

Farm Woodland Forum – Response to the England Tree Strategy Consultation 2020



This response is submitted by the Executive Committee of the Farm Woodland Forum (www.agroforestry.ac.uk), a registered charity with members from across the UK and Ireland. We provide a forum for about 200 practitioners, researchers, and advisers with an interest in trees on farms.

The Farm Woodland Forum welcomes the consultation to help develop an England Tree Strategy. We appreciate the use of the term “Tree Strategy” as there are 742 kha of tree cover outside the National Inventory definition of “forest” in GB (or 20% of the total GB forest and woodland).¹ There is great opportunity to encourage the expansion of “Trees Outside the Forest” (ToF), including agricultural and urban trees generally. We are pleased to submit our response, and draw attention to our detailed submission to the 2018 consultation². In addition to the structured online questionnaire, we have some brief comments and suggestions particularly related to agroforestry. There are six points we wish to make.

1. Support for farm carbon inventories.

Agroforestry seeks to achieve the appropriate integration and management of trees on farms, be it for production, animal welfare, environmental, or social reasons. It is our premise that farmers and landowners are usually best placed to decide the most appropriate arrangement and form of trees on farms, be it fruit and nut trees, hedgerows and shelterbelts, small copses, farm woodlands, or silvoarable and silvopastoral systems. Our recommendation is that the UK Government should support farm businesses or clusters of smaller farm businesses, to establish a spatial carbon inventory of the farm (soil and biomass carbon) and individual roadmaps to achieve no net emissions of GHG by 2050. Farm businesses should be paid to determine and report their carbon inventory every five years and demonstrate that there is no net loss. We think that such a framework will encourage tree planting and management in innovative and robust ways that will stimulate economic activity and environmental enhancement.

2. Collation of measures to promote tree planting

Within the Common Agriculture Policy, Mosquera-Losada et al (2017)³ identified 27 measures to support the management and planting of trees on farms, i.e. agroforestry in its broad sense. We recognise that there are benefits in having different measures (if not 27), but that it would be very helpful for farmers, landowners and advisers if support for tree planting and management could be collated in one location and entitled: “Agroforestry; trees on farms”.

3. Targets for Agroforestry

We support the need for robust targets for agroforestry, and tracking of these through a national “Tree Action Plan (TAP). We support the NFU’s net zero by 2040 strategy for increasing farmland woodland and hedgerows (including trees in hedgerows) to deliver annual GHG savings of 0.7 MtCO₂e, and 0.5 MtCO₂e respectively. We also support the Climate Change Committee’s 2018 recommendation for 900,000ha of new “agroforestry and hedgerows” in the UK by 2050⁴ and would like an intermediate target set for England by 2030. These values should be related to the need for agroforestry in different landscapes, and finer-scale area- or tree-based targets should be set for regions.

¹ Forestry Commission. (2017). *Tree cover outside woodland in Great Britain*, HMSO Statistical Report Forest Inventory). ([link](#))

² Farm Woodland Forum (FWF) response to consultation on “the future for food, farming and the environment” 8.5.2018 ([link](#))

³ Mosquera-Losada, M.R. et al. (2017). *How can policy support the appropriate development and uptake of agroforestry in Europe?* AGFORWARD Deliverable 8.24. ([link](#))

⁴ Committee on Climate Change. (2018). *Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change*. [UK CCC](#).

4. Forest Management Standards

The consultation implies that the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) could be extended to farm woodlands. We would like to see the development of standards covering trees on farms generally: recognising that agroforestry is now included in the PEFC Standard.⁵

Alongside this, there is a need to develop the evidence base of 'what works where' – including critically looking at how different forms of agroforestry affect the economic performance of the farms in different contexts. As much as possible, development should be in line with agroecological principles. It is important to support farmer innovation and experimentation: which also gives increased ownership and 'buy in' for farm woodlands and agroforestry.

5. Facilitating engagement between foresters and farmers

The administration of forestry and agriculture have historically been at odds with each other, and the cultural divide between them still exists, and presents a significant barrier to woodland expansion on farmland. The promotion of agroforestry is one mechanism to bridge this divide and support integrated land management; but one that requires a significant 'hearts and minds' initiative to increase adoption. This will be hugely dependent upon farmers who have successfully adopted these systems teaching other farmers, through the use of demonstration farms and targeted extension from the agricultural community (rather than the forestry community). This advice should be guided by a good understanding of the agroecological benefits of farm woodlands (and not just their productive value), and designs that enable the delivery of both on farm benefits and public goods.

- There is limited capacity to support this activity at present, and the agricultural and forestry colleges could usefully improve their skills and establish agroforestry demonstration plots.
- One mechanism to achieve this capacity would be through the provision of annual grants for "Whole Farm Audits", where specialists would assess the practical opportunity to integrate trees within specific farms, or groups of farms, and help them prepare more detailed planting and management proposals.

6. Designation/definition of "forests"

The concept of a permanent change in land use to "forest" is a disincentive to farmer-led planting of small blocks of trees, for many economic and psychological reasons. Currently the UK threshold area for blocks of "forest land" is 0.1 ha⁶. The Forestry Commission Inventory recognises a category of "small woodland" for blocks between 0.1ha and 0.5ha.⁷ These need not be regarded as official "forest", especially since the FAO "forest" threshold is 0.5 ha, and this is used in most European countries. We suggest changing this threshold in England, meaning that large numbers of small copses could be established without changing their legal status to "forest". This change would also increase the carbon-sequestration recorded in LULUCF annual returns to the UNFCCC from agriculture (i.e. "cropland" and "grassland").⁸

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⁵ PEFC. (2019). PEFC Trees outside Forests at the World Agroforestry Congress. Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification. ([link](#))

⁶ Regulation EU 2018/841 (Annex II)

⁷ "Small woods" cover 295,000 hectares in England (see *Tree Cover Outside Woodland in Great Britain, National Forest Inventory Report (2017)* - see footnote 1

⁸ A modification would be needed to the [UK National Forestry Accounting Plan](#) as notified to the UNFCCC, but procedures exist for these changes.