

Farming's value to society - values and ethics

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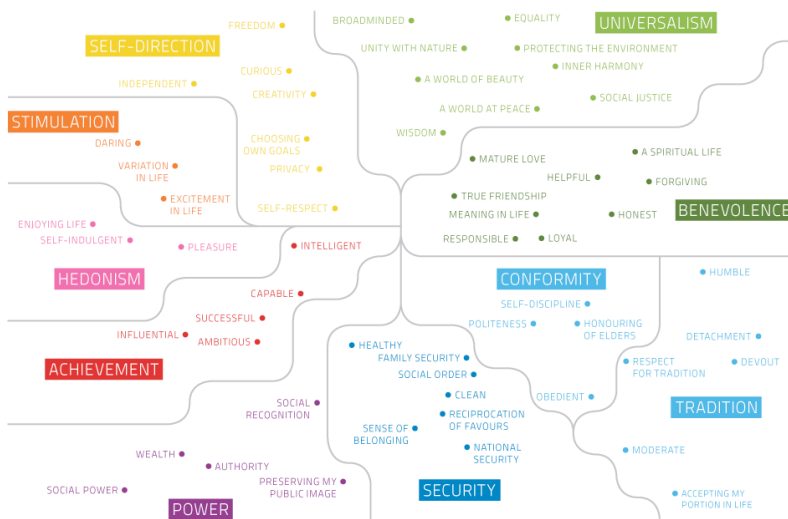
Farming is valuable to society not only for its economic and environmental value, but because it satisfies people's values. But measuring these is more difficult and they are, therefore, little understood or appreciated. Below is an attempt to remedy this.

Values are not the same as value. Value implies worth. Values are the principles that underpin people's attitudes, motivations, decisions and actions. They determine economic behaviour, but reach well beyond the merely economic. Four different approaches to values are described and applied to farming below.

Universal human values

Social psychologists have drawn on hundreds of cross-cultural studies over several decades to identify a number of consistently occurring human values. These can be mapped into groups, such that a person who prioritises one value is very likely to prioritise one close to it, but much less likely to prioritise one that is further away. Further, the groups could be classified according to whether the values within them are self-interested or altruistic and open or closed to change. The values and groups are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Recurring human values and value groups



Source: Reproduced from Holmes *et al*²

As a 'thought experiment' (there is no claim that this is a scientific analysis), Figure 2 shows how farming might satisfy these different values in wider society, suggesting that as well as providing products, security and leisure, farming has the potential to address values related to protecting nature, community and tradition – delivering these is variously dependent on environmental stewardship and high standards of animal welfare, public engagement and access, and maintenance of traditional practices. Not only are some values more satisfied by farming than others, because values are clustered (Figure 1), some people will attach more value to some aspects of farming than others.

Fundamental human needs

Economist Manfred Max Neef saw values in terms of needs. Beyond the need for subsistence, human beings have a relatively small number of fundamental needs that make for a 'good life'. He identified nine basic values that, he argued, are widely accepted to be fundamental to our understanding of what it means to be human, and four ways or contexts within which these can be satisfied. He called the result the

Human-Scale Development Matrix (H-SDM).³

Figure 2

Descriptions of value groups and farming's potential contribution to satisfying values

Value	Description of value	How farming might satisfy the value in wider society
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and nature	Protecting the environment; unity with nature; a world of beauty; <i>community cohesion</i>
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact	
Tradition	Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self	Respect for tradition; <i>preservation of symbolic landscapes, cultural heritage and distinctive customs; sense of place; community continuity; national identity</i>
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms	
Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, or relationships, and of self	Health; social order; sense of belonging; clean <i>air and water</i> ; national security; <i>food security; energy security</i>
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources	<i>Food and energy security (in face of global threats)</i>
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards	
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself	<i>Products and services to consume; food, local food, gourmet food</i>
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty and challenge in life	<i>Green exercise, outdoor recreation, extreme sport</i>
Self-direction	Independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring	

Green shading indicates a general effect of farming. Items in regular type in the right-hand column are extracted from Figure 14; italics are additions.

Again, as a 'thought experiment', Figure 3 presents a version of the matrix annotated to show how farming might satisfy the 36 needs in wider society. It highlights farming's main role as meeting subsistence and protection needs (i.e through food production and food security). Beyond that, farming may satisfy needs related to relationships among people and with nature, education, leisure and identity – but, again, this depends to a great extent on access to farms and farmland, farming engaging with the public, stewardship of the natural environment, and the maintenance of traditional forms of farming and of farming's role in the wider community.

