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1 Consultation on the future of food, farming and the environment after Brexit

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is carrying out a consultation on government proposals for future agricultural policy in England, following the UK's departure from the EU. The consultation paper [Health and harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit](#) is available on line and responses must be submitted by 8 May 2018 either [on line](#), by emailing agricultureconsultation@defra.gsi.gov.uk, or by post to Defra.

2 Growing digital connections could unlock profits for rural businesses

Across the UK, an estimated £15bn or more could be generated in additional business turnover if digital constraints are removed and the digital potential is realised in rural areas, according to a new report on [Unlocking the digital potential of rural areas across the UK](#) by Rural England and Scotland's Rural College. The digital economy has clear potential to address certain inherent issues with rural geographies. Businesses can, for example, gain online access to wider markets and services, thus helping to improve their competitive position.

3 CECAN shares experience of policy evaluation across the Nexus

The [Centre for Evaluation of Complexity Across the Nexus](#) (CECAN) is sharing its experience of working in complex policy areas across the food-energy-water-environment "Nexus". The team has published its manifesto [Policy Evaluation for a Complex World](#), looking at policymakers needs for evaluation and developing and matching new methods that can be applied in policy areas as diverse as waste crime, rural development and the trilemma challenges of the energy price, carbon and security policy landscape.

4 How history can help us improve the management of livestock disease

A team of experts from six institutions (Kings College London, and the universities of Newcastle, Hull, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Leeds Trinity) has been awarded funding of £1.5 million by the Wellcome Trust to research better ways of understanding and managing endemic livestock disease. The search for solutions has been hampered by traditional disciplinary silos which separate the biological analysis

of disease from the human factors that shape its effects. This project will break new ground in developing an interdisciplinary approach that cuts across the realms of nature and culture, science and society, human and animal. By investigating the past and present effects of two exemplar endemic livestock diseases and how they relate to changes in farming systems, communities and the wider world, the researchers aim to develop better predictions of disease in the future, and to advise on its management. The four-year project, commences in September 2018. For more information contact Abigail Woods, email: abigail.woods@kcl.ac.uk.

5 Rural economy's potential has been underrated and underexploited say academics

In the past rural economies have been overlooked by policymakers when they could be boosting productivity and jobs significantly and helping to rebalance economic growth across Europe. But that picture could be improving with the launch of the UK Government's new Industrial Strategy, according to academics. [Addressing a meeting of representatives](#) from government departments, local economic partnerships, councils, rural agencies and academics, Professor Jeremy Phillipson from Newcastle University's [Rural Enterprise UK](#) initiative and [INNOGROW](#) European project, said: "In England alone, rural areas contribute over half a million enterprises, 3.5 million employees and produce output equivalent to the country's ten leading cities outside of London. And yet they have all too often failed to appear in government strategies aimed at boosting growth. So it is heartening to see them featured in this new [Industrial Strategy White Paper](#)."

6 Brexit implications for the devolved governments

Two reports identifying key rural policy questions for the devolved governments in Scotland and Northern Ireland are now available. [After Brexit: 10 key questions for rural policy in Northern Ireland](#) is published by Newcastle University's Centre for Rural Economy and [After Brexit: 10 key questions for rural policy in Scotland](#) is a joint publication by Scotland's Rural College and the Centre for Rural Economy. Both are available on line, and may be freely downloaded.

7 Business Secretary calls for new tech revolution in agriculture

In a keynote speech to the National Farmers' Union Conference [Business Secretary Greg Clark announced a new £90 million investment](#) to bring together AI, robotics and earth observation to improve supply chain resilience in the agri-food sector. He highlighted how new technology is boosting farmers' earning power and making agri-businesses more productive and profitable than ever before. The UK agri-tech sector contributes £14.3 billion to UK economy, employing 500,000 people, with companies and researchers developing pioneering technologies from farming drones to 3D printing helping to fuel rural growth, create high-skilled jobs and open up new export opportunities as part of the Industrial Strategy. The funding will be delivered as part of the new the [Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund](#).

8 Investing in landscape and nature

Research has shown that since the Heritage Lottery Fund was set up in 1994 it has invested over £765 million in landscape and nature projects. These investments have enabled the recipients to develop and test new methodologies, to build new partnerships, to work at a larger scale, to attract more match funding, to create new visitor infrastructure, to grow conservation organisations and to improve organisational resilience. Grants awarded range from £3,000 to over £10m with projects spanning everything from engaging children in underwater safaris to restoring over 80 square miles of degraded peat bog in Scotland. [The research was carried out on behalf of HLF in December 2017](#).

9 New facility will assist advances in crop science

A [£4.3 million field experimental station at Church Farm, Bawburgh](#), will allow scientists at the John Innes Centre to carry out ground-breaking research in crop improvements. Funded mainly by BBSRC, plus a contribution from the John Innes Foundation, it brings together lab and field research in one location and will further research in understanding how genes control plant growth in the field. The aim is to create tools for plant breeders to produce new varieties that are more reliable, nutritious and resilient to pests and diseases. The opening is planned for July 2018.

10 Scientists identify factors which drive the evolution of herbicide resistance

Scientists have identified factors which are driving the evolution of herbicide resistance in crops – something which could also have an impact on medicine as well as agriculture. [The new study](#), led by researchers from the University of Sheffield's Department of Animal and Plant Sciences in collaboration with Rothamsted Research and the Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London,

gives an important insight into how we can learn from past management of agricultural systems to reduce the likelihood of resistance evolving in the future. The study showed that even in the absence of chemicals, directional selection from the repeated use of the same management will lead to evolution resistance. This highlighted a need to design a management system in which evolution is anticipated. Apart from focussing on densities and yields, there needs to be an appreciation of resistance.

11 The UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme needs citizen scientists

The UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme (PoMS) is looking for volunteers to collect data on pollinating insects, to help inform their conservation. There are two ways to get involved. Anyone can carry out a 10-minute Flower-Insect Timed Count between April and September, at any location where there are flowers and insects. A full survey guide is provided. A smaller group of volunteers is also needed to help with the systematic surveying of random sites across England, Scotland and Wales. This involves 'adopting' a 1km survey square, meeting on site with a PoMS team member, and visiting the square on three further occasions during summer to collect insects with water-filled pan traps. Visit the [website](#) for more details, including short videos introducing the two PoMS surveys. You can follow the work on Twitter @PoMScheme. If you would like to volunteer please email poms@ceh.ac.uk.

12 Seminar: Community-based food systems in a global context

This latest seminar in the Newcastle University CRE/Global Challenges Academy [International public seminar series](#) will be given by Professor Michael Hamm, C S Mott Chair of Sustainable Agriculture at Michigan State University at 5.30 pm on Wednesday 9 May, in the Clement Stephenson Lecture Theatre, Agriculture Building, Newcastle University. Professor Hamm is an expert in food security and policy and works with communities to develop community-based food systems.

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