



# RURAL FLOOD RESILIENCE PARTNERSHIP

Work Plan 2024-2026



# Foreword

Climate change means that people, places and nature will be faced with more frequent and severe storms and floods. In recent years farmers and rural communities have been on the frontline of increasingly frequent weather extremes and the devastating impacts flooding can have.

Flooding can present specific challenges for those living and working within rural communities. For rural areas where there are few facilities, the loss of services and shops can have a disproportionately large economic impact. Damage to bridges, power, roads, and other infrastructure may cut off more remote and distributed communities from essential services and utilities after flood events. This can slow their recovery, impacting the wider community beyond those whose homes or business have flooded.

Farming businesses face unique vulnerabilities. Floodwater can cut off access to livestock, leaving animals vulnerable and without food; it can damage or destroy crops and prevent access to fields for drilling, cultivation, or harvesting; and it can result in soil compaction, degradation and salinisation in coastal areas. These impacts all carry economic consequences and often result in a substantial clean-up operation for farmers, who may need to repair or replace farm and business infrastructure in addition to dealing with any flood damage to their own homes.

In the face of these challenges, we know that healthy, functioning catchments hold more water, filter pollutants, and provide vital homes for wildlife and offer health and wellbeing benefits for people that live or visit there. Sustainable land management reduces the incidence of detrimental flooding both on farm and within the local community.

As partners, the impact of flooding on rural communities is something we all want to reduce, and individually, our organisations have supported, and will continue to support rural flood resilience. But no single organisation can tackle these challenges in isolation. The Rural Flood Resilience Partnership is being established to strengthen collaboration and help better understand the specific vulnerabilities of rural areas. The Partnership work plan will enable rural communities to strengthen the resilience of their homes and businesses by providing evidenced solutions to the challenges they face in the event of flooding. It will enable these communities to influence decision making, provide access to resources, and support action on the ground, strengthening rural resilience to flooding in a changing climate.

The Environment Agency (EA), National Farmers Union (NFU), Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA), the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) and Natural England (NE) are pleased to be working together to deliver our first work plan.



# The strategic case

In 2020, the Environment Agency published The National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy for England. This strategy, developed in collaboration with a wide range of partner organisations, sets out a long-term vision for “a nation ready for, and resilient to, flooding and coastal change - today, tomorrow and to the year 2100”.

The FCERM Strategy Roadmap to 2026 describes how the Strategy, its objectives and measures will be translated into practical action.

The first ambition of the FCERM Strategy is to create climate resilient places where:

- People and places will be more resilient to flood and coastal change in a changing climate
- Farming and land management practices will better support rural resilience to floods and droughts
- Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) will work with farmers and land managers to help them adapt their businesses and practices to be resilient to flooding and coastal change.

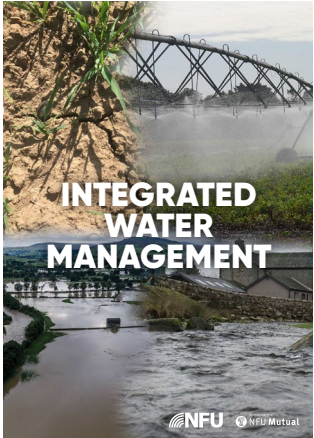
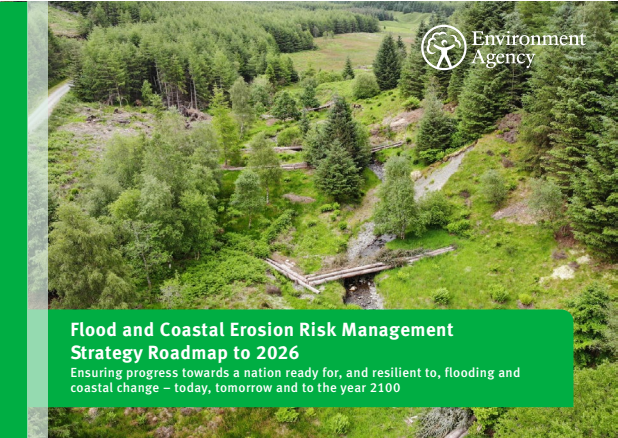
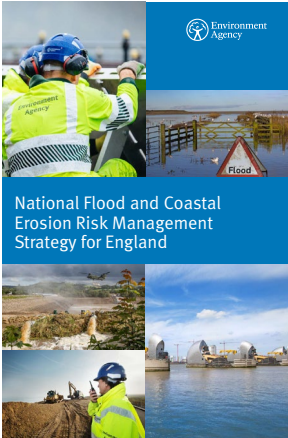
The FCERM Strategy Roadmap to 2026 describes how the Strategy, its objectives and measures will be translated into practical action. It includes the commitment that:

*The National Farmers Union will work with the Environment Agency to establish a rural resilience partnership focused on helping farmers and land managers adapt to a changing climate. The Partnership will look at how farming practices can enhance flood resilience in rural areas alongside sustainable food production.*

In January 2021, the National Farmers Union also published an Integrated Water Management Strategy, designed to help farmers and land managers adapt to future flood and drought risk and raise the resilience of farm businesses, while ensuring sustainable food production.

