

Speech: The importance of soil in a changing climate

Thank you

–

“In winter’s chill or summer’s heat, farmers work so the world can eat.”

–

They’ve got their work cut out for them.

As the planet’s population hurtles towards eight billion people, we are relying on farmers to mass produce cheap food like never before.

At the same time, farmers manage 70 percent of the land – which they must protect and enhance for the next generation.

Farming isn’t rocket science.

It’s much, much harder than that.

The soil delivers 95 percent of global food supplies, but it is a limited resource under pressure from climate change, population growth, urban development, waste, pollution...

...and a lack of understanding.

Leonardo Da Vinci said “we know more about the movement of celestial bodies than about the soil underfoot” and 500 years later, there is less information about soil than any other part of the environment.

That’s a big problem.

Which is why the Environment Agency hugely welcomes the Government’s work to move this up the political agenda.

The 25 Year Environment Plan says “by 2030 we want all of England’s soils to be managed sustainably, and we will use natural capital thinking to develop appropriate soil metrics and management approaches.”

Earlier this month, the Natural Capital Committee released its advice on soil management, which – among other things – explained what those metrics might look like.

Today, we add our voice to this chorus by releasing a report about the state of soils.

I want to thank the Devon and Cornwall Soils Alliance for inviting me here to launch it.

Your members know how serious the problems facing soil health are, and will also have useful expertise about how to reverse the degradation.

But, we will all struggle to drive effective change, if the will for action is not supported by knowledge beyond the echo chamber.

The Secretary of State, Michael Gove, said: "Countries can withstand coups d'état, wars and conflict, even leaving the EU, but no country can withstand the loss of its soil and fertility".

Soil degradation in England and Wales is calculated to cost £1.2 billion every year.

–

Soil is also essential to managing the world's climate emergency.

Last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said we have 12 years to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

But, a key point they made was that even if we manage that, the physical threats – like floods, droughts, heatwaves, and more extreme storms – are still multiplying.

The world is currently on course for at least a 3 degree rise, so we have a lot to do in terms of reducing emissions and preparing for escalating risks.

–

UK soil contains about 10 billion tonnes of carbon, roughly equal to 80 years of annual greenhouse gas emissions.

Globally, intensive agriculture has caused arable soils to lose 40 to 60% of their organic carbon.

If we are serious about the Committee on Climate Change's target of net zero by 2050, then the earth itself will have a big role to play.

And, we will need to see better management of our bogs and peatlands – (which is another ambition of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan).

–

The impacts of climate change also pose risks to the soil itself.

Challenging weather conditions, where farming has to continue in less than ideal situations, are a major threat to farmers' income.

Very heavy rainfall and thunderstorms cause soil erosion which make flood risks worse – particularly on sandy soils and on peaty moorland soils, as you know all too well in the South West.

In this part of the country, most areas have over 200 days where soils are wet.

This is high when compared to soils in – for example – Cambridgeshire, where the soil is wet for only about 80 days.

High moisture in the soil means that it can be compacted by field work which then causes runoff, pollution, and flooding.

Over fifty years ago the US President, Dwight D. Eisenhower said:

“Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you’re a thousand miles from the corn field.”

And, I know that for many that still rings true.

Farmers need help, but every field is different and it is not in farmers’ interests to damage the soil.

So, how should we regulate farming in England to make sure we are tough on the problems while supporting farmers, who we see as our natural allies?

–

Well first of all, we need to recognise that looking after the soil isn’t the sole preserve of one industry.

Many of the problems come from urban areas, where soil health is often neglected by development schemes.

Soil compaction and expansive bonded surfaces increase the risk of runoff in towns and cities.

Subsoils are at risk of deep compaction in new housing development and this affects the health and resilience of trees in parkland and the built environment.

–

Urban environments are also where most people live.

So, we must acknowledge that a lot of the pressure on rural and farming communities originates in cities – and this is certainly true in terms of waste and water resources.

But, of course, farmers are key.

To help them, we provide advice, guidance and practical support.

We do not take a “top-down” approach, we are supporting peer groups all over the country to learn about best practice.

“Upstream Thinking”, funded by South West Water, is a good example of collaborative working to improve drinking water quality.

