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AGRICULTURE'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

NEW ENTRANTS

Young farmers share their experiences p42-43



SPECIAL ISSUE

GETTING STARTED IN AGRICULTURE

FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO APPLYING FOR A TENANCY p16

TAKING CHANCES DEVON FARMERS' BATTLE PAYS OFF p46



The sale of county council farms once tenancies have ended is making it more difficult for new entrants to enter the industry.

PICTURE: Marcello Garbagnoli

Action needed as more than 1,000 council farms sold off

► Farming ladder is 'broken' - TFA chief

► Some councils still committed to farming

By Olivia Midgley

IN the last 11 years councils in England and Wales have sold off more than 1,000 farms, investigations by *Farmers Guardian* have revealed.

Figures obtained by *FG* show councils have been selling off holdings over the past decade, rather than letting them to new tenants.

There were 3,777 council-owned farms in England and Wales in 2000, a figure

getting started



which declined to 2,431 in 2011.

Farming leaders blasted the move, which they said scuppered opportunities for new entrants.

County council farms traditionally provided a way into farming for those who have not inherited land or could not afford to buy their own.

But against a backdrop of Government cuts and rising costs, councils have resorted to selling off their assets in a bid to raise cash.

Experts said this 'short sighted' approach was breaking the farming ladder, with new farmers seeing the door to the industry 'slammed in their face'.

Chief executive of the Tenant Farmers Association George Dunn said: "What is clear is if there were ever a farming ladder, the ladder is now broken."

"Traditionally there were opportunities for farmers to get in through the council farms."

"But making the jump from small holdings to large holdings is hard and now there are not the intermediary holdings to move to."

He said the farms were needed to provide a viable entry point and ongoing development for those seeking a career in agriculture, but demand from developers had

seen councils look for a 'quick fix'.

"They are plugging a hole in an unsustainable way," said Mr Dunn.

"We need to be looking at our farms as strategic assets and harvesting profitable land over time, rather than rushing to sell off the family silver."

Offloaded

Between 2000 and 2011, 78 per cent of councils *FG* contacted had sold farms. Norfolk offloaded the most with 123, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire both sold 92 and Shropshire sold 62.

A Norfolk County Council spokesman said: "Different administrations have run the council farms estate differently but this administration is committed to keeping the estate as it is."

A spokesman for North Yorkshire County Council said the authority had a long-standing policy of disposing of its farms when tenancies ended and the money was ploughed back into council services.

There was no change in the number of farms owned by Bournemouth, Milton Keynes, Peterborough and South Gloucestershire. And Hampshire and Brighton actually purchased additional units. Scotland does not have a council farm network.

A spokesman for Hampshire County Council added: "It's vital we continue to invest in the future of our rural economy so farming continues to be a modern, viable and sustainable business that supports the local economy."

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TONY SHEPHERD & JOHN HENDERSON, NORTH YORKSHIRE

"My plea is for all the professional advisers to take off their blinkers and be more open-minded"

STARTER FARM FINANCING A DREAM OF DAIRYING p30

PPA EDITORIAL CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR WINNER 2008 AND 2011



View our interactive tenant map, visit
www.farmerguardian.com/tenantmap

New entrants, revenue and number of council farms in England

Council	New entrants		Revenue		Total farms	
	2000	2011	2000	2011	2000	2011
Bournemouth	0	0	-	£20,360	3	3
Brighton	-	-	£438,229	£528,731	29	38
Buckinghamshire	47	58	-	-	58	47
Cambridgeshire	38	2	-	£2,609,585	354	-
Cornwall	-	3	£954,894	£1,187,100	148	104
Cumbria	0	0	£195,000	£100,000	24	15
Devon	8	4	£840,548	£845,000	128	77
Dorset	3	2	£620,000	£690,000	74	55
Durham	-	0	-	£57,162	19	9
East Riding	1	0	£518,000	£512,000	79	68
East Sussex	0	0	£20,930	£38,769	5	5
Essex	1	4	£98,461	£19,359	37	6
Gloucestershire	-	0	£785,639	£944,082	127	84
Hampshire	5	4	£335,449	£522,843	70	70
Hartlepool	0	0	£10,085	£9,487	smallholdings not farms	smallholdings not farms
Herefordshire	1	-	£995,453	£387,189	67	52
Hertfordshire	0	3	£358,276	£404,206	64	63
Lancashire	0	0	£52,087 in 2003	£27,376	19 in 2003	18
Leicestershire	4	0	£169,560	£347,810	93	78
Lincolnshire	0	0	£1,877,050	£1,212,419	357	265
Medway	-	-	£7,600	-	5	3
Milton Keynes	-	0	-	£78,256	10	10
North Lincolnshire	0	0	£90,840	£82,916	24	21
North Yorkshire	would not disclose but fewer than 5	would not disclose but fewer than 5	no records	£366,630	170	78
Norfolk	33	5	£1,248,990	£1,186,870	339	216
North Somerset	0	0	£50,082	£53,457	9	8
Northamptonshire	0	0	£54,686	£49,782	14	13
Northumberland	0	0	£100,027	£25,549	21	5
Nottinghamshire	1	0	-	£78,886	23	12
Oxfordshire	0	1	£75,000	£43,000	26	26
Peterborough	0	0	£226,720	£245,502	37	35
Shropshire	0	0	£376,936	£109,722	84	22
Somerset	6	1	£703,653	£525,065	98	60
South Gloucestershire	3	0	£71,940	£71,660	10	10
Staffordshire	18	3	£936,129	£1,061,769	166	125
Suffolk	3	0	£820,000	£1,000,000	131	85
Surrey	0	1	£263,930	£250,166	63	46
Swindon	0	0	£134,785	£135,200	18	15
Thurrock	0	0	£12,974	£12,974	3	3
Warrington	0	0	£6,370	£0	2	0
Warwickshire	2	2	-	£577,278	46	46
West Berkshire	0	0	£12,000	£22,000	3	2
West Sussex	-	4	£198,000	£90,273	46	38
Wiltshire	0	0	£849,729	£556,999	70	40
Worcestershire	6	1	£363,621	£324,252	145	91
York	0	0	£31,000	£17,000	4	0