The Rural Flood Resilience Partnership work plan has been developed to support delivery of the FCERM Strategy Roadmap and National Farmers Union Integrated Water Management Strategy, specifically targeting the needs and vulnerabilities of rural communities when faced with flooding.

The work plan also supports the ambitions in the Government’s Plan for Water (published in April 2023), which sets out action to transform our management of the water system, deliver cleaner water for nature and people, and secure a plentiful water supply.



# A partnership approach

## The Rural Flood Resilience Partnership comprises 6 core member organisations:

- Action with Communities in Rural England
- Association of Drainage Authorities
- Country Land and Business Association
- Environment Agency
- National Farmers Union
- Natural England

We recognise there are a number of other key stakeholders with valuable expertise working on rural resilience issues across the country. As the partnership develops we will look to engage and collaborate with others in pursuit of our broad objectives. The founder members may by unanimous agreement bring further organisations into membership of the Partnership.

Since first coming together in November 2022 we have worked collaboratively to establish a joint understanding of the issues facing rural communities, the actions we can take through the work of our organisations and where these actions can be combined or amplified to maximise the resilience of rural communities and businesses to flooding.

This initial work plan is the product of those discussions and sets out the work we intend to do between now and 2026. As a Partnership we have committed to reviewing and reporting on our commitments on an annual basis.

# The outcomes we are seeking

The Partnership has identified **7 strategic outcomes** to inform our first work plan. The activities set out in the work plan will help farmers, landowners and the rural communities they are part of to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change whilst supporting and retaining the vital role of managing land and producing sustainable food.

A better understanding of the specific challenges associated with both rural flooding and coastal change, and what resilience looks like.



**Evidence to drive the right activity**

Clear approaches to identifying, valuing and measuring rural flood risk impacts for farm businesses and rural communities.

Farm businesses are able to increase their resilience to current flood risks and adapt their practices to prepare for the long-term challenges of climate change.



**Access to quality support**

Increased resilience to flooding and coastal change for rural communities through effective long term rural land use and management.

Rural communities understand local flood and coastal change risks and have the resources to help mitigate them.



**Engaging rural communities in flood resilience**

Rural communities are heard and involved when planning, developing and delivering resilience to flooding and coastal change.

Increased awareness of the funding available and suitable for the needs of rural communities addressing rural flood resilience and coastal change.

# Evidence to drive the right activity

*Robust evidence helps us make the right decisions. The Partnership will combine scientific data with the experience of farmers, landowners, and rural communities to inform the work we do. The Partnership will then use this combined evidence to support and encourage others to play an active role in enhancing flood resilience in rural areas alongside sustainable food production.*

## Strategic outcomes:

- A wider understanding of the specific challenges associated with both rural flooding and coastal change, and what resilience looks like.
- Clear approaches to identifying, valuing and measuring rural flood risk impacts for farm businesses and rural communities.

We want to see	What we will do	When from	Who will lead the work
A growing evidence base on the impacts of flooding to rural areas and the practices that increase resilience.	Work with universities, research councils and other partners to produce world leading research through the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Research and Development Programme. (R)  This will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific consideration of rural impacts in new research</li> <li>• Inclusion of rural expertise in research advisory groups</li> <li>• Review and identification of any gaps in existing research and evidence</li> </ul>	2024	EA
Greater awareness amongst people working in FCERM that the impacts of flooding on rural areas are different to those felt in towns and cities.	Share the findings of the research, evidence and project review with rural communities and businesses and seek their views on what the evidence says and how that applies to their experiences.	2025	All Partners
	Survey farmer and landowner views on their experiences of rural flooding and their approaches to flood resilience.	2024	NFU
	Using existing evidence and feedback from farmers and landowners, identify the specific flood data needs for rural communities and businesses.	2025	EA
	Seek feedback from rural sector organisations using the Environment Agency Flood Warning and Flood Guidance products to better understand and document their needs for any future sector specific services.	2024	EA
	Commission research into the multifunctional benefits of lowland water level management for habitats, soils, peat, flood risk and water resources.	2025	ADA
Greater awareness of the practices that increase the resilience of rural communities and businesses to flooding.	Identify and promote the practices adopted by farmers and growers here and in other countries to improve their own resilience to flooding and the benefits to the wider catchment.	2025	NFU

