises, with actions taken to –

- Accelerate progress on ‘the good’
- Hasten the die-off of ‘the bad’
- Take transformational action now
- Avoid the lock-ins

A recent YouGov survey found that 85% of people want to see at least some of the personal or social changes experienced during lockdown to continue afterwards. 51% say they have noticed cleaner air and 27% have noticed more wildlife. Social bonds are stronger, with 40% saying they feel a stronger sense of local community. 42% say the outbreak has made them value food more. Some 3 million people, 6% of the population, have tried a veg box scheme or ordered food from a local farm

for the first time.<sup>11</sup> These represent a few elements of ‘the good’ on which we must now accelerate progress.

For an example of ‘the bad’, we need look no further than the intensive livestock production systems that might cause the next pandemic. The contribution of these systems towards land degradation and deforestation, wildlife loss and antimicrobial resistance, climate change and an inadequate life for farm animals, is compounded by the risk of novel zoonoses. The die-off of these systems, in the context of a just transition to agroecological farming and sustainable land-use, should be hastened.

To this end, the following ten priorities form a ‘resilience route-map’ that, collectively enacted, would deliver a ten-year **transition to agroecology and sustainable land-use** alongside a ten-year **transition to healthy and sustainable diets**. They are followed by a look at the ‘lock-ins’ that must be avoided if the transition is to be successful.



# Ten-Year Transition to Agroecology and Sustainable Land-Use





Afonso Palma © Soil Association

### 1. Transform livestock farming to dramatically reduce the risks of pandemics and antimicrobial resistance

There are significant barriers to overcome in transitioning away from intensive livestock production to more extensive, agroecological systems that ensure a 'good life' for all farm animals. Farmers investing in intensive systems can be tied into debt and repayments across more than a decade; buildings designed to house cows, hens or pigs cannot be easily re-purposed; changing production systems can mean changing business models and diversifying into new markets.

Significant government investment will be required to enable a just transition for farmers away from intensive livestock and into mixed, agroecological production. A combination of policy change and financial support should be harnessed, including by ensuring the new farm animal welfare grants and payment support system sets a bold ambition. The UK Government should offer tax relief or capital grants to help farmers repurpose buildings and animal housing, and public procurement should be used to create a secure demand for the meat produced in more extensive systems. Harder policy measures could also be introduced, such as a ban on the routine, preventative use of antibiotics; improvements to legal animal welfare standards; and measures to both reduce reliance on imported animal feed crops and to free-up UK land from feed crop production.





Afonso Palma © Soil Association

## 2. Exceed Europe's ambition to halve pesticide use and grow organic farming to 25% farmed land by 2030

If the UK is to be a global leader in environmental food production, it will need to continue raising its ambitions and its standards. As we recover from Covid-19, the UK should seek to exceed Europe's target of halving pesticide use and growing organic farming to 25% of farmed land by 2030. This will require policy and legislation, coupled with practical support and enhanced knowledge-sharing among farmers. The Agriculture Bill and Environmental Land Management System should ensure that farmers are rewarded for employing agroecological production across the 'whole farm system', not just for taking individual actions that improve the environment, which could see production systems unchanged, and concern for nature relegated to the margins. The Environment Bill should also introduce a legally binding pesticide reduction target, with a programme of support for all farmers to adopt agroecological methods of integrated pest management, based on prevention first and pesticides last.

The ambition for land farmed under organic systems should be accompanied by efforts to grow the market for organic foods. The UK organic market is in its eighth consecutive year of growth, with sales increasing by 4.5% in 2019.<sup>12</sup> That means that £200 million is spent on organic products in the UK every month. The UK Government should build on this growing demand with action to drive uptake across all channels and sectors, including through public procurement (see below).



### 3. Instigate a farmer-led tree planting revolution

The UK Climate Change Committee has set the target of 19% woodland cover in the UK by 2050.<sup>13</sup> This should be achieved via increases to farm woodland and the rapid scale-up of agroforestry systems, with farmers leading a tree planting revolution.

