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Centre for Agricultural Strategy

# Crisis on the family farm: ethics or economics?

Edited by S P Carruthers & F A Miller

CAS Paper 28

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CAS Paper 28

# Crisis on the family farm: ethics or economics?

Proceedings of a symposium, organised by the Family Farmers' Association (formerly the Small Farmers' Association) and the Centre for Agricultural Strategy, and held at the University of Reading, 30-31 March 1993

**Edited by S P Carruthers & F A Miller**

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# Abbreviations

ACORA	Archbishop's Commission on Rural Areas
ADAS	Agricultural Development and Advisory Service
AGM	Annual General Meeting
AGMED	Institute of Agricultural Medicine and Rehabilitation
ATB	Agricultural Training Board
AWU	Annual Work Unit
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BST	Bovine somatotrophin
BSU	British Size Unit
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CAS	Centre for Agricultural Strategy
CEC	Commission of the European Communities
CLA	Country Landowners' Association
CO <sub>2</sub>	Carbon dioxide
CPRE	Council for the Protection of Rural England
CPRW	Council for the Protection of Rural Wales
DANI	Department of Agriculture, Northern Ireland
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EC	European Community
ECU	European Currency Unit
EDM	Early Day Motion
EEC	European Economic Community
EHF	Experimental Husbandry Farm
ESA	Environmentally Sensitive Area
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute of Ireland
ESU	European Size Unit
FADN	Farm Accountancy Data Network
FFF	Federation of Family Farm Organisations
FFI	Family Farm Income
FWU	Family Work Unit
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GB	Great Britain
GP	General Practitioner
ha	hectare(s)
HBS	Household Budget Survey
HDC	Horticultural Development Council
HLCA	Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance
HOH	Head of household
IACS	Integrated Administration and Control System
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development

IT	Information Technology
LFA	Less Favoured Area
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
MP	Member of Parliament
NAAS	National Agricultural Advisory Service
NAC	National Agricultural Centre
NFS	National Farm Survey
NFU	National Farmers Union
OSS	One Stop Shops
PAYE	Pay-as-you-earn
PHARE	Pologne-Hongrie Assistance à la Restructuration des Economies
RAC	Royal Agricultural College
RASE	Royal Agricultural Society of England
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SAFE	Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Environment Alliance
SFA	Small Farmers' Association
SGM	Standard Gross Margin
Smd	Standard-man-day
SOAFD	Scottish Agricultural Output Input and Income Statistics
t	tonne(s)
TECs	Training and Enterprise Council
UFAW	Universities Federation for Animal Welfare
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
US	United States
VAT	Value-added Tax

## Preface

Across the UK, smaller independent family farms face a serious crisis. Incomes have declined steadily, while farmers feel subject to increasing pressure from Government and Society. Many have already gone out of business and many more see their survival seriously threatened. Inevitably, morale is declining, and, sadly, some farmers have seen suicide as the only 'way out'.

Yet, these family farms have played a unique role in society, both by their contribution to agricultural production and by their profound influence on rural communities and the countryside. But should family farms be treated as a 'special case' or should they be regarded as 'just another business', subject to the same vicissitudes of demand and prices as any other business?

Concern for this crisis on the smaller independent family farm and a desire to address these questions from both economic *and* ethical viewpoints drew nearly 150 people to Reading for a two-day Symposium organised jointly by the Centre for Agricultural Strategy and the Small Farmers' Association (now the Family Farmers' Association). Participants included farmers, academics, advisors, agricultural consultants, government officials, members of various advocacy groups and rural clergy.

The symposium recognised that the crisis was not only an economic one, but had serious social and moral implications. It explored the past and present role of smaller family farms and the changes they have experienced and their effect on farmers' morale, and sought to identify what practical steps and policy changes are needed to address the situation and consider how these should be guided by both economic and ethical judgements.

The issues were examined by a combination of spoken presentations, small-group discussions and short written papers. Further, three politicians were invited to respond to a previously-prepared Symposium statement and to answer questions. These were the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, John Gummer, MP, and front-bench spokesmen, Elliot Morley MP for the Labour Party and Paul Tyler, CBE, MP for the Liberal Democrats.

The Symposium enabled many views to be expressed, grievances to be aired and hopes to be shared. While politics and economics, as ever, assumed a high profile, it was the inclusion of 'ethics' in the debate that provided the unique element. The Symposium drew attention to the need for a detailed and disciplined treatment of 'agricultural ethics' and 'ethical agriculture', for a more positive relationship between ethics and economics, and for policies to be formulated with greater regard to ethical concerns. In these respects, it is hoped that the event marked a beginning.

**Peter Carruthers**

**SYMPOSIUM  
PROCEEDINGS**