



Land Futures - Land Access Skill Share Report Monkton Wyld Court 7th October 2017

The objective of the day was to bring together interested parties to explore and discuss innovative approaches to land access in the UK. While not a new subject, the continued rise in price of land in the UK, and shortage of affordable rural housing, makes land access still a significant barrier for many who wish to make a living, working on the land.

Representatives of organisations with experience in this area were invited to lead participatory workshops based around 4 broad themes. This report forms a record of the days events in the hope that the discussions which ensued will form a catalyst to take debate, discussion and action into the future.

Special thanks go to Nikki Pepperell and Janie Prince for help in preparation for and on the day. Also to Monkton Wyld Court who kindly supported and hosted the event and of course, to all those listed below who, without their important contributions of time and expertise the day would not have been possible.

Background information to the workshops can be found on the separate file provided to participants: Land Futures – Workshop Details. Links are provided for the participating organisations.

Contents

1. Introduction to the theme (based on a talk given by Dan Powell of LandBase)
2. Synopsis of Workshops on the thread Building Land Trust.
am Contributors: Robert Fraser – Real Farming Trust. <http://www.feanetwork.org/>
pm Gabriel Kaye – Bio-Dynamic Land Trust. <http://biodynamiclandtrust.org.uk/>
3. Synopsis of workshops on the thread Access to Land
am Gareth Davies – CSA Network UK. <http://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/>
pm John Yates – Biophilia Project. <http://biophilia.org.uk/>
Harriet Bell – Dartington Hall Estate. <https://www.dartington.org/>
4. Synopsis of workshops on the thread Land Planning and Systems
am Simon Fairlie – Chapter 7. <http://tlio.org.uk/>
5. Rebecca Laughton – Land Workers Alliance. <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/>
pm Joanna Dornan – Agro-Ecological Land Trust. <http://agroecology.co.uk/>
6. Synopsis of workshops on the thread Small scale horticulture
am Ashley Wheeler – Trill Farm Garden. <https://trillfarmgarden.weebly.com/>
pm Rebecca Laughton – Land Workers Alliance

1. Introduction to the theme – Dan Powell LandBase <http://landbase.org.uk/>

Issues of land access in the UK has a long history dating back to pre-Norman conquest. Land was managed in a feudal system up until the 16th century when acts of enclosure both parliamentary and private restricted the use of land for the common rural community. Simultaneously the industrial revolution had taken hold and machinery began to replace labour on the land and the rise of textile mills and later factories, required a workforce. The move from the country to the town had begun! Peasants organised themselves in an attempt to demonstrate against this trend which they saw as a threat to their way of life and livelihood.

An expression of this early land activism and trade unionism related to land can be found in the rise of “The Diggers” and “The Levellers” who were active around the time of the English civil war but were quickly put down by the parliamentarians and establishment of the time. The swing riots, named after the fictitious Captain Swing, were a protest against low wages for rural workers who were being supplanted by machinery such as the threshing machine.

Later the Tolpuddle martyrs were sent off to Australia for attempting to start what we would call an Agricultural Workers Union today, in order to fight for better conditions and pay. Lack of access to land and land sovereignty was a common theme. Today’s land access barrier – price - did not really become an issue until after the agricultural depression of the 1930’s.

Spikes in land prices had occurred earlier due to attempts at keeping grain prices high such as the effects of the corn laws in the 1830’s, but imports of grain from the new world and Australia brought farming to its knees. This was only to be resurrected post 1945 with increasing policy mechanisms to support British farm produce.

Farming became profitable again but by now machinery had taken over the most of the farm labour had gone to the towns. Farms got bigger and bigger as a result and more and more efficient in terms of labour output. The farm work force has continued to shrink to this day and the remaining farmers are getting older.

The farm work force represents only 1-1.5% of the national total now and the average age of the owner occupier farmer is over 55 (ADAS 2004). Although generally cash poor, rises in land prices have made farm businesses asset rich.

Typically farm balance sheets show upwards of 80% owner equity. This high net worth in the sector, is unrelated to profitability as in the past, but is largely linked with high property prices in general and strong farming subsidy for farmland that underpins this. Land is rarely sold with <6% of total land or just over 100 K acres traded on the open market today. Land prices have sky rocketed from £200/acre in 1960 (700K acres traded) to an average of over £8000/acre today (Savills research 2016).

Due to the cost of entry into the farm business, the biggest one being purchase of land, most young farmers enter the business through succession. They inherit the land and business from their parents. Consequently, new entrants with no background and family farm to inherit, generally will start their business on smaller scale, choosing higher value enterprises such as horticulture.

Recent research by the Catalonian rural researcher, Neus Monllor (2011, 2016) suggests that these new entrants have significantly different social profiles to what she terms continuers and that they may be influencing a quiet revolution in rural Europe. Monllor characterised this shift as a move from an agro-industrial to an agro-social paradigm and suggested that new forms of social and environmental relations are appearing in the food systems of rural Europe. These new entrant rural businesses are being stimulated by grass roots activism in response to the perceived negative effects of the policy driven main stream food production business.

Monllor compared these two groups, the continuers and new entrants using a system which she coined the Agrosocial Paradigm Index (API). She formulated the API using eight different characteristics, that combined could reach a score of maximum 10. She compared the two groups based on attitudes and practices.

The results were interesting. Showing that although the practices of the continuers were not as close to the ideal of the Agrosocial Paradigm than the new entrants, their attitudes suggested that they would rather be nearer than they actually are! This is not dissimilar to asking if the general public agrees that using fossil fuels is generally bad for the environment, but the vast majority make use of them in one way or another!

This important piece of social research suggests that new entrants represent a small but growing group that are influencing rural development in a direction that even the farming establishment may want to follow given the right incentives.

Exploration of novel ways to enable this impulse to progress is urgently needed.

References

- ADAS Consulting 2004** **Entry to and Exit from Farming in the United Kingdom (RMP 2037)**
- Monllor N, Fuller A 2016** **Newcomers to farming: towards a new rurality in Europe in Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica 2016, vol. 62/3 531-551.**
<http://dag.revista.uab.es/article/view/v62-n3-monllor-fuller/376-pdf-en>
- Savills Research 2016** **Market in Minutes Report 2016.**
<http://pdf.euro.savills.co.uk/uk/rural---other/market-in-minutes-uk-farmland-market-q1-2016.pdf>