Trees can be integrated into the farmed landscape in a variety of ways, from individual trees, to trees in hedgerows, to farmland woodland, to agroforestry systems which integrate trees with crop or animal production. These systems deliver multiple benefits, boosting productivity and providing environmental benefits such as improved soil health, reduction in wind exposure impact to crops, reduction in heat stress to livestock, reduced incidence of pests and diseases, and supplementary foods for livestock diets. Ecological regeneration and food production are often said to be at odds, but they needn't be. As stewards of our land, farmers should be supported to lead the UK's efforts to increase tree cover, with a minimum of 5% of agricultural land under agroforestry by 2030 and 10% by 2040, and a doubling in farm woodland cover in the same period.

These tree-planting ambitions could be supported via government funding for a National Nature Service which supports young people to gain employment in work that supports a green recovery from Covid-19.<sup>14</sup> With the crisis likely to increase unemployment rates, meaning fewer opportunities for young people, the Government should be looking to create opportunities in emerging green industries, including in the countryside. The National Nature Service would provide a training and employment programme, and grants for farmers and community groups to engage young people in projects that benefit the land, including tree-planting and agroforestry projects.





An Innovative Farmers field lab with Riverford testing non-chemical seed treatments with the Organic Research Centre

### 4. Farmer-led innovation and professional development – from agrichemical to agroecological R&D and knowledge sharing

Public investment in agricultural research is not aligned with the principle of ‘public money for public goods’ and its governance excludes farmer and citizen participation. Transformational change in farming will require a shift in investment towards innovative solutions for agroecological systems, alongside support for new entrants going into agroecological production. Research institutions and universities – particularly agricultural colleges – should be encouraged to offer courses in organic and agroecological farming practices, and support should be made available for apprenticeships.

Continuous Professional Development should be available to all farmers and land-managers and a condition of access to grants. Opportunities for knowledge sharing among farmer networks should be promoted and encouraged, alongside the provision of independent advice that is not tied to input sales. Evidence suggests that well-structured peer-to-peer mentoring is an effective method of learning and development for farmers.

One example is the Innovative Farmers network, established by a partnership led by the Soil Association. The programme brings together organic and non-organic farmers with researchers and provides funding and support to test new ideas in practical ‘field labs’. It provides a model that could be expanded more widely. The UK currently spends around £450 million a year on agricultural research and innovation, but as little as 1% goes to practical projects led by farmers. Putting just 10% of this budget towards these projects could see upwards of 1,000 projects a year led by groups of farmers.<sup>15</sup>



### 5. Turn soil from carbon source into carbon sink – for net zero and climate resilience

Soil health should be at the heart of the UK's post-Covid-19 recovery plan. Increasing soil organic matter in UK soils would deliver multiple benefits, including increased water holding capacity, helping to prevent flooding, increased productivity, and increased soil carbon content. The UK's adaptation and mitigation agendas converge in the need to regenerate our soils, building adaptive capacity into food production while sequestering carbon from the atmosphere.

The Agriculture Bill recognises soil health among the measures for which farmers should receive payments ('public money for public goods') but soil measurement is not established as common practice. A legally binding target for improving soil health should be embedded in the Environment Bill, with payments for agricultural support contingent upon baseline measurement and data-gathering of soil organic matter. This should be coupled with support and guidance for farmers to make the requirement practicable.



# Ten-Year Transition to Healthy and Sustainable Diets







Farringtons carrots © Fresh-range

### **6. Scale up fruit, vegetable, pulses, nut production – by investing in UK horticulture**

The UK Government should boost UK horticultural production, doubling (or tripling) UK production of vegetable, fruit, nuts and pulses. This move should be backed by financial incentives and grants to support farmers to move into horticultural production, with an emphasis on agroecological growing techniques. Policies should also be introduced to improve access to land for diverse new entrants, and investment in skills for agroecological production. The labour challenge will need to be addressed, with a sure supply of workers to pick fruit and other crops at harvest.

Boosting UK nut production will require investment in markets. While markets are well established for UK-grown fruits, this is not the case for nuts such as hazelnuts, cobnuts, walnuts and chestnuts. Farmers investing in agroforestry systems also face a delayed return on investment before trees become profitable. The UK Government should seek to grow the domestic market for nuts, including through public procurement, while supporting farmers to implement agroforestry systems.





