



Food Ethics Council

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'Farmers are not paid for woodpeckers' - Dairy farmers speak out about lack of support for environment enhancement in the UK

Dairy producers feel held back from delivering environmental goods like planting trees and encouraging more wildlife

- Revised milk contracts and universally-applied higher standards across all milk and dairy products should be used to deliver environmental goods, say farmers
- The Food Ethics Council is working with dairy farmers to help them accelerate positive change for people, planet and animals across the UK dairy sector
- The three-year *Dairy Project* involves a series of workshops and dialogues on ethics and fairness with UK dairy farmers
- New briefing published today is the outcome of a Business Forum debate held in October 2021 with retail, industry and supply chain representatives and farmers involved in the *Dairy Project*

Dairy farmers feel held back in delivering the positive changes they themselves want to implement on-farm, according to a briefing '[How should food businesses treat dairy in a sustainable food future?](#)' published today by the Food Ethics Council.

The Food Ethics Council has been listening to dairy farmer perspectives on how they can accelerate a shift to fairer and more ethical dairy systems in the UK through a series of workshops over the past six months. Most recently it ran a discussion with retail, industry and supply chain representatives to give dairy producers a chance to test out their ideas and look for opportunities for change.

Some producers talked about wanting to do things differently (i.e. grazing animals or planting trees and encouraging more wildlife) but being held back. They felt unable to fairly compete for contracts that supported producers to deliver those changes. As one participant remarked, "farmers are not currently paid for woodpeckers". The ability to sell direct - another option to deliver positive change - is still limited by time, opportunity and the scale of investments made on-farm, they argued.

Producers also argued the need for higher minimum standards for all milk produced in the UK. As a rule of thumb, standards on ingredients and processed foods tend to be lower than less processed versions. Dairy buyers need to end this disparity and set new, higher minimum standards that everyone signs up to, for all dairy products, regardless of how much they are processed.

However, retailer representatives said it was unfair to expect them to take the burden for paying for environmental or other improvements if other buyers in the market were just paying on price. The market was currently hampered by uncertainty

around the future direction of food policy in the UK, including imports and any standards to be applied to them, said participants in the discussion. If higher standards were enforced domestically, then stricter controls on foods in free-trade agreements would be needed to avoid UK producers being undercut.

Speaking after the Business Forum debate on the Dairy Project, Food Ethics Council executive director Dan Crossley, said: "It's really important to listen to farmers and give them a platform to articulate what they want and need to deliver positive change. It's time for the wider dairy and food industry, civil society and government to take notice and do the same. If we want a fairer and more ethical dairy sector that is better for people, planet and animals, then we should give proper support and tools to the dairy producers that want to drive that change."

Notes for Editors:

For further information about the project, interviews and attending the next workshop please contact: tomlevitt@foodethicscouncil.org

[Food Ethics Council](#) is an independent UK think tank whose purpose is to bring ethics to the centre of the food system. Our mission is to accelerate the shift towards fair food systems that respect people, animals and the planet. Twitter:

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See [here](#) for an overview of the Food Ethics Council's Dairy Project.

Read the full report on our website: [How should food businesses treat dairy in a sustainable food future?](#)