SOUTH WEST

Flooding is a major issue in the South West. Traditionally, the region receives an above national average volume of rainfall and, over recent years, the infrastructure has not been able to cope with the extreme heavy downpours associated with climate change. This was demonstrated during 2013-14 when thousands of acres of agricultural land were flooded for over three months.

This spurred a different approach from Government, which included the creation of the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA), the only river authority in England, with the main aim of overcoming the bureaucracy in the area.

The SRA's purpose is to give Somerset an extra level of flood protection and resilience, as set out in the county's 20-year Flood Action Plan. It is a partnership involving the Environment Agency (EA), local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) among others.

The challenges and impacts that flooding brings to the South West include:

- Most of the region's best agricultural land is low lying and prone to flooding. It is protected and drained by IDB and EA assets, some of which are not working to their full potential due to a lack of maintenance. Every year, the region loses high value crops due to flooding.
- Farmers play their part in maintaining field drains. Unmanaged drainage channels mean land is more prone to flooding and the complicated licencing regime around flood risk is a barrier that stops people doing what is needed.
- In some parts of the region the EA and local councils have stopped, or are proposing to stop, maintaining coastal defences which only protect farmland, much of which is our better-quality agricultural land.
- In the recent past, flash flooding has caused huge devastation to some parts of the region (e.g. Boscastle, Cornwall). Flash floods are exceptionally difficult to predict as they are usually associated with summer thunderstorms. They are also extremely dangerous as they can damage critical infrastructure and kill livestock.

The South West is an area which traditionally has plenty of water in the winter months. But it appears to become 'water stressed' very quickly in periods of dry weather as most of the water is drawn from surface water sources. This can be a particular issue in areas of horticulture (especially in Cornwall), cereal cropping and grass growth (having a 'green drought' is something that is notable – this is where the grass is green but there is no or limited growth). As much of the focus in the region has been on flooding there has not been the investment in water resilience on farms.

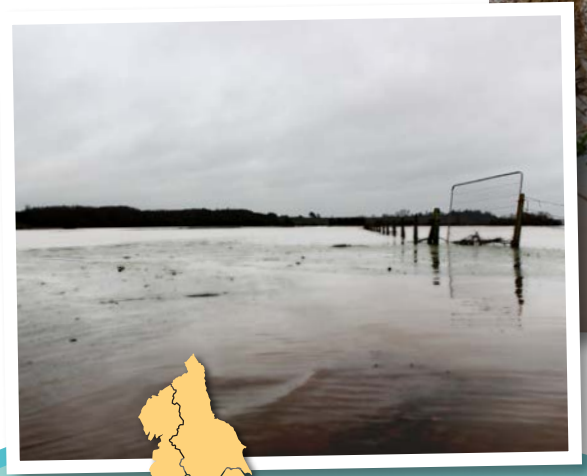
Regional priorities:

Flood Management:

- Farmers need to have the ability to protect their land from flooding and need to have the means to drain floodwater away efficiently after an event. This will help to improve the resilience of the farming business and safeguard the productivity of the soil.
- Internal Drainage Boards play a vital role in the area.
- Better balance between protecting the environment and allowing flood risk management activity to take place e.g. the difficulty getting a licence for more than one operation where a Site of Special Scientific Interest is involved. This can be expensive and bureaucratic. Farmers need long term multi operation licences in sensitive areas.
- More guidance from the EA on the licencing process.
- At a strategic level, recognition of the value of farmland and food production.
- Capital grants on a case-by-case basis to help with flood protection or recovery.

Water resources:

- Proper maintenance of the current drainage system so it can hold more water.
- Help with grants and overturning the bureaucracy associated will building on-farm water storage.
- Grants and advice on water efficiency techniques (water recycling on farm, low input irrigation techniques).
- Making more of our on-farm groundwater resources. Despite surface water levels falling to very low levels in the late spring/early summer, the groundwater levels were still exceptionally high.



NFU

NFU SUPPORTED BY NFU Mutual