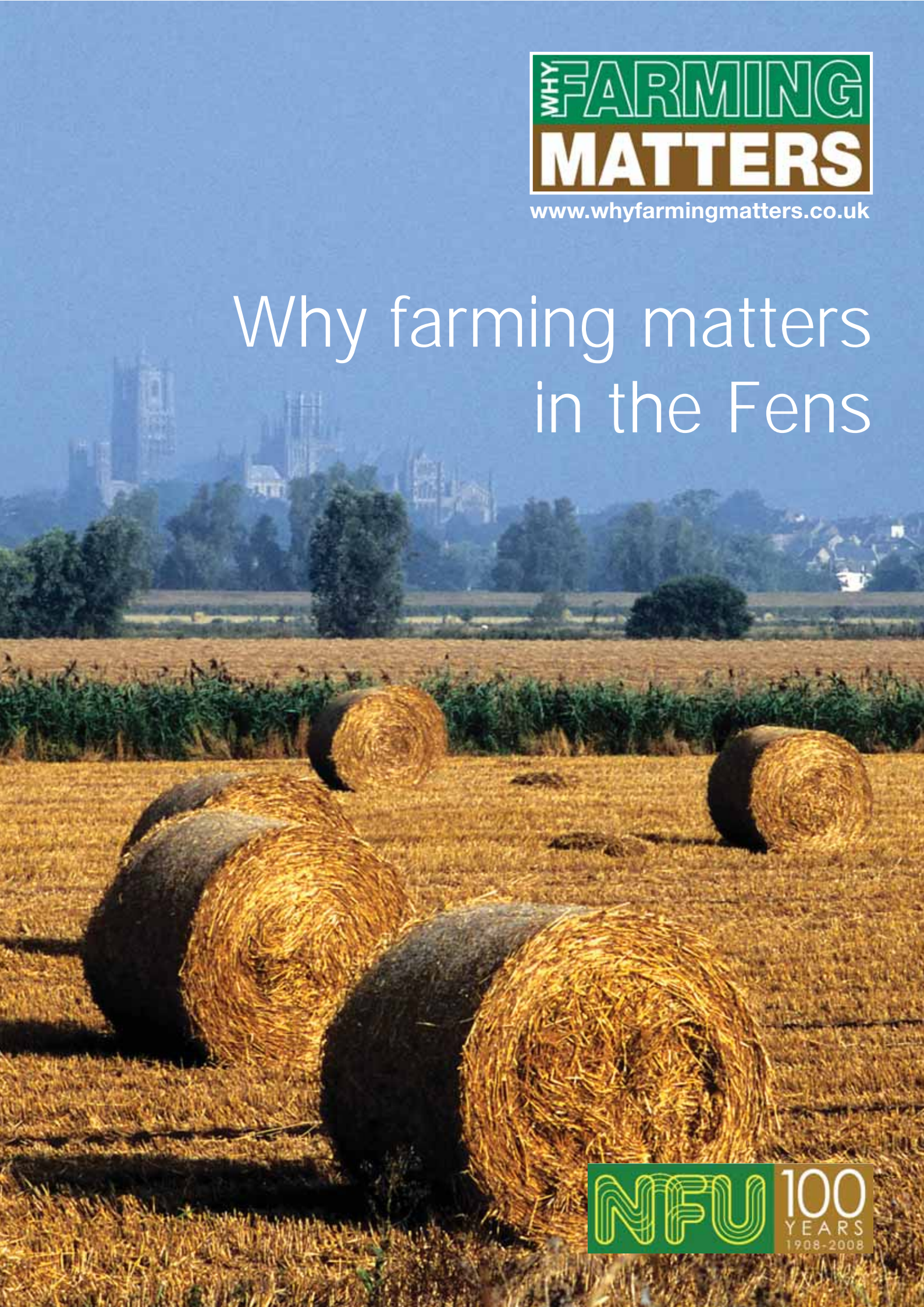




www.whyfarmingmatters.co.uk

Why farming matters in the Fens



Keep the Fens farming

A personal view by Professor David Bellamy

The Fens are one of my favourite 'head just above water' landscapes. I have known them since I was evacuated to Wisbech in the War and I have loved them ever since. The Fens are a place to get away from it all – a place to go to dream about the marsh-men and their methods of fishing and wildfowling, all rooted in those rich soils.