The new Farming Rules for Water, which include dealing with soil erosion and runoff, will also help.

There are practices that cause compaction, runoff and erosion. Such as:

- harvesting of maize and vegetable crops late in the year during wet conditions;
- crops that are drilled late in the year with poor soil structure;
- out-wintering of stock where this causes compaction and runoff;
- continuous growing of vegetables (and daffodils in South West) on soils with low organic matter which are prone to erosion.
- And, spreading of slurry and manures during winter where this causes compaction.

It is vital that farmers take reasonable precaution to prevent soil loss from their land.

But, while enforcement underpins the new rules, some of the problems can be subtle and remain undiagnosed, particularly where the problem lies in the subsoil.

We will take action in serious cases, but we will need to consider each situation case by case.

—

The success of the new Farming Rules for Water will also depend on us taking an advisory approach, and we have published guidance with practical steps to help farmers protect their land.

—

We are also working on farm assurance schemes with WRAP, the NFU, and the Renewable Energy Association, to address both the plastic waste produced by agriculture, and to reduce plastic contamination in bio-waste spread on farmland.

If badly managed, landspreading can damage soil health, contaminate crops and livestock, and it can affect the aquatic environment and bathing waters.

We need to do more work with water companies and the waste sector to manage this.

As with all environmental issues, collaboration is essential.

And, I fully support the work of Rebecca Pow MP and the Sustainable Soils Alliance to bring together farming organisations, businesses, and NGOs, to

reverse the current crisis in soil health and restore our soils to health within one generation.

There is no doubt that risks to soil threaten not only farmers' livelihoods, but also humanity's ability to:

–

Overcoming these threats is a job that goes far beyond our borders, and we're pleased to work, and learn with, the Department for International Development as they help farmers around the world deal with these problems.

–

The world's growing population puts more and more pressure on the soil.

It is our responsibility to ensure we are doing everything we can to help farmers manage the challenges to come.

I am grateful to the Devon and Cornwall Soils Alliance for this event to build capacity and capability in soils advice.

And, I am grateful to you for listening to me today.

–

Thank you very much.

[News story: Call for evidence: Administrative Reviews](#)

In my 2019-20 inspection plan, I signalled my intention to carry out a further inspection of the Home Office's Administrative Review (AR) processes, following on from my initial inspection of ARs, published in 2016 and re-inspection in 2017.

My intention is to look again at the areas specified in the 2014 Immigration Act, namely:

- the effectiveness of AR in identifying case working errors
- the effectiveness of AR in correcting case working errors
- the independence of persons conducting AR (in terms of their separation from the original decision-maker)

As I did for the initial inspection, I also plan to look at:

- whether ARs are being concluded within Home Office service standards

- the consistency of approach between the different AR functions
- whether AR outcomes are being used to improve initial decision making
- whether cost savings have been achieved.

I am inviting bodies with relevant knowledge and expertise, including NGOs, academics, think tanks, faith groups and representative bodies, to write to me by 17 June 2019 with their supporting evidence or case studies they are able to share. I would also like to receive evidence from individuals, including those who have first-hand experience of the Administrative Review process.

Please note that my remit does not extend to investigating or making decisions about individual cases. This remains a Home Office responsibility. Please note also that in providing information to us you are acknowledging that we will process your information in accordance with the terms of the GDPR. Your information will not be processed after publication of the inspection report unless you otherwise provide consent.

Please note that submissions may be cited in the final report.

[Press release: Commuters to save up to 90 minutes in massive A428 upgrade](#)

Commuters using the A428 between Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire could save up to an hour and a half on their journeys every week using a new 10-mile dual carriageway linking the Black Cat roundabout in Bedfordshire to the Caxton Gibbet roundabout in Cambridgeshire. Both roundabouts would also be upgraded into modern, free-flowing junctions and a new junction would be added at Cambridge Road near St Neots.

The project would replace the only remaining section of single carriageway between Milton Keynes and Cambridge and tackle one of the region's most notorious congestion hotspots.

The Black Cat roundabout – how it will appear once the transformation is complete.

