

Name of representative/organisation: Graham Woolcock North Devon+	Answers provided to questions from the Committee:
<p>1. How do you see the current state of agriculture in North Devon? What is its primary role and how do you think it contributes to the wider North Devon economy?</p>	<p>It is in a bit of a static confusion. Basic Payment Scheme is reducing and farmers are struggling to find a way of making this loss up. Not sure whether SFI is a way forward for some who have bad experiences with “The Ministry” and fines in Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Its primary role is to ensure the rural economy stays vibrant. Each farm supports at least 25 – 30 local businesses and if the farms don’t have the money to spend then these businesses will ultimately be lost – causing a worsening of GDP in the rural areas.</p> <p>The current state is very sector dependent – mixed bag of how well each sector is surviving. Beef and sheep are generally doing ok, arable took a big hit last year due to the very wet weather in July through to November and dairy and pigs continue to struggle</p> <p>What has to be remembered is that agriculture provides food security and feeds massively into the local food supply chain. It also has direct impact on other important sectors such as tourism and hospitality. We really do need to maintain and develop local supply chain particularly in light of the focus on the reduction of food miles and seasonal availability.</p>

2. What are the challenges and how do you see they can be overcome?

The Government are going away from the Basic Payment Scheme which farmers have relied on in the majority of cases as cashflow. Now after 6 years of reducing payments and only recently the launch of the SFI offers the farmers are having difficult decisions to make.

SFI can work for some farms and in fact some are getting more payments than their BPS and it hasn't affected their core farming practices. Others are not so lucky and have to look at differing options which will have an impact on their farm and maybe lead to a reduction in stock numbers.

Government legislation on slurry is also seeing a lot of farms leaving the Dairy sector. Some discussions I have had seem to say that planning for bigger lagoons will not be passed – something that the councils should look into if they wish to keep milk being produced in our area.

Preconceived ideas that SFI is all about rewilding has to be changed as there are a number of options that can improve the way you farm. Soil testing, Nutrient Management, Pest Management, Low input payments, introducing herbal leys and legumes can all be funded.

We also need to ensure farmers/landowners are getting enough support. A bottom end price capping on what supermarkets can pay the farmers to ensure they are being paid a fair price for their product.

We need to continue to educate farmers with good farming practice, with good incentives to manage their land correctly. Additional funding for further education and getting workers

	<p>qualified in things like PA1&2 (spraying), telehandler etc should also be considered.</p>
<p>3. What are the opportunities going forward for farming and what can farming contribute to the future of North Devon as a whole?</p>	<p>Beef and lamb prices still remain high – which is giving optimism to some. Some have taken advantage of this and put in more stock now rather than looking at the long term vision. It will take time to see who is right but there are some encouraging signs in this sector for the majority.</p> <p>SFI is flexible and more importantly you get paid on a quarterly basis aiding cashflow and allowing expenditure in the rural economy for 12 months of the year. It can also enhance what you are currently doing. Hedgerow management has to be looked at – some internal hedges are now worth £46 per 100metres so it's worth deciding whether you can cope with every other year cutting. The application process is relatively easy and if you are worried there is specific help out there or your agents would be very pleased to help you submit an application. The weather this winter has meant most hedges haven't been cut anyway so each farmer needs to see if they can accept that on a 3 year offer.</p> <p>Diversification isn't for all and early figures for Tourism this year are worrying with a drought of bookings in July and August currently. UK Prosperity funding for some farm diversification projects (building conversions) will shortly be available and maybe an opportunity for some – subject to planning.</p> <p>As per above - provides food security and feeds into local food supply chain and has direct impact on other sectors such as tourism / hospitality. Need to maintain local supply chain</p>

	<p>particularly in light of the focus on the reduction of food miles and seasonal availability.</p> <p>Farming needs to be a self-sufficient industry, that can afford labour and support which will aid the further economy. Trying to get this better balance has been and continues to be very difficult and making plans for 3 - 5 year plans for new agreements almost impossible.</p>
<p>4. What can North Devon Council do to support the situation with agriculture in North Devon?</p>	<p>Get a better understanding of agriculture as its changing and being told to change by central government. New animal health and welfare guidance is making some of the more older buildings redundant and new sheds will need to be built to accommodate guidance from the vet. The councils should not be looking at the old buildings first for class R or Q but the need of the business if it is to stay farming. In the majority of cases most farmers wouldn't want to convert those buildings as they are too close to their farmhouse and wouldn't want long term tenants or tourists in and out all day.</p> <p>Family businesses that split need some support. Businesses can't be left until the last minute to inheritance issues so if we want vibrant businesses they need to be supported at an early stage – so if a farmhouse needs to be built after a partnership split – what does the farmer need to do to show that this is needed for the farm to succeed?</p> <p>Look to support and promote initiatives for people and businesses to buy local produce and support wherever possible local supply chains to ensure food security.</p>