### 7. Set ambition to cut ultra-processed food in diet – as France has done

The UK consumes the most ultra-processed diet in Europe, with 51% of family food purchases being of ultra-processed food.<sup>16</sup> There is robust evidence associating the consumption of these foods with obesity and metabolic disease, including through their impact on the gut microbiome.

Despite France's relatively low consumption, the French Government has set the target of reducing ultra-processed foods in the diet by 20% (of the 14% that they form) between 2018 and 2021.<sup>17</sup> (Reducing consumption of ultra-processed foods is also part of national dietary guidance in Brazil and Canada.) The UK Government should follow suit, aiming to move from 'worst in class' to 'best in class' within ten years. Across nineteen European countries, the median proportion of ultra-processed foods in the diet is 33.9%, with Portugal (10.2%) and Italy (13.4%) at the bottom, and the UK at the top.<sup>18</sup> The UK Government should aim to rebalance our diets to the European median within 5 years and achieve an 80 percent decrease on today, down to 10-15% total by 2030.



Fresh-range delivering catering boxes © Fresh-range

### **8. Bold public procurement** – improving quality and increasing organic

The UK Government should commit to a world-leading public procurement strategy that aims to normalise healthy and sustainable diets, while providing a secure market for agroecological and organic production. As a priority, Defra's Balanced Scorecard should be implemented across the public sector, with procurement decisions required to place a minimum weighting of 60% of quality relative to price.

The UK Government should also commit to a % target for organic in public procurement, following the example of Denmark, where 60% of food in public institutions is organic (84% in Copenhagen), and the precedent set by caterers serving organic through the Soil Association's Food for Life Served Here scheme. Procurement and nutrition guidelines should support the consumption of 'more and better' plants and 'less and better' meat, increasing the volume of organic and agroecological meat served in public settings, alongside an overall reduction in meat on menus. The update of the School Food Standards provides an opportunity to introduce a statutory requirement for 'less and better' meat in all English schools.





### 9. Every child to get world class food education – for health, climate and nature

The UK Government should support a million more children to eat their five-a-day by encouraging schools to adopt a 'whole school approach' to food, such as is embodied in the Food for Life School Award. Independent evaluation shows that pupils in Food for Life-engaged schools are twice as likely to eat their five-a-day compared to children in matched comparison schools, and they eat a third more fruit and vegetables overall. If every primary school was a Food for Life school, a million more children would be eating their five-a-day.<sup>19</sup>

Increased uptake of Food for Life, and other school food initiatives, could be supported by committing 50% of the funds from the Soft Drinks Industry Levy to school food and food education.



Afonso Palma © Soil Association

### **10. Rebuild resilient, regional food supply chains and stop deforestation associated with UK animal feed**

The UK Government should invest in regional supply chain infrastructure to bring renewed diversity and resilience to routes to market. Over-specialised global and national supply chains for retail and catering are vulnerable to disruption and caused the dual tragedy of food dumping and shortages. 'Dynamic Food Procurement' – currently being piloted by Crown Commercial Services in the South West – should be rolled out to support local farmers and growers to benefit from the £1.2bn annual food spend from public procurement.<sup>20</sup>

This does not imply that trade will no longer be important – it will be – but we should be producing food where its climate and nature impact is lowest. Crucially, the UK Government should legislate to end deforestation and loss of high conservation value habitats from UK supply chains, beginning with commodities and products that contribute most significantly to losses, including animal feed. A mandatory due diligence obligation should also be imposed on companies that place commodities and products on the UK market that might have contributed to deforestation.<sup>21</sup>



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The world is not going to  
return to the way that it  
was only a few months ago

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Harvesting onions at  
The Community Farm



GROW BACK BETTER

# Avoiding the lock-ins

Efforts to grow back better from Covid-19 should target investment at areas that secure multiple co-benefits, accelerating progress in resolving the climate, nature and health crises while re-booting the economy. But there are risks.

The wrong choices taken at this moment could lock us into damaging directions of travel, at precisely the wrong moment. The UK Government's 'Build, Build, Build' road building plans might fall into this category, but there are other 'lock-ins' that must be avoided, including those that affect food, farming and land-use. Among these are –

**Net-zero pathways that do not work for nature.** The UK Climate Change Committee's land use plan proposes the increased production of bioenergy crops, which could damage soils and wildlife. The Committee notes that "risks of biodiversity loss can arise for bioenergy crops or planting large monocultures for example and these need to be managed." But an alternative agroecological pathway is not clearly promoted.

