



# EAST MIDLANDS

The East Midlands region has a diverse agricultural economy and is a major contributor to UK agriculture and national food security.

Farmers in the region are significant growers of combinable crops such as wheat, barley, and oilseed. Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire grow 25% of national field vegetable production. The region produces significant crops such as sugar beet, potatoes, and nursery stock. Grassland supports beef, sheep, and dairy production, and the region has well developed pig and poultry production. The East Midlands supports major UK food processing and manufacturing companies because of the primary agricultural production.

Key to this diversity is the ability of farmers to manage water and deal with extremes of weather. The region is drained by major rivers such as the Trent, Derbyshire Derwent, Witham, Welland and Nene. It has a major stretch of low-lying coastline and two vast tidal estuaries in the Humber and Wash.

Crops such as vegetables, potatoes and sugar beet need access to clean and plentiful supplies of water for both irrigated production, productivity, and processing. Over 60% of irrigation licenses are found in the Anglian and Midlands areas. The importance of irrigation is very well illustrated in Nottinghamshire where carrot production on sand land would not be possible without irrigation.

Securing supplies of water needs both investment and management, be that farm reservoirs or initiatives such as the Witham Water Transfer Ltd, established three decades ago by farmers collaborating to secure their water needs. Despite these developments, many businesses still face

crop production issues in drought conditions with increased demand curtailed by abstraction restrictions.

The East Midlands faces increasing risks of water shortages with the prospect of more frequent and severe droughts, and growing competition from housing growth and the environment. More innovative ways to combat this are needed, hence projects like the South Lincolnshire Water Partnership and a reservoir proposal that seeks opportunities to better use the water that is available with a multi-purpose catchment approach.

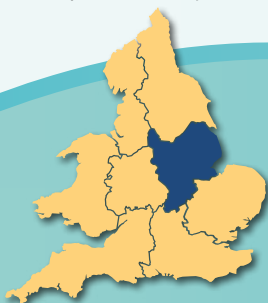
It is estimated that 35% of agricultural land is at risk from flooding in the region. In Lincolnshire, 45% of the county is in a floodplain. The management of watercourses and flood risk by both the Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Boards is vital, particularly as we see more extreme events such as the flooding in 2019/20. There were record flood levels across all catchments; five breaches of Lincolnshire flood banks; numerous overtopping and bank seepage issues.

Large parts of Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire have a high reliance on pumped river systems which ensure the efficient conveyance of water along lowland carriers and out to sea. A fundamental issue is the maintenance and funding of rural catchments where the value of agricultural land is not properly accounted for in how the Treasury allocate public money.

Flooding from a tidal surge and rising sea levels is of major concern to Lincolnshire. The December 2013 tidal surge damaged flood defences and farmland from the Humber to the Wash. A sea bank breach at Friskney flooded 209 hectares of grade 1 farmland which did not return to agricultural production for five years while salinity levels reduced. The potential impact of a major inundation from the North Sea is enormous and was illustrated in 2017 when agri-food sector analysis highlighted that 108,000 hectares of farmland was at risk, and in year one over two million tonnes of crops would be lost. The direct and indirect costs to the local economy of such an event would be around £666 million and 9156 jobs.



Photo courtesy of Richard Hardesty





## Regional priorities:

We need access to secure supplies of water on a long-term basis to be able to plan future business growth and invest with confidence

- We need less complexity in the regulatory regime surrounding abstraction licences and the best use of resource i.e. winter abstraction and capturing spate flow
- We need better recognition and joint working to maintain, repair, and enhance flood defence infrastructure across the region to reduce risk, particularly in the face of more extreme weather events and sea level rise
- We need improved Risk Management Authority engagement with farmers and landowners to help policy and decision making at catchment level, and to better account for the long-term needs of the sector
- To seek recognition of the value of productive farmland as a valuable asset, so rural catchments can obtain better national Government funding allocations
- To secure major upgrades of Wash sea bank defences, such as has been achieved at Wrangle Bank
- Help farm businesses with positive policies to improve the water quality, help tackle pollution, and incentivising measures that can improve both productivity and the environment

- Seek and improve the drought resilience planning of farm businesses, so for example at times of supply interruption livestock units have water for their stock