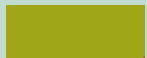
It was the Romans who first recognised the Fens' farming potential and Vermuyden, the 17th century Dutch engineer, who slowly but surely turned the area into some of the richest farmland in the world. The Fens have always fascinated and challenged in equal measure and that continues today as farmers look to sustainable management of an area that is still subsidising thanks to the effect of the last ice age.

Farmers working together with, and not against, Mother Nature are using sustainable techniques like integrated crop management to provide locally produced chips, crisps, vegetables and salad, cutting down the waste of fuel on food miles. Conservation groups of every shape and size are working in partnership with farmers to repair, re-wet and regenerate, recreating mowing fens and grazing marshes. These not only help protect the landscape against tidal surge but also the rich heritage of flowers, insects, fish and birds that educate, enthral and delight locals and visitors alike.

Farming has played a central role in the history of this unforgettable landscape. It must perform a central role in its future.



The Fens



The Fens



Grade 1 agricultural land



Why farming matters in the Fens

Farming and the Fens are inextricably linked. It was the prize of farming the Fens' nutrient rich soils which led to the area being drained hundreds of years ago and turned the Fens into what they are today – a unique landscape, a place of huge horizons and dramatic skies but also a powerhouse of productive agriculture and horticulture.

The Fens begin their life in the surrounding uplands where four rivers – the Witham, Welland, Nene and Ouse – start their journey. These rivers carry water from the uplands and surrounding areas down through the Fens and into the Wash.

Before the Fens were drained water flowed into the area, creating an inhospitable wetland. It wasn't until the 17th century, when drainage of the wetlands first began in earnest, that the Fens as we know them began to take shape. Under the supervision of Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden the Fens were systematically drained to reveal nutrient rich soil which could be used for farming.

To maintain water levels in the Fens, and mitigate the risk of flooding, water must be pumped into the rivers and out into the Wash. Organisations known today as Internal Drainage Boards were formed to maintain the watercourses and pumps. Members of each board include elected farmers and local councillors who represent the interests of people living and working in the Fens.

Initially wind supplied the energy to pump the water out and at one time 700 or more wind pumps dominated the Fens' landscape. With the advent of steam power in the 19th century steam powered pumps began to take their place.

Today the Fens are home to approximately half a million people and cover an area of almost 1,500 square miles encompassing 11 districts, four counties and two government office and development agency regions. Well-maintained flood defences remain essential and Internal Drainage Boards maintain 3,800 miles of watercourses and 286 pumping stations. The steam pumps of the past have been replaced by either diesel or electric pumps

with a combined capacity to pump the equivalent of 16,500 Olympic sized swimming pools in 24 hours.

Coupled with over 60 miles of coastal sea walls and 96 miles of fluvial embankments the Fens are well protected, despite their vulnerability to flooding. However, climate change poses a serious threat to the Fens. Predictions of sea level rises of up to 82cm by 2080¹, together with an increase in the frequency and intensity of storm surge events, mean that there must be a continued programme of investment in flood defences.

In all, 88% of land in the Fens is cultivated and the fertile soils account for about half of all grade 1 land, the most productive farmland, in England.

Farming contributes significantly to the success of the local economy, supporting a large number of businesses involved in the production of food and rural tourism. However farming also makes a major contribution to protecting the environment

and underpinning healthy and vibrant communities.

The vital role played by farming in the Fens is underlined by the fact that, since 1995, the self-sufficiency of the UK has declined steadily. UK farmers now only produce 71% of the food that we eat that can be grown in our climate².

