



PRESS RELEASE

Benn supports launch of major new skills strategy

A major new skills strategy aimed at equipping farmers and growers with the right skills for the 21st century has been unveiled in London today. Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, joined key industry representatives for the launch in recognition of the report's importance.

The AgriSkills Strategy seeks to ensure that industries that lie at the heart of the UK's agriculture and horticulture production deliver a skilled workforce capable of delivering increased food production and tackling environmental challenges.

The Strategy is the first to be developed by industry for industry. It portrays a profession of highly skilled and technically knowledgeable farmers and growers in a priority industry that seeks to be fully valued and seen as an attractive career of choice.

AgriSkills Forum Chairman and NFU Deputy President, Meurig Raymond, said: "The need to produce enough food to feed an increasing population while impacting less on the environment, coupled with the advances in technology, means we must build on our highly-skilled base to take the industry forward into the 21st century.

"While we recognise that farmers and farm workers already have a high level of skills we understand that, to attract young people and new entrants to the industry, it is essential that these skills are recognised and improved. Put simply – a thriving industry needs to demonstrate that it is highly competent in all that it does. "

Richard Longthorp, chairman of the AgriSkills Strategy working group, added: "This strategy has been developed thanks to an unprecedented degree of collaboration between all the major agricultural organisations to address the issue of skills in our industry and how they are recognised.

"We are most encouraged by the Secretary of State's support here today. Defra has been incredibly helpful, while never interfering and always insisting that this is an industry-led strategy. And it's significant that the NFU is showing such commitment to the initiative and the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board is fully behind it too.

“However, this is no time to be patting each other on the back. The real work and the real outcome lie ahead of us. It will be down to the whole of industry to ensure the strategy's vision is realised. I challenge anyone to read the strategy's vision and not feel an immense sense of pride in this great industry of ours. Anybody and everybody who shares that vision has a responsibility to ensure it is achieved”

Following an initial consultation period the AgriSkills Strategy is now available. The AgriSkills Forum is insistent the strategy will never be allowed to “gather dust” and is supported by an action plan which it will regularly monitor, review and revise to drive through its implementation.

To download a copy of the AgriSkills Strategy and to view the latest copy of the action plan please visit www.agriskillsforum.co.uk

The key Forum organisations responsible for developing the strategy were Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for the environmental and land-based industries, National Farmers Union, Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, Landex and National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs.

Additional Quotes:

Lantra Chief Executive Peter Martin said: “This is an exciting opportunity for the industry to demonstrate just how skilled we really are and also for individuals to continue to learn and develop so that they can fully meet the many challenges that confront farming today. Lantra is fully committed to delivering the strategy and ensuring that there is quality learning available for everyone entering and already working in the industry.”

John Bridge, Chairman of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) said: "AHDB is generating information, tools and techniques to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of farmer/grower businesses. These are widely accessible but our challenge is encouraging greater uptake. We believe the AgriSkills Forum's initiative can help achieve this, which is why it has our full support."

Landex Chief Executive Vic Croxson said: “Landex Colleges welcome the new opportunity which the AgriSkills Strategy provides to continue to work with employers and learners to ensure that the courses that our colleges provide meet the changing future needs of the agricultural industry. We look forward to working with our partners to deliver the clear but challenging agenda which the Action Plan describes, to ensure tomorrow's workforce can meet the aspirations in the Governments "Food 2030" strategy.”

Agriculture and Rural Affairs Officer of the National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs Sarah Palmer said: “NFYFC wholeheartedly supports the

importance of acquiring skills and training and it's a fundamental part of the YFC ethos of 'fun learning and achievement'. We welcome wider recognition of recording skills and are pleased to be part of the solution for the delivery of the strategy, getting young people involved in land-based industries and helping with specialist training for new entrants."

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Issued by the NFU press office in conjunction with Lantra. For more information please contact Mike Thomas on 02476 858662.

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Notes to editor

1. The AgriSkills Strategy aims to recognise existing skills, promote skills development and the concept of professionalism as being central to business improvement; promote the industry as a professional and progressive place to work; provide governments with a strong and influential partner to meet the challenges of the future; and support the industry as a priority sector.
2. The strategy wants to see a profitable, sustainable agricultural industry, valued by society, with skills development embedded into everyday business practice and meeting the demands of agriculture and land management in the 21st century.
3. The AgriSkills Forum was set up in Autumn 2008 to ensure skills issues were being addressed in the agricultural and horticultural sector. In April 2009 Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs tasked the Forum to develop an AgriSkills Strategy.