



Lancashire farmers fear they will go out of business post-Brexit

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An upland farmer is worried she will go out of business after a loss of income has left the farm “treading water”.

Changes to subsidies since the UK left the European Union has seen support for some farms fall by 37%, the National Farmers’ Union (NFU) has said.

Helen Drinkhall, a beef and sheep farmer near Chorley, said it means “it’s really hard to plan and invest and know where to take the business”.

The government said it would introduce new options for farmers in the summer.

Most upland farms in the UK are suitable only for raising cattle and sheep and are often made up of semi-natural habitats, usually rough grassland, heather, moorland and bogs.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJsGZL-zb54>

When the UK was in the EU, upland farmers received Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) support, which was replaced by environmental land management schemes, external (Elms), offering farms an increase in payment rates if they produced food more sustainably and implemented environmental protection schemes.

But Ms Drinkhall said the old payment scheme was phased out before the new one was ready, limiting the options for upland farms.

She would like to plant trees, but was told her land is not suitable.

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She said the future of the farm “is in the hands of the people designing the schemes, which is quite a scary thought”.

Farmer Thomas Binns, the NFU Uplands Forum chair from the Ribble Valley, said: “We’ve been lobbying hard for the last two years to not disenfranchise upland farming on the basis that it’s a little bit too difficult to deal with at this stage.

“It’s good that there are some measures now that farmers can evaluate and build into their business plans going forward, but I think the big worry is that the single farm payment under the current schemes means less food production in terms of switching the emphasis from productivity towards the environment,” he said.

A spokesman for the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) said: “We’ve just

announced the biggest upgrade to our farming schemes since leaving the EU and have worked with upland farmers to increase payment rates, in many cases for those in existing agreements.

“We have also developed a new range of actions on moorland that farmers can be paid for, offering greater flexibility, including new actions to support management of upland peat and non-peat land soils for flood and drought resilience.

“We continue to do all we can to support British upland farmers – and will take on board feedback so that our schemes work in the best possible way.”

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RR8YYeb4PMk>

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