However, farming in the UK has never been more important, a fact highlighted recently by poor global harvests that have left many countries facing food shortages. As a result food security is once again on the political agenda. Set against a steady decline in self-sufficiency across the country, the Fens are a highly productive and precious resource that must be protected to safeguard food production.

¹ UKCIP02, a report detailing climate change scenarios for the UK (2002)

² Agriculture in the UK 2006, Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)

Policy recommendations

The NFU calls for the following urgent action to secure a successful and sustainable future for the Fens:

- **Climate change presents a multitude of threats. With the right policy framework, farmers in the Fens can be part of the solution by helping to meet ambitious renewable energy targets in the East Midlands and the East of England.**
- **Flooding poses a serious threat to the Fens. It is crucial that authorities take appropriate action to minimise the risk and impact of future events. A continued programme of investment in flood defence measures is essential to mitigate the risk of flooding due to the effects of climate change.**
- **Farming in the Fens is nationally important and makes a significant contribution to the regional economy. It is essential that all stakeholders continue to support the sustainable growth of the farming and food industries to guarantee the future prosperity of the Fens.**

Why farming in the Fens matters to the economy

Farms in the Fens exemplify modern and sustainable farming, combining exceptional production with outstanding environmental stewardship. Employing 27,000 people³ and supporting a large and diverse range of businesses, farms in the Fens contribute significantly to the success of the economy.



There are an estimated 4,000 farms in the Fens covering all sectors of agriculture and horticulture. This includes arable, livestock, poultry and dairy farming as well as a large number of farms growing vegetables and ornamental plants. Farms in the Fens permanently employ 14,000 people, or 6% of the working population. Horticultural production is particularly labour intensive and a further 13,000 people are employed temporarily throughout the year in the Fens to sow, harvest and process crops.

Overall 89% of farmland in the Fens is either grade 1 or 2 agricultural land. Due to the predominance of high quality land, farms in the Fens are exceptionally productive and are famous for producing large quantities of vegetables, wheat, potatoes and sugar beet as well as ornamental plants such as daffodils.



“Rising world demand, climate change and energy security have combined to make agriculture a strategically important industry once again, a sector that offers society solutions, not problems.”

Peter Kendall, NFU President

³ NFU estimate based on the June Agricultural Census and other sources

Crops grown in the Fens

| Crop | Acres grown in the Fens | Percentage of total English acreage |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Vegetables grown in the open | 72,000 | 37% |
| Potatoes | 62,000 | 24% |
| Sugar beet | 53,000 | 17% |
| Bulbs and flowers grown in the open* | 5,500 | 38% |

Source: June agricultural census 2006, DEFRA. *2004

▼ Case study: Shropshire's, Ely



*Richard Turner,
Celery Manager*

The Shropshire family originally farmed 300 acres near Ely but over the last 50 years Shropshire's has grown to be one of the largest fresh produce companies in Europe, employing more than 1,700 people at the height of the season.

Shropshire's success is due to its innovative approach to production and marketing. In 1984 Guy Shropshire founded G's Growers, a cooperative of farmers which became more efficient by sharing expertise and resources. Today Shropshire's grows a wide variety of vegetables, both conventionally and organically, and is one of Europe's leading salad producers.

Vegetables and salads produced by Shropshire's are marketed by G's Marketing Ltd, a subsidiary which conducts and acts upon the latest

consumer and market research. It serves all sectors of the food industry from supermarkets to independent retailers, restaurants and food manufacturers all over Europe. Protecting the environment is a priority for Shropshire's. It has integrated the conservation of a wide variety of species including skylarks and pipistrelle bats into the management of its farms. Where possible, Shropshire's also utilises sub-irrigation and planting systems, which increase energy efficiency and reduce the use of water, fertilisers and pesticides needed to grow crops.

Shropshire's has won many awards including the Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Challenge County Award.

For more information visit www.shropshires.com



The Fens maintain a level of production far exceeding their geographical size. Every year farms in the Fens grow enough wheat to produce 250 million loaves of bread and 37% of all the vegetables produced in England are grown in the rich fertile soils of the Fens. These include a large number of different vegetables grown to cater for an increasingly sophisticated market.