The Soil Association is not alone in highlighting that the climate and nature crises must be addressed together. Bob Watson, Chair of the UN's IPBES global assessment of biodiversity and land degradation, has said: "Governments have focused on climate change far more than they have focused on loss of biodiversity or land degradation. All three are equally important to human wellbeing."<sup>22</sup> It is essential that as the UK recovers from Covid-19, and seeks to achieve net zero, that the transition pathway also benefits nature, soils, ecological regeneration and public health.

**Bailing out the polluters.** The full impact on business from Covid-19 is yet to be realised, and the potential for government bailouts of key industries is growing. It is essential that any

companies offered bailouts or relief must be required to take meaningful action to align with the UK's ambitions to achieve net zero and implement the Paris Climate Agreement, and with the ambitions outlined in the UK's 25-Year Environment Plan. This includes national and multinational food and agri-input businesses with a stake in UK and global land-use.

**Productivity grants** for farming should only be used in a context in which they accelerate the transition to agroecological farming. With many farmers impacted by Covid-19, it is appropriate that financial support should be made available, but productivity grants, for example those that might be invested in biogas digesters or housing for intensive animal farming, could be counter-productive, locking farmers into production systems that are incompatible with resolving the climate and nature emergencies.

**Trade agreements that lock us into a 'race to the bottom'.** The UK's ambitions for a green recovery from Covid-19 could be scuppered by trade agreements that undermine production standards and create a 'race to the bottom' in animal welfare, pesticide use and environmental protection. To counter this, the UK Government should embed a legislative guarantee of non-regression on environment, food and farming standards, before any trade deal is agreed. This should be via a non-regression clause in the Trade Bill, reinforced by an amendment to the Agriculture Bill requiring that imports are produced to at standards that do not undermine producers in the UK.



# In conclusion

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Growing back better from Covid-19 will require immediate and meaningful action on multiple fronts, but the crisis has shown that this action is both possible and desirable. The world is not going to return to the way that it was only a few months ago, and in many ways, this should be welcomed.

The climate, nature and health crises demand a response that is as radical and rapid as the response to Covid-19, in recognition of the scale of threat posed and the narrow timeframe that we have left to respond. This response can and must be delivered in the next ten years, beginning with transformation action taken now.

We can grow back better, transitioning to a healthier, more resilient and more sustainable food and farming system.

The transition should begin today.



# About the Soil Association

The Soil Association is a membership charity formed in 1946 by a group of farmers, scientists, doctors and nutritionists determined to pioneer a world where we can live in health and in harmony with nature. Our vision is good food for all, produced with care for the natural world.

Today, the Soil Association is campaigning and scaling up solutions to the climate, nature and health crises, collaborating with farmers and food procurers, lobbying government, working across the food system to innovate and implement change.

Through our Innovative Farmers network, we bring together organic and non-organic farmers with researchers and scientists, providing support to test new ideas in practical 'field labs'.

Through our trading subsidiary, Soil Association Certification, we work with over 6,000 businesses including organic farmers and growers, caterers, food processors and manufacturers across more than 50 countries, and we certify over 14 million hectares of forest globally.

Through our Food for Life programme, we work with schools, nurseries, hospitals and care homes to put healthy and sustainable food on the plate and to reconnect people with where their food comes from. Our Food for Life Served Here scheme provides independent endorsement that caterers and food providers are serving fresh, healthy, sustainable and locally sourced food, with over 2 million meals served each day meeting Food for Life standards.

Through our Sustainable Food Places network, founded in partnership with Sustain and Food Matters, we work with cities and places to develop cross-sector partnerships of local public agencies, businesses, academics and NGOs committed to working together to make healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where they live.



## Join us



[soilassociation.org](http://soilassociation.org)



[foodforlife.org.uk](http://foodforlife.org.uk)



[sustainablefoodplaces.org](http://sustainablefoodplaces.org)



[innovativefarmers.org](http://innovativefarmers.org)



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**Soil Association**

Spear House, 51 Victoria Street

Bristol BS1 6AD

T 0300 330 0100

F 0117 314 5001

Registered charity no. 206862

**[www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org)**



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