Figure 3

The Human Human-Scale Development Matrix (H-SDM)

	Existence needs (contexts)			
Value needs	Being (qualities)	Having (things)	Doing (actions)	Interacting (settings)
Subsistence	1/ Physical health, mental health , sense of humour, adaptability	2/ Food , shelter, work, <i>fibre, fuel, energy, water</i>	3/ Feed, procreate, rest, work, take exercise	4/ Living environments, social settings
Protection	5/ Care, adaptability, autonomy, solidarity	6/ Insurance systems, savings, social security, health systems, work rights, family, <i>food security, climate change amelioration, water & air quality</i>	7/ Co-operate, prevent, plan, take care of, cure, help	8/ Living space, dwelling, social environment
Affection	9/ Self-esteem, respect, tolerance, passion, determination.	10/ Friendships, family, partnerships, relations with nature	11/ Caress, express emotions, take care of, cultivate, appreciate	12/ Private spaces, intimacy, home, spaces of togetherness
Understanding	13/ Critical conscience, receptiveness, curiosity, discipline, intuition, rationality	14/ Literature, teachers, method, education policies, communication policies, environmental education	15/ Investigate, study , experiment, educate , analyse, meditate	16/ Settings of formative interaction, schools, universities, groups, gardens, natural habitats, open farms
Participation	17/ Adaptation, receptiveness, solidarity, willingness, determination, respect, etc	18/ Rights, responsibilities, duties, privileges, work	19/ Affiliate, co-operate , propose, share, dissent, obey, interact, express opinions	20/ Parties, churches, communities , neighbourhoods, parks, greenspaces, natural habitats

Leisure	21/ Curiosity, receptiveness, imagination, recklessness, tranquility	22/ Games, spectacles, clubs, Holidays	23/ Daydream, remember, relax, connect, have fun, play	24/ Privacy, time, intimate spaces, surroundings, landscapes
Creativity	25/ Passion, determination, imagination, boldness, rationality, inventiveness, curiosity	26/ Abilities, skills, method, Work	27/ Work, invent, build, design, compose, interpret	28/ Productive and feedback settings, cultural groups, spaces for expression, temporal freedom.
Identity	29/ Self-esteem, sense of belonging, consistency, differentiation, assertiveness	30/ Symbols, language, religion, habits, customs, reference groups, values, norms, historical memory, work, regional foods & food customs, cultural landscapes & farming practices, local livestock breeds	31/ Commit oneself, integrate, confront, decide, recognise oneself, grow	32/ Social rhythms, natural rhythms , everyday settings, maturation stages
Freedom	33/ Autonomy, self-esteem, determination, passion, assertiveness, boldness, rebelliousness, tolerance	34/ Equal rights	35/ Dissent, chose, run risks, develop awareness, commit oneself, disobey	36/ Temporal and spatial plasticity—offering multiple opportunities and meanings

A general effect of farming is shown by green shading; effects on the categories in the original table are in bold; added items specific to farming are in bold italics.

Source: Adapted from Church *et al*⁴

Relationships

Good relationships make a good society. Therefore, things that are characterised by, or promote, good relationships are valuable to society. The Relationships Foundation⁵ in Cambridge has developed ‘relational analysis’ as a tool for informing public policy. Using the Centre’s approach, Figure 4 presents a tentative relational analysis of farming. The final column combines ways in which farming might promote wider social relationships and things that make for good relationships between farming and society. Again, these emphasise that delivering these values depends on farming engaging effectively with the public. Good farming-society relationships also enhance the value of other farming benefits (i.e we generally value qualities in our friends more than the same qualities in strangers or enemies!).

Figure 4

Relational domains, promoters, outcomes and relevance to farming

Relational domain	Promoters of good relationships/ relational proximity	Outcomes of good relationships/ relational proximity	Farming relevance
Communication	Directness, reducing the extent to which presence is mediated or filtered	Connectedness and clarity, making for completeness of communication	Local food, direct sales, farm visits, open farms, and access, improve communication
Time	Continuity, managing the gaps between interactions	Meaning and belonging, resulting in momentum and growth	Farming can promote community continuity, and hence local and regional belonging and sense of place
Information	Multiplexity, improving the breadth and quality of information	Being known and mutual understanding, enabling situations to be read and needs addressed	Food labelling, bespoke marketing, own branding, explaining land-use changes, and new enterprises strengthen mutual understanding
Power	Parity, the fair use of power	Mutual respect, promoting participation and investment	Farming eschews ‘us and them’ confrontation with public and espouses constructive engagement promotes mutual respect
Purpose	Commonality, building a shared purpose	Unity, resulting in motivation and synergy	Shared goals and agenda, like food security and environmental stewardship, promote synergy and unity