One particular farm business in the Fens produces almost half of all the beetroot grown in the UK. On other farms oriental vegetables such as pak choi now grow alongside many other traditional vegetable varieties including iceberg lettuce, savoy cabbage and winter celery. All of these vegetables provide the essential ingredients for the five-a-day programme, offering a healthier lifestyle for all and reducing the incidence of chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer⁴.

The Fens are also famous for producing potatoes, one of the world's staple foods. Demand for potatoes has grown by 4.5% annually for the past ten years. Farms in the Fens produce 1.5 million tonnes of potatoes each year, equivalent to 24% of all the potatoes grown in England and worth an estimated £232 million. These potatoes are supplied to retailers and caterers as well as many prominent food manufacturers.

In addition, farmers in the Fens play the leading role in the production of Colman's English Mustard, one of England's iconic brands. Colman's has been making mustard in Norwich for over 180 years and today 13 of the 16 farms that grow mustard in England for Colman's are located in the Fens.

⁴ Department of Health. The NHS Plan (2000)

◀ Case study: Richard and Margaret Angood, Chatteris

Following in his father's footsteps Richard represents the fourth generation of his family to farm in the Fens. With his wife Margaret, Richard owns and farms 200 acres of land on Byall and Langwood Fens near Chatteris.

The business is an excellent example of how relatively small farms contribute significantly not only to the economy but also to rural life. The Angoods grow a number of different crops including cereals, sugar beet and potatoes and also keep a flock of sheep. The cereals and potatoes are marketed by Fengrain and MBMG respectively. Both companies are based in the Fens and, combined, employ 550 people and generate a turnover of £150 million.

The Angoods employ one other person full time which allows Richard to farm neighbouring farmland under contract, a practice which is becoming increasingly common. In addition to farming, Margaret is a Justice of the Peace while Richard, keen to pass on his knowledge and expertise to the next generation of budding farmers, teaches part time at the Agricultural College of West Anglia in Wisbech.

▶ Case study: Premier Vegetables, Old Leake near Boston



*Ian Baker,
Managing Director*

Premier Vegetables is a marketing company which markets, packs and distributes the produce of nine Lincolnshire Fen farms, covering a total of 2,500 acres. Founded by Mick Baker in 1983 the company now employs over 200 people at the height of the season. Every year Premier Vegetables supplies Tesco with 20 million cabbages and 3,000 tonnes of sprouts, the equivalent of 18 million portions.

Premier Vegetables is an innovative company that continually strives to increase its efficiency and improve the quality of its produce. As part of its development work it has successfully extended the English growing season of a number of different varieties of cabbage by a total of 24 weeks. This means that it imports fewer cabbages from abroad, saving over 250,000 food miles per year.



*Harvested pumpkins at Oakley Farms,
Outwell near Wisbech*

▼ Case study: Delamore, Wisbech St Mary



Peter Wood,
Managing Director

As well as their leading role in food production, the Fens are also one of the country's most important areas for ornamental crop production. An estimated 250 farms and nurseries grow hardy nursery stock and approximately 38% of the bulbs and flowers produced in England.

The contribution of farming to the economy does not end at the farm gate. Farming in the Fens supports a large and diverse range of other businesses involved in the food industry such as hauliers, packers, wholesalers and merchants, food and drink manufacturers as well as those involved in financial and legal services, construction and tourism. The full contribution of farming to the economy can only be appreciated once the relationship between farming and the businesses it supports is taken into account.

Every year Delamore supplies more than 100 million young plants to nurseries throughout the UK and employs 100 people. The company is always keen to embrace new technology and develop new varieties. It recently invested in a state of the art greenhouse covering 14 acres. Water, temperature and light levels are automatically adjusted to provide maximum efficiency.

Horticulture is a very competitive industry and product development is crucial to

meet increasingly sophisticated consumer demands. Delamore works closely with plant breeders to develop new varieties. Fifty new varieties are currently represented in its catalogue, which includes over 1,000 different varieties of ornamental plants including fuchsias, geraniums, perennials, lavenders, climbers, and shrubs.