What can be done to help new entrants climb the farming ladder?

“It is important to ensure viable exit opportunities are available. The TFA believes this can best be achieved by matching a new entrants’ scheme with a farmers’ retirement scheme, which could be operated under the CAP rural development programme. This would also have beneficial effects for new entrants.

There are a significant number of tenant farmers near to, at or above retirement age who do not have the economic wherewithal to retire. Their only option is to remain on their let farms for as long as possible to sustain a roof over their heads.”

George Dunn, Tenant Farmers Association chief executive

“Everyone always thinks the traditional young farmers’ career path is to secure a county council holding.

With fewer opportunities, candidates need to be of the highest calibre. NFYFC has recognised and, with support from Defra, we are running tenancy training courses with Savills and the TFA.

Favourable financial conditions will help encourage fledgling farm/rural businesses so young farmers can establish elsewhere to get their feet firmly on the ladder.”

Milly Wastie, NFYFC vice-chairman

“At our tenants’ conference in November, one of the biggest concerns voiced by young farmers was the difficulty in getting access to credit.

We have heard of young people being charged interest rates of 5 to 6 per cent more than established farmers. We believe this is grossly unfair.

These people are determined to do well, but with nothing on the balance the gearing is difficult.

If banks or the Government could underwrite some of the capital required to go into farming, it could open up access to loans for these people. It could allow young farmers to compete on a level playing field.”

Meurig Raymond, NFU deputy president

Key statistics

265
Highest number of council farms in 2011: Lincolnshire County Council

0
Lowest number of council farms in 2011: Warrington and York

5
Most new entrants in 2011: Norfolk

£2.6m
Highest revenue from council farms in 2011: Cambridgeshire County Council

Wales

Council	2000	2011
Carmarthenshire		
New entrants	-	-
Revenue	£206,547	£263,321
Farms	52	41
Ceredigion		
New entrants	-	-
Revenue	£43,643	-
Farms	16	15
Isle of Anglesey		
New entrants	8	2
Revenue	£315,940	-
Farms	125	117
Vale of Glamorgan		
New entrants	-	-
Revenue	£20,568	£5,500
Farms	28	4

Special cases

Council	2000	2011
Cheshire County Council		
New entrants	6	ceased 2009
Revenue	£1,193,196	ceased 2009
Farms	170	ceased 2009
Cheshire West and Chester		
New entrants	-	1
Revenue	-	£518,199
Farms	-	51
Cheshire East Council		
New entrants	-	-
Revenue	-	£605,100
Farms	-	73




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Name of Award being entered: Environment Award
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Title of Entry: Action needed on more than 1,000 rowns farms sold off
farnes.com

Name of Publication / Station / Website: Farmers Guardian

Date of Publication / Broadcast: April 6, 2012

State briefly why you are submitting this particular piece and what impact has it made?

This exclusive investigation collected research from many sources including
the FOE Act. It broke the news about the huge number of rowns farms
which had been sold off, so denying many new entrants the opportunity to start
farming. It was the first to highlight the extent of this sell-off and was picked
up by several newspapers and channels, as well as being discussed within
To be completed by NOMINATED ENTRIES only national organisations

Name of nominator:

Address:

To be completed by ALL ENTRANTS

I hereby declare that I am a fully paid-up member of the Guild of Agricultural Journalists and I agree to abide by the decision of the Judging Panel, which will be final.

I understand that the Judging Panel(s) reserve the right to withhold presentation of any Award if the quality of work is considered to be of insufficient standard.

Signature: Olivia Midgley

Date: August 27 2012