In February, Highways England announced the preferred choices from an earlier [public consultation in 2017](#) which included three route options for the new dual carriageway and three options for improving the Black Cat roundabout. Now, the details behind that announcement are being put to the public for views before the final plans go forward for planning consent early next year. An eight-week consultation launching today is an opportunity for drivers, business owners and local people to get involved and help shape the plans.

Highways England A428 programme lead Lee Galloway said:

The current A428 carries twice the traffic it was designed for and cuts through small communities and villages. It can get painfully congested – in fact it is in the worst 20 per cent of roads for delays in the whole country. Our plans will make a real difference, improving people's journeys, reducing rat running on local roads and better linking the two key economic hubs of Milton Keynes and Cambridge, with economic benefits being felt across the whole region. People's input has been essential in getting us to this stage, and I am looking forward to hearing what people think about our plans.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

These important upgrades will not only relieve congestion but will also link businesses and communities helping to boost the region's economy and make a real difference to people's lives.

This is part of the government's £15 billion Road Investment Strategy to improve our motorways and major 'A' roads helping get motorists to their destinations quickly, easily and safely.

The project team will be hosting eight consultation events at local venues across the area, and in addition a mobile visitor centre will visit popular locations and pop up events will be held in Milton Keynes and Bedford shopping centres. Each will give people the opportunity to find out more about the proposals, explore the project using innovative visualisations and put any questions directly to the project team.

People can respond to the consultation by visiting the [A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet webpage](#). Copies of the consultation booklet are also available at local council offices and libraries.

The consultation runs eight weeks from today and closes at 11:59pm on Sunday 28 July 2019.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Press release: Andrew Murrison's statement on Israeli settlement construction

On Thursday 30 May, the Israel Land Authority announced plans to advance tenders for 556 housing units in East Jerusalem.

Minister for the Middle East Andrew Murrison said:

The UK Government is gravely concerned by plans announced on 30 May to advance tenders for hundreds of settlement housing units in occupied East Jerusalem.

We are clear that settlements built on occupied Palestinian territory are contrary to international law and an obstacle to a two-state solution. Regrettably this takes us further away from a negotiated peace agreement.

I visited Jerusalem on 28-30 May where I reiterated UK support for a two-state solution, with Jerusalem as a shared capital for both states.

News story: Hold the date for the NDA Supply Chain Event at a new venue in 2020

Since launching in 2011, the event has attracted a total of around 10,000 visitors from more than 20 countries, representing thousands of companies both large and small.

At each of our events, attendees have:

- celebrated dozens of NDA Supply Chain award winners, in categories ranging from innovation to collaboration and exports
- made valuable face-to-face connections, built collaborative networks and

win contracts across the NDA group

- found opportunities for their businesses to move into the nuclear decommissioning market for the first time, adding to our supply chain's strength and diversity, and boosting the UK economy
- come from overseas to see the wide range of UK expertise at first hand
- met with other government departments, such as the Department of International Trade (DIT) and Ministry of Defence (MOD), to understand future opportunities and meet potential suppliers

The event has grown from attracting a few hundred visitors to almost 1,700 and is now the largest event of its kind anywhere in Europe.

The event started life in Bolton, Lancashire, before travelling a few miles down the M61 to Manchester's EventCity. Whilst this has been an extremely popular, accessible location, we're aware that this venue favoured suppliers based in the North West. It can be difficult or expensive for suppliers from elsewhere in the UK to travel to EventCity – especially the small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) we're keen to encourage into the nuclear decommissioning sector. The influx of thousands of overnight visitors also brings a significant boost for local hotels and restaurants.

Looking across the whole UK and listening to other feedback, we believe it's time for a change of venue, to look at a different time of year and improve the event for the future.

The next event will be on Thursday 18 June 2020 at The International Centre, Telford. This venue has world-class facilities and easy access to motorway and rail networks. And we truly believe that the updates and improvements will be worth the wait!

We'll still be holding our supply chain awards to celebrate our suppliers' huge contribution to the clean-up mission.

The success of the event is down to our suppliers and we very much look forward to seeing you in Telford.

Registration via [the supply chain event website](#) will open in the autumn. If you would like to be notified when registration opens [please sign up to our e-bulletin](#).