For more information visit www.delamore.co.uk

▼ Case study: Mason Bros, Swineshead



Farming supports a wide range of businesses in the Fens such as hauliers, which provide efficient ways of transporting produce. Mason Bros, founded in 1962 by Gerald Mason when he purchased a small holding and two small cattle trucks, is one example. Gerald originally planned to expand the farm but instead he responded to requests by customers of the former owner to provide transport. Since then Gerald's three sons have taken over the day to day running of the business and it has grown into a successful vegetable

transport, grading and storage company. Today Mason Bros employs up to 130 people and transports 80,000 tonnes of potatoes and onions each year from thousands of farms all over the UK and Europe. Realising there was a demand for the handling and storage of potatoes and onions, Mason Bros recently built a grading and storage facility to provide customers with a complete transport, grading and storage service.

For more information visit www.masonbrothers.co.uk

"Rural areas like the Fens make a vital contribution to the prosperity of the East of England."

Richard Ellis, Chair of the East of England Development Agency



Why farming in the Fens matters to the food and drink manufacturing industry

Farming is the crucial first step in a food chain that, in turn, supports around 250 businesses in the Fens involved in producing and distributing a diverse range of food and drink.

*Chicory at Jack Buck Farms,
Moulton Seas End near Holbeach.
Courtesy of Jack Buck Farms*



“Farmers in the Fens are rightly proud of the fresh produce they grow. To me the variety, quality and taste of food from the Fens is superb.”

Rachel Green,
Tastes of Lincolnshire Champion
and celebrity chef

The food and drink manufacturing sector is the largest single manufacturing sector in the Fens and is key to the sustainable growth of the region. Food and drink manufacturers in the Fens generate a turnover of approximately £1.7 billion and, together with businesses that pack and distribute produce, employ around 17,500 people in the Fens, accounting for 7% of employment.

There is a wide range of food and drink manufacturing businesses in the Fens. These range from small companies employing one person to international companies employing thousands. However, irrespective of size, each business values the Fens as a plentiful source of excellent quality fresh produce. A recent survey of the food processing

and manufacturing industry conducted by the NFU revealed that companies in the Fens source approximately 60% of their produce from the local area⁵.

Combined, the farming and the food manufacturing sectors provide 13% of jobs in the Fens. However, like farming, the cluster of businesses manufacturing food and drink also supports a range of businesses that supply it with materials or provide services. As such farming, and the food and drink manufacturing sector it supports, provide substantial added value and employment in the Fens.

⁵ Fens food industry survey conducted by the NFU (2007)

▼ Case study: Greenvale AP, March



Over the last 40 years Greenvale AP has grown to become a leading supplier of fresh potatoes. From March in the heart of the Fens, and two other sites in Shropshire and Berwickshire, Greenvale AP packs and distributes 600,000 tonnes of potatoes each year to retailers, caterers and food manufacturers all over the UK and Europe.

In addition to packing and distributing potatoes, Greenvale Foods, a subsidiary of Greenvale AP located in Wisbech, manufactures cooked potato products including chips and mashed potato. Greenvale Foods uses a number of different varieties of potato including Maris Piper, Vales Emerald and Lady Balfour. The latter is available exclusively

from Greenvale AP and is the only variety of potato specifically bred for organic production. It is particularly resistant to disease.

The success of Greenvale AP is due in part to its progressive philosophy, which sees it work in partnership with many leading research centres. Product development is a particular priority and it worked with the Scottish Crop Research Institute to develop a very successful new Peruvian potato variety called Mayan Gold. Greenvale AP has also developed many innovative storage and natural pest control technologies.

For more information visit www.greenvale.co.uk

Why farming in the Fens matters to the environment

Farmers play an important role in managing and protecting the environment. More than 670,000 acres, or 70% of land in the Fens, is managed under environmental stewardship schemes. Under these schemes land managers look after 270 miles of hedgerow and 1,780 miles of ditches, providing important habitats for endangered birds and mammals.



