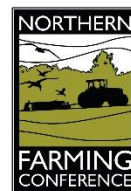


7 November 2024

Report: Northern Farming Conference 2024 – 'Owning Change'



Authored by Jan Claridge, YoungsRPS

Circulated on behalf of the Northern Farming Organising Committee

The 15th Northern Farming Conference opened with a strong focus on the theme of 'Owning Change' reflecting the significant transformations facing the agricultural sector. Held at **Hexham Auction Mart on 6 November**.

Several high-profile speakers attended this year's conference including: **Lord Inglewood** (Conservative Peer); **Farming Minister Daniel Zeichner**; and MPs **Tim Farron (LibDems)** and **Robbie Moore (Conservatives)**.

Amid heightened security and a planned protest by local farmers, **Chair Samantha Charlton (the AHDB's Beef and Lamb Sector Director)**, representing the Northern Farming Conference committee, acknowledged the milestone of the conference and the challenging times ahead. She highlighted the "shockwaves impacting our sector," with rising costs, market uncertainty, and regulatory pressures, noting that recent budget announcements had failed to address these urgent concerns.

Charlton urged delegates to engage fully, emphasizing that "great questions demand clear answers." She called for proactive dialogue and action from policymakers, stressing the need for a government that listens, responds, and works with farmers to secure a sustainable and resilient future for British agriculture.

The first round of speakers sparked a lively discussion, with some differing viewpoints. The panel discussion was chaired by respected Northumbrian farmer **John Baker-Cresswell**.

Lord Inglewood opened the panel with a thought-provoking question: "What is the point of farming and owning land, and how does it fit into the wider world?" He urged attendees to consider this fundamental issue when shaping rural policy. Drawing on his experience in agricultural policy, Inglewood stressed the importance of balanced policies that support both environmental goals and economic sustainability. He concluded by encouraging responsible, self-sustaining land management practices.

Farming Minister Daniel Zeichner, MP for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, acknowledged the hardships farmers face, including recent floods, blue tongue, and avian flu. He assured the audience that compensation schemes were in place, announcing the immediate release of £60 million in funding. Zeichner also addressed

the year's budget, which is the largest ever for agriculture, with a focus on food production, nature recovery, and environmental progress.

He confirmed that £1.8 billion would go toward Environmental Land Management schemes in 2025-26 and highlighted Labour's commitment to funding Weighbridge facilities for biosecurity. Zeichner also announced the appointment of England's first Commissioner for the Tenant Farming Sector.

Tim Farron, Lib Dem MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale, passionately discussed the barriers farmers face today, calling for a more responsive approach to agricultural policy. He criticized the government for creating policies that "disincentivize food production" and urged for fairer policies, especially regarding market access and rural support.

Robbie Moore, Conservative MP for Keighley and Ilkley, criticized the current government's agricultural policies, particularly in relation to inheritance tax, and called for clearer, more farmer-centred support. He promised to hold the government accountable, particularly regarding the £1 million limit on inheritance tax.

A slight change to the schedule allowed delegates to learn more about the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board's (AHDB) work. Samantha Charlton, Beef & Lamb Sector Director, discussed the importance of AHDB's marketing campaigns in supporting UK food production and educating future consumers.

Helen Browning OBE, Chief Executive of the Soil Association, shared her journey into farming, beginning at 24 when she took over her family farm in Wiltshire. A staunch advocate for organic farming, Helen emphasized the importance of sustainable food production, stating that our "moral duty is to produce food only when it is sustainable to do so." Through her leadership and personal experience, she made a compelling case for balancing environmental responsibility with the need to feed future generations.

A farmers' panel, focused on the challenges facing younger farmers, explored issues such as succession planning, diversification, and contract farming. Panellists **Stuart Johnson, Tania Coxon, Rich Oglesby**, and **Annabel Hamilton** shared their experiences and emphasized the need for greater support and innovation to encourage new entrants into farming.

The conference concluded with a memorable session by **Michael Blanche**, former land agent turned podcaster, who entered the stage in the guise of Donald Trump to rapturous applause. His light-hearted yet thought-provoking talk posed the question, "Are we so in love with the system we're in that we can't let go?" In a first for the NFC, Michael invited audience participation, encouraging attendees to reflect on their own practices and embrace new ways of thinking. His session provided a fitting end to the

conference, leaving delegates with plenty to ponder about the future of farming and the systems we operate within.

The conference is a joint venture between Armstrong Watson, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), Hexham and Northern Marts, HSBC, Womble Bond Dickinson and Youngs RPS.

For more information and to register please visit:

www.northernfarmingconference.org.uk. To get the latest conference news and updates, follow @NorthFarmConf on Twitter.

The conference brought together diverse voices and perspectives, emphasizing the need for change, innovation, and collaboration to address the complex challenges facing modern agriculture.