



## Record of Policy Statements

# Agriculture

### Set-Aside

(Originally passed – January 1994)

#### Introduction

Set-aside schemes have been instituted by western governments in an attempt to cut the cost of the subsidies they are paying out to their farmers, particularly in the US and EU. The Green Party is opposed to set-aside schemes, including that currently in operation in the UK.

#### Background

The idea that there is an excess of farm production is false. In Britain, on the Ministry of Agriculture's own figures, we are 57% self-sufficient in food and feed. Even considering those products that can be grown in our climate, we are only 72% self-sufficient. The UK exports £7.5 billion worth of food each year, but imports £13.5 billion worth. Taking in other products of the land the situation is even worse. We import 90% of our timber requirements.

US schemes since the 1930s have regularly and consistently failed, because farmers have intensified efforts on the rest of their land and thereby increased the overall yield. The system of guaranteed prices will encourage European farmers to respond in the same way, while effectively doing nothing on the 20% of land taken out of production.

The opportunity is being lost to restore the ecological balance of the countryside. Few farmers have taken advantage of the farm woodland scheme, potentially the best possibility to emerge from set-aside land. More agricultural land could be lost to inappropriate

urban or recreational developments (like golf courses), under the UK scheme.

Organic farms are not exempted, despite their lower yields and proven capacity to reintroduce rich wildlife diversity to their area.

Set-aside is unpopular with farmers and public alike, leaving an unmanaged, ill-kempt countryside. It fails to address the real issue, which is that large unbalanced subsidies are the incentive to grow unwanted crops, whilst leaving many needs for home production, such as timber, unmet.

There is potential for greatly increased afforestation, particularly of broad-leaved species and traditional agricultural landscapes which have high amenity value. We deplore the continued loss of hedgerows, trees, wetlands, marshes and wild flowers, which has contributed to the increasing sterility of the countryside.

Land could more usefully be used for growing reed beds, that have been shown to act as efficient sewage treatment systems.

#### Policy Statement

The Green Party would:

- Rescind all set-aside payments regulations.
- Introduce payments that favour lower-input organic farming systems, currently by-passed by the massive agriculture subsidy system.
- Aim to treat the whole country as an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA), redirecting subsidies towards keeping people on the land, and enhancing the landscape value of our countryside.

- Press for an EU-wide review of the guaranteed price system, which has conspicuously failed to give security or sustainability either to farmers or to the well-being of the land.

- Start widespread trials of reed beds for sewage treatment systems.

### Permaculture Land-Use Category

(Originally passed – Spring 1995 Conference)

Conference resolves that GPEX and the Association of Green Councillors jointly press the Department of the Environment to establish a new category of land-use, Permaculture Land, which would integrate appropriate house-building with sustainable agriculture, energy conservation, renewable energy, recycling and conservation of natural resources (and with minimal or no requirement for old-style infrastructure).

### Foot and Mouth Disease – Short-Term Proposals

(Originally passed – Spring 2001 Conference)

Noting that Green policies on globalisation trade and animal welfare would have made the current outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) less likely to happen;

Noting the severe effect of FMD on animal welfare, the farming and rural community, and the economy of the country;

Noting the denial, delay, inefficiency and inhumanity of the Government's response;

Noting that the pyres are a source of serious air pollution, and are capable of spreading the FMD virus;

Noting that the government's chosen strategy is clearly overwhelmed by the spread of the disease, and the situation fulfils almost all policy guideline criteria laid down by the European Commission in 1999 for the use of emergency vaccinations;

Noting the palpable weakness of MAFF's objections to emergency vaccination;

Noting the opinion of the Soil Association that emergency vaccination should be introduced with a view to its later withdrawal.

Recognising that it may now be too late, even with the help of ring vaccination, to stop the spread of FMD, so that ring vaccination will de facto become blanket vaccination, with the consequent loss of meat export markets.

Noting the irrationality of simultaneous imports and exports;

Noting that the economic cost (arising from endemic vaccine suppressed FMD) of lost exports are less than the cost to the tourist industry caused by movement restrictions;

Noting that the FMD free status desired by the farming community can be regained after blanket vaccination;

Conference calls on GPEX, Local Parties, and its representatives in Government to press for a speedy introduction of emergency vaccination in order to bring this tragedy to an early resolution, and also to look intensively into the alternatives to culling vaccinated animals in the exclusion zones.

## **Foot and Mouth Disease - Stopping the Culling and Allowing Farmers to Vaccinate, and Implementing a Green Strategy for the Future**

(Originally passed – Spring 2001 Conference)

-----  
This conference notes:

- a) that Green policies on globalisation, trade and animal welfare would have made the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease less likely to happen.
- b) the severe impact of FMD on animal welfare, the farming and rural community, and the economy of the country.
- c) the denial, delay, inefficiency and inhumanity of the Government's response.
- d) that the Government's chosen strategy is clearly overwhelmed by the spread of the disease; the situation fulfils almost all the policy guideline criteria laid down by the European Commission in 1999 for the use of emergency vaccinations.
- e) palpable weakness of MAFF's objections to emergency vaccination.
- f) that FMD is a survivable disease for livestock from which most animals recover within a few weeks.
- g) that FMD poses no known serious health risks to humans even if the meat of an infected animal is consumed.
- h) that less than 500 confirmed cases have resulted in up to a million healthy animals being condemned to be culled and their carcasses burnt.

Conference therefore calls on the Government to end the present culling policy and allow farmers to vaccinate animals in order to prevent the spread of disease and safeguard the health and well-being of the nation's livestock.

Conference also believes that the present Government's obsession with returning the country to a FMD free status is primarily focussed on allowing further international trade which is ecologically damaging, has been the primary cause of spreading the disease and is unnecessary because we import and export similar amounts of meat.

We therefore demand that the Government reconsiders whether or not it is either necessary or practically possible to return to and keep a FMD free status for the UK in the future.

Conference further demands that the Government adopt a Green strategy for future animal husbandry based on:

1. higher standards of animal welfare and better enforcement thereof.
2. small, preferably mixed, family farms.
3. local production for local needs.
4. minimum transport of livestock for sale, and therefore provision of local and mobile abattoirs.
5. an end to live animal exports.