◀ Case Study: Vine House Farm, Deeping St Nicholas

Nicholas Watts farms 2,000 acres in Deeping Fen and is passionate about the environment and protecting habitat for birds. Vine House Farm grows a number of different crops both conventionally and organically and between its larger fields Nicholas has created 20 metre wide wild flower strips.

Nicholas also considers electricity a vital crop and Vine House Farm and a neighbouring farm are home to eight wind turbines which generate the equivalent amount of energy to power 9,000 homes every year.

Since 1982 Nicholas has kept detailed records of the birds that nest in Deeping Fen and performs annual surveys for the British Trust for Ornithology. In 1993 he began to feed birds in a paddock near his farmyard. So many birds flocked to the paddock that he decided to stage an open day. Several visitors asked if they could buy bird seed at the farm to feed the birds. In response to this demand Nicholas began to grow and sell bird seed.

Today Vine House Farm sells around 1,000 tonnes of bird seed every year. Recently Nicholas has also built three nesting towers (pictured opposite) which house barn owls as well as a variety of other species including swallows and even bees. Vine House Farm has won many awards and Nicholas is the proud recipient of the MBE for services to farming and conservation.

For more information visit
www.vinehousefarm.co.uk

The ditches which criss-cross farmland in the Fens provide the perfect habitat for the water vole, one of England's most endangered native animals. It lives in burrows alongside rivers, ditches and ponds but across the UK numbers have been falling due to the loss of habitat and predation by mink, a non-native species.

However, a survey by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough water vole project has revealed that the Fens provide the perfect refuge for water voles. They were found to be living in 93% of drains at Ransonmoor and 64% of drains at Curf Fen⁶.

Coupled with hedgerow and ditch management, many farmers prepare integrated farm management plans. These ensure efficient and environmentally sensitive use of inputs and resources while protecting the environment and allowing farmers to produce quality fresh food. Effective management of the diverse range of soil types in the Fens is key to the economic and environmental sustainability of farms. Farmers combine excellent agronomy with the latest technology to protect soils and the environment while ensuring efficient and sustainable production.

The Fens contain many areas of particular environmental significance and many are managed by farmers. The largest of these areas is the Wash, which covers more than

153,000 acres and is one of the most outstanding coastal wetlands in Europe. The Wash consists of an important and rare combination of habitats including open water, mudflats and salt marsh. These diverse habitats support a wide variety of wildlife and are one of the most important winter feeding grounds for waders and wildfowl in the UK.

Irreplaceable habitats such as the Wash and the Nene and Ouse Washes are protected by livestock farmers who graze cattle and sheep on them. Grazing reduces the height and increases the diversity of vegetation, providing a rich habitat for birds and other wildlife. Farmers also provide an important supply of food for migrating birds such as Bewick's swans, which feed on sugar beet tops and small potatoes left in fields after the crops have been harvested.

“Without the support of local farmers... we would not be treated to this wonderful spectacle of wild swans each year.”

Jon Reeves, RSPB Site Manager at the Ouse Washes

⁶ The Wildlife Trusts, 2006

▼ Case study: Salt Marsh Beef, King's Lynn



Gavin Lane is the third generation of his family to farm in the Fens. Together with his wife Jane, Gavin farms 2,400 acres near King's Lynn and on the Wash. They grow crops including garlic, wheat, oilseed rape, sugar beet and peas.

Gavin and Jane are also members of the higher level environmental stewardship scheme and, in partnership with Gavin's

brother, Benedict, rear cattle that during the summer graze on the salt marsh of the Wash. Grazing cattle on the salt marsh is incredibly important as it protects the habitat which attracts hundreds of thousands of birds to feed in this area every winter.

For more information visit
www.saltmarshbeef.co.uk

Why farming in the Fens matters to climate change

Climate change is the most significant environmental challenge facing the planet today. Farms offer a unique opportunity to increase energy generation from renewable sources, reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and helping deliver regional objectives for renewable energy production.

