

## **Analysis of the UK Government Policies which have precipitated the #SavetheOakTree Campaign.**

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EU farming policy, especially in the UK, supports large, industrial, energy-intensive agriculture that employs very few people.

The quality of our food is declining. The mineral content of vegetables has dropped dramatically in recent decades, and residues of pesticides in food present serious concerns for human health.

UK soils are so impoverished that Sheffield University scientists predict they will support fewer than 100 more harvests. We could store vast quantities of carbon, from the atmosphere, in our soils as organic matter which would make a real impact on climate change.

Farmland wildlife is has reduced dramatically, and the spread of animal factories to produce cheap meat is both hidden, and very alarming.

Many young people want to get into farming, but local farmland costs an extortionate £10,000 per acre. UK landowners receive “farming benefits” in the form of EU subsidies, in some cases millions of pounds. The dynasties who own half of Britain’s rural land have paid no inheritance tax on it for decades: it become a tax haven, which further pushes prices up.

Few farmers want to cause problems. Chat with them, the vast majority are good people. But the system makes them compromise to stay solvent.

Here at The Oak Tree Low Carbon Farm our priorities are to care for people, the planet and our animals. We are a not-for-profit social enterprise. Our members and their children muck in to help produce their own food alongside farm staff. Members enjoy with countless health, educational and community benefits.

Despite these benefits, and our management team’s years of business experience, we are threatened with closure. Why?

We are just under five hectares in size. This triggers very stringent planning rules. Red tape means we have no shelter for our farm members, we can’t transform our produce into higher value products, and we have no office space. Everything is harder because we don’t have the building we need. An “overage agreement”, which is standard practise on land sold close to the town, further restricts building.

Endless petty rules hamper our work, from excessive paperwork blocking feeding safe waste human food to animals, to not being able to sell our meat chickens without very expensive (and unnecessary) of infrastructure. Even if we had the money, the planning system would block us!

We receive no EU farming subsidies as we are “too small”. Lowering the five hectare subsidy threshold (or buying a small extras strip of land) isn’t the answer: we need a complete overhaul of food policy in the UK.

The UK needs many different farms, both big and small. But here at The Oak Tree we believe we have something important to offer, and should not be excluded.

Guardian journalist George Monbiot tells of a farmer who spends some of his EU subsidy on a weekend grouse shooting in Scotland. Farming subsidies cost each UK household, on average, £245/year. In this time of austerity, are you happy with how yours is being spent?

Help Save the Oak Tree Farm at <http://igg.me/at/savetheoaktree>

**END (word count 500)**

**Some sources to justify the claims made in the above text.**

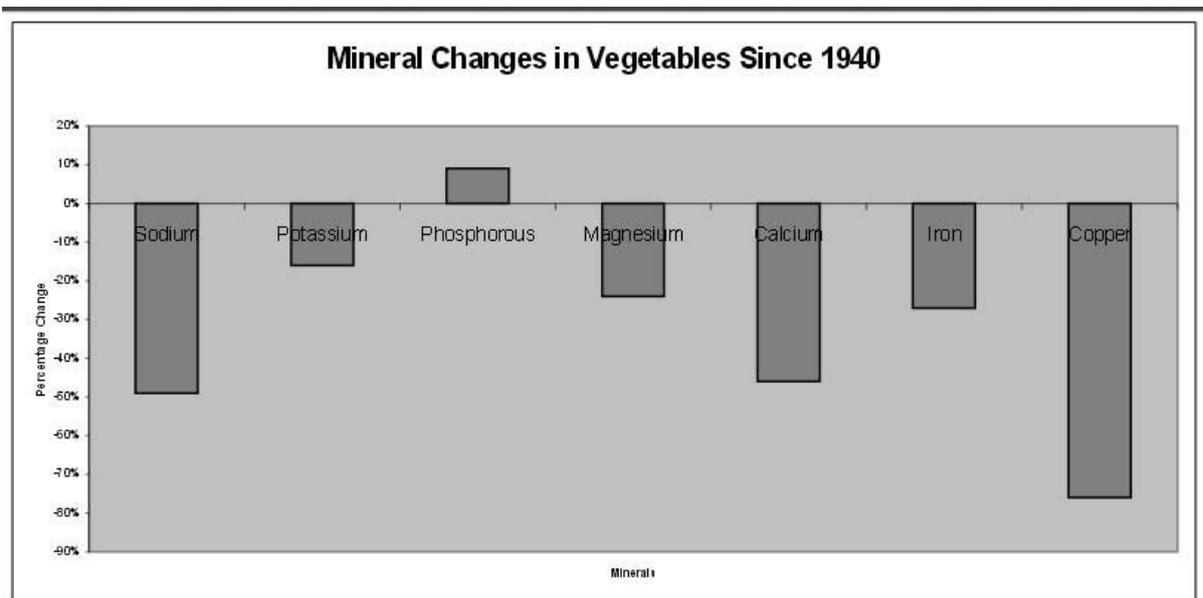
**100 harvests left in our soils:**

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/britain-facing-agricultural-crisis-as-scientists-warn-there-are-only-100-harvests-left-in-our-farm-soil-9806353.html>

**Reduction in mineral content of vegetables**

[http://www.mineralresourcesint.co.uk/pdf/mineral\\_deplet.pdf](http://www.mineralresourcesint.co.uk/pdf/mineral_deplet.pdf)

which includes this graph:



**George Monbiot on many of these issues**

You can hear him speak in the video at the bottom of this blog post:

<http://www.the-oak-tree.co.uk/blog/2015/01/oxford-real-farming-conference-2015/>

It is long so I recommend listening to

Minutes: 03.00 – 04.30 - benefits for rich farmers

Minutes: 07.35 – 08.01 – “get big or get out” – consolidation of land ownership.

Minutes: 08.11 – 09.22 – impossibility for new entrants to get into farming.

### **Inheritance tax exemption on agricultural land**

Matter of fact version: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/99ae5756-1d89-11df-a893-00144feab49a.html#ixzz3Kexs2dL2>

George Monbiot ranting version: <http://www.monbiot.com/2014/12/02/breaking-the-silence/>