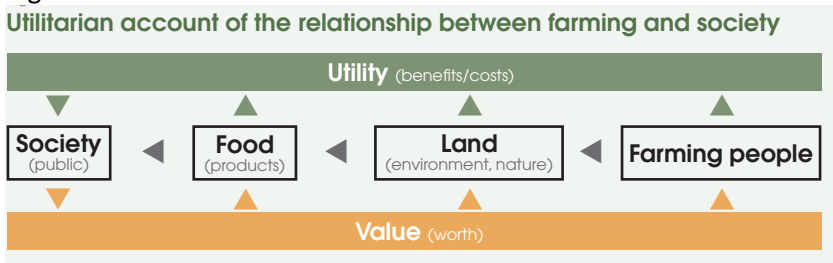
Ethics

‘Ethics’ refers both to principles of right and wrong and to the study of these principles. Most of the discussion so far has been constructed around the idea that the value of farming depends on the extent to which it delivers what society wants. Even meeting needs or satisfying values can be thought of this way. This reflects a ‘utilitarian’ ethic - ‘the greatest happiness for the greatest number’ – and is illustrated in

Figure 5. Utilitarianism is the standard moral argument used by governments in the Western world; it undergirds economics and is the basis of most of the ways we have assessed value here.

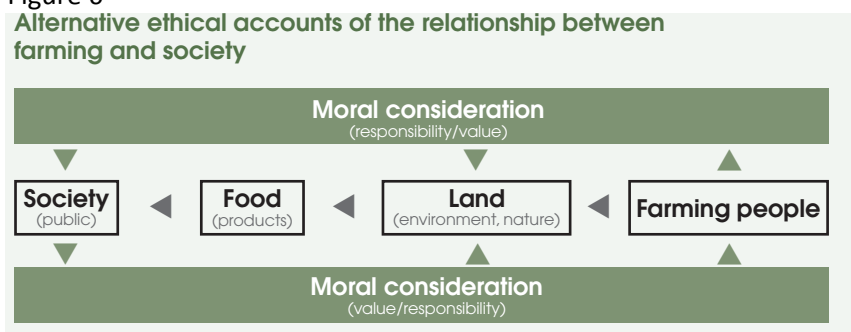
The problem with utilitarianism is that it frames people as essentially self-centred ('utility maximising' in economics language), and reduces the human experience to a game of pleasure and pain. Simply adding up all the pleasure and pain (i.e. benefits and costs) fails fully to protect the moral welfare of particular individuals, minority groups and non-human and non-sentient life. Utilitarian economics cannot fully describe or determine the human condition. Human beings are not just economic beings (i.e. consumers), but also social (e.g. citizens), ecological, moral and spiritual beings.

Figure 5



There are alternatives to utilitarianism, based, for example, on the value of things 'in themselves' (intrinsic value), rights and duties, ideas about what makes a good person, a good life and a good society, and responsibility to God. Most of us instinctively use many of these in everyday life. These approaches put farming, society and land/nature/environment in a shared 'moral space', characterised by consideration and responsibility, stewardship and service (Figure 6). The value of farming depends not on 'delivery', but, for example, on the intrinsic value of nature and of every individual person, the significance of people in places and communities, what best serves the common good, and the duties and rights of farming and society within the 'social contract'.⁶

Figure 6



Several of these themes reflect the Christian roots of the values of UK society. The simple imperative to 'love God and neighbour' will be familiar. Biblical principles for land and farming may be less well known. In the biblical economy, land is neither just individual private property nor just a common possession, but an inheritance and a gift, ultimately from God, to be received with gratitude, farmed in accordance with principles of sharing, caring and restraint (which are especially focused in Sabbath and Jubilee), and passed on in 'good heart'. For farmers, these principles find expression, for example, in the familiar virtues of husbandry and stewardship. For wider society, they mean that farmers are both worthy of honour and accountable - as keepers of the land and its produce, which are given to all.⁷

More specifically, these alternative ways of thinking have implications for the way we value public goods. Public goods are not only non-market goods; they are often also objects of ethical concern (ie issues of right and wrong) and aspects of the common good (because they enrich society, aside from any benefit to individuals).⁸ Public goods are a matter of public debate and should be valued using methods that treat people as citizens rather than consumers. For public goods, the 'forum' is preferable to the 'market place'.

However, although there has been some progress in applying participatory and deliberative⁹ methods, nearly all the public goods valuation evidence associated with farming, land and environment is from economic valuation studies. This means, for example, that the data on environmental impacts reported in Section 6.4 need to be treated with caution.

Using participation or deliberation to determine value is an example of 'ethical procedure', which, in simple terms, proposes that a decision is 'right' if it is made in the 'right' way. The right way means using agreed principles, which may include participation, consent, fairness, impartiality, consent, and free choice. Ethical procedure usually involves creating an interactive dialogue among all interests, working back and forth until a just equilibrium is reached. Ethical procedure offers a way of advancing in the face of differing beliefs and values and of resolving complex issues.