*Gedney Marsh Wind Farm at
Red House Farm, Gedney Marsh*

Globally over seven billion tonnes of carbon dioxide is emitted into the atmosphere every year. The accumulation of greenhouse gases fuels climate change and will lead to an increase in sea levels and an increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events.

Biofuel research is essential to develop new, greener fuels and to secure a low carbon future. The Fens are home to the Arthur Rickwood Research Centre, where ADAS conducts renewable energy research, growing 40 acres of miscanthus and willow coppice.

Love them or loathe them, wind turbines provide another source of renewable energy. There are more than 80 wind turbines in the Fens, many sited on farmland. Altogether the wind turbines in the Fens generate enough energy annually to power 87,000 homes and prevent the release of more than 300,000 tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere.

Biomass is also put to good use in the Fens, where Sutton near Ely is home to the world's largest straw fired power plant. It generates enough energy each year to power 21,000 homes. To keep it operational 200,000 tonnes of straw is sourced from surrounding farms, a highly sustainable source of energy.

The transport sector is responsible for 25% of carbon emissions in the UK. The Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation is a commitment by government to require 5% of road transport fuel to come from sustainable renewable sources by 2010⁷. This obligation will be met in part by blending biofuels such as bioethanol, produced at British Sugar's Wissington factory, with conventional fossil fuels and will result in a 2-3% reduction in carbon emissions.

⁷ Energy white paper setting out the government's international and domestic energy strategy (2007)

▼ Case Study: British Sugar and Cornerways Nursery, Wissington



Farmers in the Fens grow around one fifth of the sugar beet grown in England, a total of 1.4 million tonnes. British Sugar operates four factories, the largest of which is located in the Fens at Wissington.

At the height of the season, the factory in Wissington employs 330 people and processes up to 17,500 tonnes of sugar beet each day.

The majority of the sugar beet is used to make sugar but the factory in Wissington also produces 70 million litres of bioethanol a year. Bioethanol is blended with petrol to reduce the amount of carbon emitted by transport fuels and helps to mitigate climate change.

To increase the energy efficiency of the factory it is powered by its own highly efficient combined heat and power plant, which not only supplies the factory with

all of the energy that it requires but also supplies 50Mw to the national grid.

Hot water and CO₂ are by-products of the power plant at the Wissington factory but both are put to good and environmentally sound use. Hot water from the power plant is used to heat the glasshouse of British Sugar's subsidiary company, Cornerways Nursery. The nursery is the largest glasshouse in the UK dedicated to growing tomatoes and each year produces 70 million tomatoes on 26 acres.

CO₂ produced by the power plant also has a beneficial use. It is blown in to the glasshouse where it boosts photosynthesis of the tomato plants and increases the yield of tomatoes.

For more information visit www.britishsugar.co.uk

Why farming in the Fens matters to tourism

The Fens are a popular tourist destination attracting more than 15 million visitors a year, 5 million of whom are visiting the countryside for the day. Tourists, attracted to the Fens by breathtaking countryside, spend over £580 million per year and support 15,000 jobs in the Fens.



*Narrow boat cruising on Well Creek.
Courtesy of Cliff Carson*

Visitors are attracted to the Fens for many different reasons. Farmland forms the attractive backdrop to spectacular churches and elegant Georgian town houses which attract visitors to numerous historic market towns in the Fens, while magnificent Ely Cathedral draws thousands of visitors from all over the world.

Waterways are an integral part of the landscape. The Fens Waterways Link is an ambitious project which aims to connect over 150 miles of waterways which criss-cross the Fens to the cathedral cities of Ely, Peterborough and Lincoln. The Fens Waterways Link will entice even more visitors to the Fens and out into the countryside.

Throughout the year there are many colourful food and flower festivals influenced by farming and attracting visitors from far and wide. These include the annual Spalding Flower Parade, attended by 80,000 people and comprising 15 or more floats decorated with up to 500,000 locally grown tulips.

