

Session Overview

Panel: *What Does the Future of British Farming Look Like?*

Hosted by: Nuffield Farming

Speakers: Wallace Currie (chair), Sharon May, Dr Emma Chapelhow, Rob Ward

This session explored the future of British farming through multiple perspectives: mental health and well-being of farming families, technological innovation and agri-tech adoption, business resilience, and the broader socio-economic and environmental context. The discussion highlighted the tension between traditional farming values and the pressures of a modern, profit-driven, and increasingly regulated industry. Speakers emphasised the importance of data-driven decision-making, community support, diversification, and self-reliance, while recognising challenges such as subsidy dependency, compliance costs, and environmental pressures. Audience engagement reflected concern over energy projects (like large-scale solar farms), land use, and maintaining the integrity of British countryside.

10 Key Audience Takeaways

1. **Mental Health is Central:** Farming is high-pressure, multi-generational, and deeply connected with personal identity; supporting farmers' mental health and wellbeing is crucial for a sustainable future.
2. **Innovation Must Be Purposeful:** Successful innovation comes from solving real problems on farms, not just chasing profit or trends. Timing, preparation, and understanding market/customer needs are critical.
3. **Technology Integration:** Agri-tech and data-driven tools can help farmers make informed decisions, predict climate impacts, and improve efficiency—but must complement, not replace, farmer knowledge.
4. **Cash is King:** Financial literacy, cashflow management, and risk assessment are essential for sustainable diversification and long-term farm resilience.
5. **Collaboration is Key:** Farmers, researchers, banks, supermarkets, and government must collaborate to share responsibility for the future of farming and reduce individual burdens.
6. **Farm Diversification:** Diversification (holiday cottages, farm shops, agri-tech businesses) can strengthen farms, but should align with core skills and values to avoid failure.
7. **Regenerative Agriculture and Food Quality:** Farming practices must balance profitability with environmental sustainability and nutritional output, using data to optimize both.
8. **Policy Impacts:** Government decisions, including subsidies, inheritance tax, and land regulation, significantly affect farm viability. Farmers should plan for independence while advocating for fair policy.
9. **Land Use Challenges:** Large-scale solar farms and non-local landownership present challenges to traditional farming landscapes and local communities; solutions require thoughtful, balanced approaches.

10. **Community and Knowledge Sharing:** Peer networks, trade associations, and knowledge exchange accelerate innovation, provide support, and reduce duplicated effort.