

Sir Donald Curry CBE,
Policy Commission on the Future of
Farming and Food,
LG12, Admiralty Arch,
The Mall,
London,
SW1A 2WH
25 October 2001



Dear Sir Donald Curry CBE,

I have been asked as Chairman of the English Strategy Sub-Committee of the UK Agroforestry Forum, to comment on the consultation document produced by the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food. The Forum consists of farmers, researchers, teachers and rural workers across the UK and was formed in the mid-1980s.

Agroforestry can be defined as:

“An innovative, systematic approach to land use, which recognises that trees and shrubs can play a central role in sustaining and enhancing the distinctive environment, economy and social fabric of the UK for the benefit of all.”

It should be noted at the outset that agroforestry is not simply a combination of agriculture and forestry. It deals with a far greater range of economic species, products, potential users, and planting arrangements than current UK forestry from an integrated perspective of sustainability. Relevant research and development work is outlined in the following recent publications:

- Gordon, A.M. and Newman, S.M. (1997). *Temperate Agroforestry*. Wallingford: CAB International. 269 pages ISBN 0 85199 147
- Hislop, M. and Claridge, J. (2000). *Agroforestry in the UK*. Forestry Commission Bulletin 122. Edinburgh: Forestry Commission. 136 pages

There is now evidence that trees and shrubs have a wide range of key sustainable rural development related attributes. These include:

- landscape and amenity - the English landscape is primarily an agroforestry landscape, where trees are integrated with pasture, crops and amenity areas.
- biodiversity - the incorporation of trees in farming can increase the diversity of invertebrates, small mammals and birds, compared to pasture or crops systems alone.
- product diversification with environmental and economic benefits - trees primarily encouraged for environmental reasons may also have productive functions. For example buffer zone trees can produce timber, fruits and nuts and flood control coppice systems can produce biomass energy thereby mitigating greenhouse gas emissions.
- animal welfare – integration of trees with pasture can offer a more welfare-friendly production system than pasture alone.
- acceptance by farmers - farmer surveys and uptake on commercial farms in Northern Ireland show that farmers have started to consider agroforestry as a realistic land use option.
- mitigation of pollution – trees can provide a filter function in the landscape capable of capturing and recycling nitrogen and phosphorus that would otherwise flow into and pollute watercourses, and

- flood control - where agricultural land use has led to high runoff and flash floods, the strategic placement of trees and contour hedgerows can increase water infiltration and transpiration and reduce flood risk.

Response to specific questions

1. As citizens, consumers and taxpayers, what should we expect of the countryside, farming and the food sector?

As citizens, consumers and taxpayers, we expect farmers and key actors within the food sector to *help sustain and enhance the distinctive environment, economy and social fabric of the English countryside for the benefit of all*. In particular we should have:

1. food that is healthy and produced ethically in terms of the environmental impact involved in its production and the welfare of animals;
2. rural economies based upon a greater range of products grown on farms;
3. farms contributing to social needs in terms of the provision of specialised health resources, housing, recreation and amenity in an economically viable setting; and
4. conservation and development of a range of important habitats to maintain a sense of locality and characteristic biodiversity.

2. Against that background, what is good about farming (as land manager and food producer) and the food sector at present that we should try to preserve, and what are the problems?

Good attributes of farming include good agronomic knowledge of a limited range of crop and animal species and efficient production of certain bulk commodities per person employed. Many of the problems of farming relate to a gradual process of subsidy- and policy-driven specialisation that is antithetical to sustainability. Farmers have become de-coupled from the three dimensions of sustainability. These are:

- Environmental: operationally important managed and un-managed biodiversity, soil and water properties, and environmental heterogeneity are not conserved adequately.
- Economic: many farming enterprises are reliant on one major source of income, e.g. subsidy, and on a small range of products. Entrepreneurial skills are suppressed.
- Social: farming is viewed to be of little benefit to society in general and farmers' understanding of the needs of the local community are not sufficient to develop, maintain and enhance a diverse and fully-integrated enterprise.

Good attributes of the food sector have only recently occurred and include a greater availability of and demand for clearly labelled, quality food items produced under positive social, animal welfare and environmental conditions and the presence of good food from "farmers'" markets. One problem with the food sector is the dominance and power of supermarkets. They do not appear to be actively encouraging diverse food production from local sources.

The overall problem is sectoral specialisation at policy and institutional (research, investment and extension etc) level which can now be recognised as a causal factor! Farming is now divorced from forestry, horticulture, energy production, social and community care, conservation, recreation and amenity.

3. What factors are driving these good and bad aspects, and how?

The main factor driving the bad aspects of the system has been the CAP and institutional separation of the government departments responsible for farming and food from those responsible for broader aspects of the rural and peri-urban environment. The main factor

driving the good aspects has been the education of consumers manifested as a demand for higher standards.

4. What can be done to make things better: (a) in the short term?

1. Critically assess the England Forestry Strategy from the perspective of agroforestry and new sustainable rural enterprise.
2. Develop an agroforestry rather than an agricultural policy for England.
3. Reform policy instruments that negate agroforestry practice.
4. Fund participatory research and development on the mature stages of integrated tree-pasture and tree-crop systems (networks of sites exist where the establishment phase has been well researched but work on management of the mature phase is now required).
5. Set up and fund the provision of specialist advice.

(b) in the medium to long term?

Faster reform of the CAP and the development a clear strategy for agroforestry in England, based upon the spirit of the rural white paper 'Our Countryside: The Future: a Fair Deal for England'. Key objectives should be:

1. To facilitate the development of dynamic competitive and sustainable economies in the countryside, tackling poverty in the rural areas *by the creation of county-based agroforestry technology transfer demonstrations in representative configurations including environmental (e.g. timber belts and riparian strips), silvoarable systems, silvopastoral systems, and orchard intercropping.*
2. To maintain and stimulate communities and secure access to services which is equitable in all circumstances for those who live and work in the countryside *by the creation of a number of economically viable demonstration agroforestry villages.* Such an approach would address non-timber tree products, energy, materials, community and the landscape.
3. To conserve and enhance rural landscapes and the abundance of wildlife (including the habitats on which it depends) *through the creation of National Agroforestry Research Centres and a network of habitat-linked agroforestry demonstrations including parklands, forests and woodlands.*
4. To increase opportunities for people to enjoy the countryside *through agroforestry by a series of demonstrations showing increasing agro-forest-based employment, visual amenity and agro-forest tourism.*
5. To promote government responsiveness to rural communities through better working together between central departments, local government, and government agencies and better co-operation with non-governmental bodies *by the facilitation of County Agroforestry Action Plans.*

If you require any further information of the above, or to visit any of our wide range of farmer led participatory demonstration plots, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Steven M Newman

Chairman of the English Strategy Sub-committee of the UK Agroforestry Forum

c/o

Biodiversity International Ltd, Marriotts 13 Castle St, Buckingham MK18 1BP

Telephone 01280 824006, Email: steve@biodiversity-int.co.uk