For many the Fens' greatest attraction is the access they afford to amazing countryside. Farmers manage and protect many of the areas frequented by so many visitors and many have also diversified their businesses to provide tourists with leisure activities and accommodation such as bed and breakfast, self catering or caravan and camping sites.

“The waterways, historic townscapes and unique landscape of the Fens contribute to the quality of life and recreational opportunities for local people and visitors.”

Penny Baker, Chief Executive of Lincolnshire Tourism

▼ Case Study: Woodhouse Farm Park, Friday Bridge near Wisbech



Sam and Kim Flint own Woodhouse Farm Park, a new farm attraction in the heart of the Fens. The farm park is set on the Flint's traditional 250 acre farm at Friday Bridge near Wisbech. Visitors are able to meet and learn about a wide variety of traditional farmyard animals including cattle, pigs, turkeys, and goats. Children can also enjoy an adventure playground complete with giant slides and padded play areas, while the café serves a wide range of freshly prepared local food. Underpinning all of the work on the farm and in the park is a commitment to

protecting the environment. Under the higher level environmental stewardship scheme dykes have been realigned to provide varied habitats for wildlife.

The farm's dedicated classroom also attracts a large number of school groups keen to experience practical lessons about farming and the environment. For a longer visit, self catering accommodation is also available in a newly converted farm barn.

For more information visit www.woodhousefarmpark.co.uk

Why farming in the Fens matters to the community

Farmland defines the nature of rural landscapes and communities and nowhere is this truer than in the Fens, where beautiful open countryside surrounds historic market towns.

Farmland in the Fens is an important part of the green infrastructure of both the Fens' rural communities and the surrounding urban communities. As the large urban areas surrounding the Fens, such as Peterborough and Cambridge, continue to grow the countryside around them provides increasingly important breathing places, which offer many opportunities for leisure and education.

Open Farm Sunday is an excellent opportunity to discover what happens on farms. For one day in June hundreds of participating farmers open their gates and welcome the public on to their farms. The increasingly popular annual event is organised by farmers and an organisation called Linking Environment And Farming (LEAF). Over 40 farms in the Fens opened their gates in 2007 and more than 15,000 people put on their wellies and headed for their nearest farm.

Many farms also provide the opportunity for school groups to visit, bridging the gap between people and the food they eat. Participating farmers are trained and accredited by the Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS), ensuring a high quality farm experience and that children are safe. Children benefit greatly from the experience which is fun and complements their class work with practical learning.

▼ Case Study: Open Farm Sunday at Thurlby Grange Farms, Thurlby



More than 4,000 people attended the Open Farm Sunday event at Tony Reynolds' Thurlby Grange Farms in June 2007. The huge turnout demonstrates the amount of public interest there is in farming and the environment. The event was organised by NFU members in and around Bourne and farmers were on hand throughout the day to answer

questions and provide extremely popular guided tractor tours. Farm machinery old and new was on show as were farm animals and many examples of different crops. There was also a farmers' market which sold plenty of local produce.

For more information visit www.leafuk.org

▼ Case Study: Moor Farm, Newborough



Judith and Andrew Jacobs farm 500 acres on Borough Fen in Newborough. The Jacobs grow wheat, oilseed rape, sugar beet and potatoes as well as keeping cattle and sheep and are members of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. They are passionate about farming, the environment and education and Judith regularly guides school groups around their farm. Judith also participates in the Peterborough Greener Schools project which promotes environmental awareness in children from Peterborough.

To enhance the experience, Judith and Andrew have built an education room complete with toilet and hand washing amenities, which is fully accessible to disabled people. Each year Judith's hard work provides a valuable and rewarding experience to more than 600 children from both urban and rural communities.

For more information visit www.moor-farm.com

"Coming from a farming family, I am acutely aware of the vital contribution agriculture makes to the wellbeing of our communities. Farming has always been at the heart of life in the Fens."

Dr Anthony Russell, Bishop of Ely and
President of the East of England Agricultural Society



*Interacting with animals at
Moor Farm, Newborough*

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