PREPARING TO BOUNCE BACK
Farmers celebrate easing of lockdown restrictions

EXTENDED APPEAL
John Deere's new mass-market 6M series put to the test

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ELM scheme may fail without farmer input

With Defra having just relaunched its consultation into the future Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme, it is vital that farmers grab the opportunity to get involved.

As research undertaken at the University of Reading’s School of Agriculture and the University of Sheffield’s Institute for Sustainable Food shows, there are many reasons farmers may be reluctant to take part in the design and delivery of ELMs.

It is encouraging that Defra has committed to “co-designing” the new policy with farmers. But previous consultations have seen only larger farmers and organisations sharing in the process, and that can lead to distorted outcomes.

Along with the impact of the “digital divide” and limited access to broadband in rural areas, our study found that past experiences with bureaucracy and distrust of Defra and government agencies put many farmers off.

Lack of time, social isolation and age of the farmer were also found to make it difficult for farmers to contribute and participate in the co-design of ELM.

Yet failure to engage these “harder-to-reach” farmers risks failure of the ELM scheme. We would therefore recommend a simplified scheme design and the creation of non-digital ways for farmers to get involved.

Ministers should also review implementation timescales regularly and fund farm advisers with strong interpersonal skills and training in agri-environment issues, to support farmers through the transition to the new scheme.

Dr David Christian Rose
University of Reading, Berkshire

A great chance to connect with young

Having been in the agricultural industry for more than 20 years, I have done and seen some amazing things. I wasn’t born into farming, so I went to ag college and learned the trade.

But I learnt so much more – passion and enthusiasm to help encourage other young people like I once was. I became a lecturer, established showing clubs and even founded the UK Hereford Youth programme.

In these strange times, it has become increasingly apparent that now more than ever we need to connect with the younger generation, albeit virtually. More children are at home, enjoying the fruits of our labour, and it’s this opportunity we need to grab.

NFU Education and Eat Farm Now are doing amazing things on Twitter. Leaf (Linking Environment and Farming) is forever setting the bar high. But it’s the responsibility of all of us to connect and teach children about where their food comes from.

If we all play a part and “put ourselves out there”, then hopefully our industry will become even more diverse, interesting and brilliant. I certainly have no regrets from my career choices 20-plus years ago.

Emma Smith
Swindon, Wiltshire

Red Tractor’s role will be more important

I write in reference to the recent letter “Cheap chicken could doom Red Tractor” (Letters, 12 June). While I understand poultry

Time to tighten the rules for temporary grain storage

With harvest about to commence and Britain’s food supply chain in the crosshairs of a future trade deal, is now the time to review, among many other things, the safety of our grain storage standards?

It probably won’t be a problem this year, but last season’s grain harvest placed enormous pressure on some farmers’ storage capacity because yields came in above average on many holdings. Fortunately, the weather was mainly favourable and enough dry grain could temporarily be placed in stores not usually used for grain.

Some of these stores were open-fronted sheds with a concrete base, while others were just a hard, impermeable floor with a roof over the top and open on all sides.

Under Red Tractor rules, farmers can declare the need for temporary storage provided the grain is stored safely under cover and is cleared by the end of October. All good so far then... well, maybe not.

Many farmers, with an eye to maximising grain returns, sold grain from their temporary stores for the latest approved delivery month of October – and that’s when the wheels fell off the system.

Despite lots of export activity, the market was not able to cope with the volumes that needed moving. More specifically, there were not enough lorries to clear the October grain. Consequently, merchants asked Red Tractor to grant a one-off extension period of two weeks to clear the backlog. This meant that some temporary storage grain was still on farms until mid-November, possibly more than four months after it was harvested.