Agricultural Water Resource Needs

April 2024

Mark Betson
Water Resources specialist

NFU SUPPORTED BY NFU Mutual

Agenda

- Context
- Key Policy Asks
- Pathways to Sustainability



NFU SUPPORTED BY NFU Mutual

Context

Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

The Path to Sustainable Farming: An Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024

November 2020



NFU SUPPORTED BY NFU Mutual

Manifesto Asks

- Increase on-farm water infrastructure
- Enable abstraction during high flow periods
- PWS to include the needs of water for food in drought planning

Access to water

FARMING FOR BRITAIN'S FUTURE

OUR ASK

Access to water for livestock and crop production in times of shortages to be guaranteed, reflecting water's vital role in food production and food security.

Why it's needed

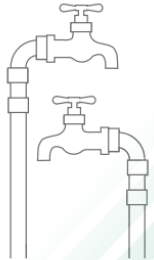
Water is critical for livestock and crop production, but farmers' ability to maintain and increase efficient, high quality food production is being threatened by growing competition for water, climate change, severe weather events and ageing and inadequate infrastructure.

With the global population set to increase to over 10 billion by 2050, there will be significant and increasing competition for water resources. If farmers and growers in the UK are to rise to the challenge of growing more food like fruit and vegetables so we can reduce the amount we import from more water scarce countries, they will need secure access to a share of water supplies.

The next government must support water abstraction for the agri-food sector to restore the confidence necessary for reliable food production. The Environment Agency grants abstraction licences for farming and growing businesses to take water from rivers or groundwater from a borehole or well. The degree of certainty provided by an abstraction licence is important for business confidence as investment decisions – such as expensive irrigation systems –are often made over many years, in the knowledge that permission to abstract has been carefully considered and approved.

Farmers and growers need a secure and reliable supply of water to produce the food we need. But they face immediate challenges in accessing this water. There are currently no mechanisms in place by which the agricultural sector is guaranteed access to water to fill winter storage reservoirs.

The UK has enough water to produce the food we need, it's just not always in the right place at the right time. As a nation, we must get much better at capturing and storing water, as well as moving it around. An abstraction system that allows for excess water capture and more on-farm reservoirs would benefit farmers, and wider society, when we experience storm events like those we saw in parts of the country in autumn 2023.



NFU NFU CYMRU NFU SUPPORTED BY NFU Mutual

Horticulture Strategy

1. Access to labour
2. Access to affordable and sustainable energy supplies
3. Access to crop protection
4. Access to water
5. Access to sustainable growing media
6. Productivity investment
7. Enabling import controls for plants and plant products
8. Fairness in the supply chain
9. Access to environmental funding schemes
10. An enabling planning policy



NFU NFU CYMRU NFU SUPPORTED BY NFU Mutual

Horticulture Strategy

The NFU has three key asks to support the horticulture sector through the challenges of changes proposed to abstraction licences and thus access to water:

1. Communication / Engagement: Abstractors need to be engaged with at the start of any programme looking to change/vary abstraction licences.
2. Data: It is important that the sector understands data source and modelling undertaken and accepts the information being presented for its sector.
3. Time: It is important that the sector has the time to respond and react to any proposed water availability reductions.



NFU NFU CYMRU NFU SUPPORTED BY NFU Mutual

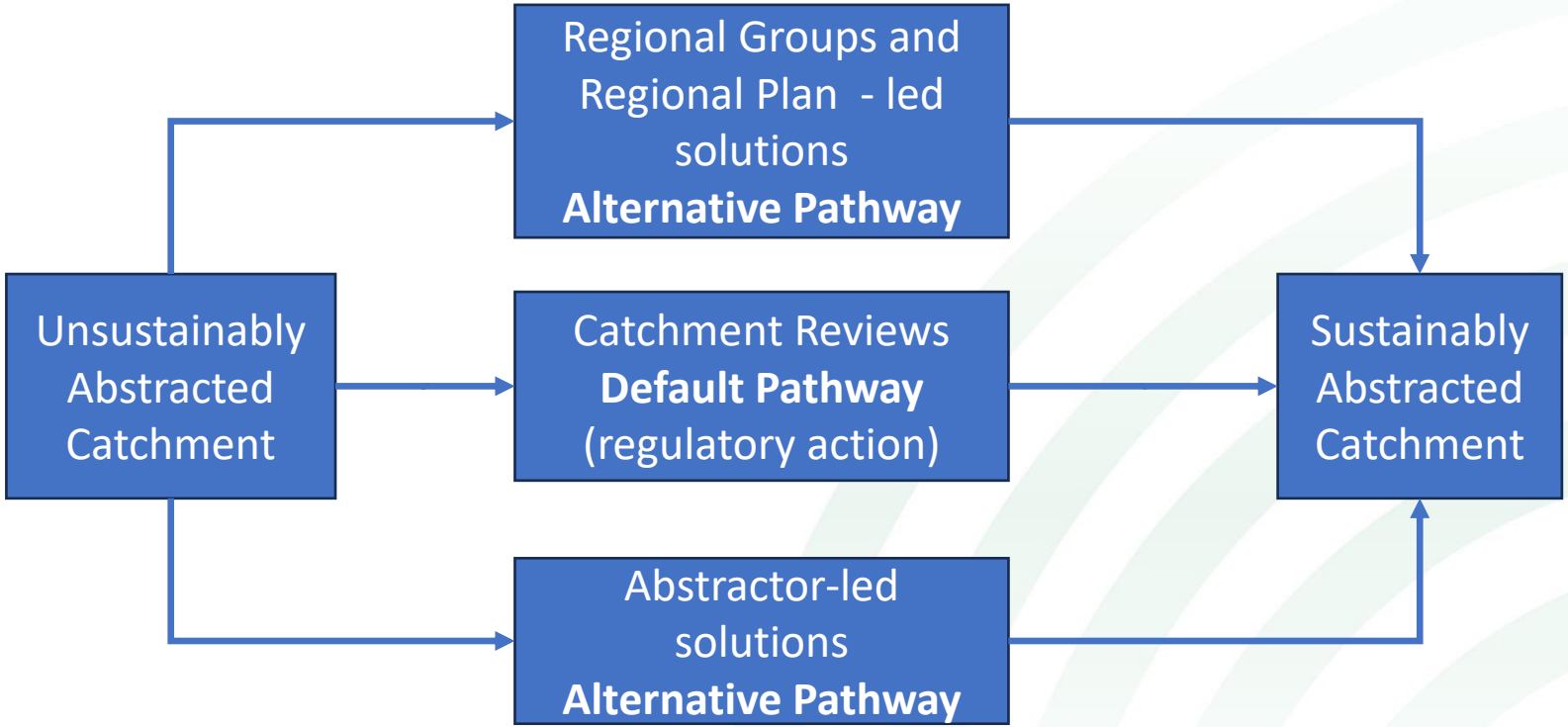
Horticulture in Practice





NFU SUPPORTED BY NFU Mutual

Pathways to Sustainability



NFU SUPPORTED BY NFU Mutual

Abstractor led options: WFF and LROs

WFF Goals: With one voice, to represent the challenges agrifood abstractors face, targeting the ears that can and will make a difference.

- A fair share of sustainably abstracted water for the food and farming sector.
- To act as lead point of contact for technical matters relating to water resource planning and food production.

Water for Food

NFU NFU CYMRU NFU SUPPORTED BY NFU Mutual

Building Resilience & Sustainability











NFU SUPPORTED BY NFU Mutual