Conclusions

Key findings

Farming is valuable because it satisfies or could satisfy values. Although some of these relate to basic needs of subsistence, provision, protection and security, farming can also satisfy values related to relationships among people and with nature, tradition, identity, education and leisure. These reflect many of the social and cultural benefits of farming identified earlier. Satisfying them depends on public access to farms and farmland, strong connections between farming and wider society, and stewardship of the natural and cultural environment.

Consideration of ethics broadens our horizons and urges us to transcend the language of delivery, costs and benefits and place farming and society in a relationship of mutual consideration and responsibility, stewardship and service. Ethical perspectives provide an important critique of how we value farming's public goods, how we make decisions in contexts of differing beliefs and values, and how farming engages with the public.

Opportunities

Values and ethics. There is potential for farming and policy to engage more specifically with values and embed ethics more explicitly in farming practice and policy. Explicit values and ethics frameworks, as exemplified here, could be used to inform the development of policies to secure social goods within a reformed CAP, enabling policy more closely to represent the needs and values of the society it serves. The recent crises of trust in banking, the media and public life drive home the urgency of addressing and embedding ethics in business practice and public policy. Farming and agricultural policy could lead the way in this.

Notes

¹ Originally published in Carruthers, S P, Winter, D M & Evans, N J (2013) Farming's value to society. Oxford Farming Conference. The full report is available at <http://www.ofc.org.uk/files/ofc/papers/ofcreportfullow.pdf>.

² Holmes, T, Blackmore, E, Hawkins, R & Wakeford, T (2012). The common cause handbook. Machynlleth, Wales: Public Interest Research Centre.

³ Church, A, Burgess, J, Ravenscroft, N, Bird, W, Blackstock, K, Brady, E, Crang, M, Fish, R, Gruffudd, P, Mourato, S, Pretty, J, Tolia-Kelly, D, Turner, K & Winter, M (2011). Cultural services. In: UK National Ecosystem Assessment, *The UK national ecosystem assessment: technical report*. Cambridge: UNEP-WCMC, <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=QLgsfedO70I%3d&tabid=82>, accessed September 2012. P 667.

⁴ See Note 2.

⁵ <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/Web/>. Shepanski, P; Schluter, M; Ashcroft, J; Hurditch, B; Trend, M & Lynas, P (2009). *The Triple Test. Integrating economic, environmental and social policy*. Cambridge: Relationships Foundation. Schluter, M & Ashcroft, J. 2009. *Influencing, developing and assessing relationships*. Cabinet Office Strategy Unit Seminar, 3 March 2009, http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/136494/relationships_handout.pdf, accessed April 2009. Schluter, M & Lee, D (1993) *The R factor*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

⁶ The ‘social contract’ is an implied agreement among members of society to accept a limited set of rules to enable social cooperation. Based on self-interest (ie ‘a good society is good for me’) or duty (to serve the ‘common good’), the social contract provides a rationale for individuals to act morally and for governments to create and maintain a just and ordered society. Drawing on the work of US agricultural ethicist, Paul Thompson, the table below shows different ways in which the social contract is specified and how they can be applied to farming and the land.

Theory	Libertarianism	Egalitarianism	Utilitarianism	Agrarianism
Deep value	Liberty (non-interference)	Fairness (equal opportunity)	Greatest good (efficiency)	Reciprocity (ecological integrity)
Principles	Property rights	Redistribution	Regulated market	Stewardship
Attitude to land/ farming	Ownership & control	Means of subsistence	Asset value	Intrinsic value & virtue
Proponents	Locke Robert Nozick	Rousseau John Rawls	Bentham/Mill Garrett Hardin	Thomas Jefferson Wendell Berry

Source: Adapted from Carruthers, S P; Thompson, N; Carroll, T; Webster, D; Harper, A & Soane, I (2009). *Developing the English uplands*. A report to the Commission for Rural Communities Inquiry into the Future for England’s Upland Communities. Cheltenham: Commission for Rural Communities

⁷ Carruthers, S. P (2009). The land debate – ‘doing the right thing’: ethical approaches to land-use decision making. In: Winter, M & Loble, M (Eds). *What is land for? The food, fuel and climate change debate*. London, Earthscan. Carruthers, S P (2002), *Farming in crisis and the voice of silence*. *Ethics in science and environmental politics*, 2002, 59-64.

⁸ Jacobs, M (1997) *Environmental valuation, deliberative democracy and public decision-making institutions*. In: Foster, J (Ed) *Valuing Nature*. London: Routledge.

⁹ Deliberation allows citizens to develop shared values through reasoned dialogue, in contrast to economic valuation methods, which aggregate consumers’ individual preferences to arrive at an ‘optimal’ outcome.