

Food, Land and Power: Why the Future of Britain Depends on Rebuilding Local Food Economies

Some Thoughts on The Land Use Framework

Adam Tugwell | 20 March 2026



When the Government released England's first [Land Use Framework](#) this week, most people saw a technical document about planning, farming, nature recovery and renewable energy. But within its pages was a signal that recreational gamebird shooting may soon require

statutory licensing - a move that, on the surface, appears to be about environmental management.

Look deeper, however, and a very different picture emerges.

The debate over pheasant shooting is not really about pheasants.

Just as farm inheritance-tax changes were never really about tax fairness.

Just as farm subsidy reforms were never really about environmental improvement.

These policies are symptoms of something much bigger: a long-running shift in who controls Britain's land, Britain's food, and ultimately Britain's future.

And unless farmers and communities recognise what is happening - and act - the UK will continue down a path that weakens independent food production, centralises power, and leaves the country even more dangerously exposed.

The Hidden Thread: Food as a Tool of Control

If you want to understand why land-use policy is changing, why farming is being squeezed, and why rural industries are being picked off one by one, you have to start with a simple truth:

Food is power.

Food is one of the three basic essentials of human survival - air, water, and food - but it is the only one that is fully embedded in a market system.

- **Air** remains untouched - for now.
- **Water** is sold, transported, and commodified - but still regulated as a public utility.
- **Food**, however, is treated as a free-market commodity, even though it is a basic human need.

And that's the lie at the heart of the system:

We pretend food is governed by market logic, but the market itself is rigged - by subsidies, monopolies, global supply chains, and policy distortions.

For decades, the UK has allowed its food system to drift into the hands of:

- multinational processors
- supermarket oligopolies
- global supply chains
- financial markets
- and political actors who see food not as a public good, but as a strategic asset

The result is a contradiction so absurd it should be impossible:

The healthiest, freshest, most local and most nutritious food - the food that should be cheapest - is now the most expensive.

Meanwhile:

- ultra-processed foods
- imported ingredients
- long supply chains
- and nutritionally empty calories

...are the cheapest and most accessible.

This is not an accident.

It is the predictable outcome of a system designed around profit, not health; control, not resilience.

And it is the backdrop against which every rural policy - including gamebird licensing - must be understood.

Why Food Costs Are a Smokescreen

Politicians justify the dominance of ultra-processed food by claiming it keeps costs down for consumers. But this is a smokescreen.

Cheap food is not cheap.

It is subsidised by:

- poor health
- environmental damage
- collapsing rural economies
- and the erosion of local food production

The “low cost” argument is used to justify a system where:

- food travels thousands of miles
- ingredients are processed beyond recognition
- supply chains are fragile
- and communities have no control over what they eat

This is the real hidden thread.

Not hunting.

Not shooting.

Not even farming subsidies.

It is the deliberate centralisation of the food chain - because the more dependent people are on distant suppliers, the more power those suppliers hold.

Where Gamebird Licensing Fits In

This is why the government's interest in pheasant shooting is not really about environmental impact. If it were, the policy would look very different.

The real significance is symbolic:

- It extends state oversight into another area of rural land use.
- It reinforces the narrative that rural practices are morally suspect.
- It distracts from the far more consequential issue: the collapse of independent food production.
- And it divides rural communities at the very moment they need unity most.

The irony is that pheasant shooting rarely displaces food production at all.

It coexists with farming, forestry and conservation.

And if every bird shot entered the food chain, the "waste" argument would evaporate.

But rural industries often undermine themselves by failing to adapt, failing to collaborate, and failing to see the bigger picture.

Farmers Are Under Attack - But They Also Undermine Themselves

Farmers are being squeezed by:

- inheritance-tax changes
- subsidy reforms
- supermarket power
- planning restrictions
- and land-use centralisation

But they also weaken their own case when they:

- defend practices that don't feed the nation
- expect special treatment while criticising others

- fail to build alliances across rural sectors
- cling to the belief that government policy is based on common sense

The same is true of shooting.

The same is true of every rural industry that assumes policymakers understand or value the countryside.

They don't.

And they haven't for a long time.

The Land Use Framework: A Turning Point

The new Framework is presented as a rational attempt to balance competing demands on land. But once government begins ranking land uses, it inevitably begins ranking the people who depend on them.

The Framework:

- centralises decision-making
- prioritises energy and carbon markets
- treats food production as one priority among many
- and opens the door to licensing activities that were previously self-regulated

This is not accidental.

It is structural.

And it is happening at the same time as:

- inheritance-tax changes that weaken family farms
- subsidy systems that reduce output
- planning rules that favour corporate agriculture
- and supermarket power that leaves farmers with no bargaining strength

The direction of travel is unmistakable.

The Future Must Be Food-Centred - And Community-Led

Here is the part that matters most.

The UK cannot fix its food-security crisis through government policy alone - because the political system is not designed to prioritise resilience over control.

A change of government will not fix this.

It has not fixed it before.

It will not fix it next time.

The only sustainable future is one where:

- **food production is embedded in communities**
- **farmers are partners, not suppliers**
- **local economies are built around food**
- **short supply chains replace fragile global ones**
- **communities regain control over what they eat**

This is not nostalgia.

It is survival.

Food is as essential as air and water - but it is the easiest to manipulate, the easiest to profit from, and the easiest to centralise. That is why it has been allowed to drift into the hands of a small number of powerful actors.

Reversing that drift will not come from Westminster.

It will come from farmers, communities, and local food networks that refuse to wait for help from the very people invested - knowingly or unknowingly - in their decline.

A Call to Action

The writing is on the wall.

The UK is at a crossroads.

One path leads to deeper dependency, weaker food security, and a countryside shaped by distant interests.

The other leads to resilient communities, empowered farmers, and a food system built around people rather than profit.

The choice will not be made in Parliament.

It will be made in fields, villages, towns, and local markets across the country.

Farmers and communities must lead the change.

Because if they don't, the future of Britain's food - and Britain itself - will be decided by those who see land not as a living resource, but as a tool of power.

Further Reading:

[Land Use Framework - GOV.UK](#)

Further Information

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