(R): this is part of an existing action in the FCERM Strategy Roadmap to 2026

# Engaging rural communities in flood resilience

*We want to understand what is important to farmers and rural communities. We want them to be involved in planning, developing and delivering rural flood resilience.*

## Strategic outcomes:

- Rural communities understand local flood and coastal change risks and have the resources to help mitigate them.
- Rural communities are heard and involved when planning, developing and delivering resilience to flooding and coastal change.

We want to see	What we will do	When from	Who will lead the work
This Partnership focusing on the most practical actions to improve rural flood resilience.	Establish a partnership subgroup at which policy matters e.g. maintenance spending, the valuing of agricultural land and flood storage payments can be discussed and potential solutions recommended to Government departments including Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.	2024	ADA, NFU, CLA, ACRE
The rural voice routinely presented in discussion and decision making on flood resilience.	Put forward and encourage the inclusion of speakers with a rural flood resilience focus at important events for farming, rural communities, and people working in FCERM.	2024	All Partners
Easier access to support, resources and evidence for people representing rural flood resilience matters at local and national levels.	Promote the inclusion of rural portfolio on bodies overseeing FCERM funding and delivery such as Regional Flood and Coastal Committees and provide support to the individuals fulfilling those roles. Provide guidance, training and support to farmers and rural communities becoming representatives on internal drainage boards and Regional Flood and Coastal Committees.	2024	NFU and ADA
	The Partnership will host a shared digital space for rural communities and businesses and those working with them to access information relevant to rural flood resilience.	2024	All Partners
A forum for people working to promote flood resilience in rural communities to learn from others and share best practice.	Form a national 'community of practice' for Action with Communities in Rural England staff working with rural communities on flood resilience so that best practice and successes can be shared and promoted.	2024	ACRE
A wider involvement of farmers and rural communities in planning for, responding to and recovering from flood incidents.	Explore how rural sector partners can help rural communities work better with Local Resilience Forums in planning for, responding to and recovering from flood incidents.	2025	EA, NFU and ACRE

# Access to quality support

*The Partnership wants to make it easier for rural communities and businesses to access the information and support they need to bolster their resilience.*

## Strategic outcomes:

- Farm businesses can increase their resilience to current flood risks and adapt their practices to prepare for the long-term challenges of climate change.
- Increased resilience to flooding and coastal change for rural communities through effective long term rural land-use and management.
- Increased awareness of the funding available and suitable for the needs of rural communities addressing rural flood resilience and coastal change.

We want to see	What we will do	When from	Who will lead the work
When rural communities and businesses are impacted by flooding they know what support they can access and how.	Identify and raise awareness amongst rural communities and those working with them of the mechanisms, tools, flexible permissions and recovery funds that rural communities and businesses may look to following flooding.	2024	EA and other regulatory organisations
	Develop a standard approach for accurately describing the breadth of impacts from flooding in rural areas, including economic, environmental, social and wellbeing impacts, as well as impacts on food production.	2024	All Partners
Rural communities and businesses know what information is available to them to help them understand their flood risk.  Rural communities and businesses have access to practical information that will help them reduce their risk without exporting that risk to others.	Develop practical advice for farm businesses seeking to reduce their risk from flooding, limit the impacts during flooding and recover faster following flooding.	2024	NFU
	Develop a programme of communications and engagement to signpost advice and support on the benefits of Property Flood Resilience to communities at highest risk. (R)  This will include the creation of guidance and advice for farm businesses on how to increase their flood resilience by implementing Property Flood Resilience measures.	2025	EA
	Strengthen the awareness among landowners, farmers, communities and businesses of the roles and responsibilities of riparian owners and explore ways that maintenance of rural FCERM assets including watercourses can be better co-ordinated between riparian owners and Risk Management Authorities such as the Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Boards.	2024	All Partners
More rural businesses know how they can be funded or incentivised to deliver activities that reduce their risk of flooding and the risk of flooding to others.	Identify and promote amongst farm businesses and rural communities the funding and incentives available to support sustainable farming, and land and business management practices that increase flood resilience.	2024	NFU, CLA, ACRE and NE
Planning for future flood resilience being routinely considered by rural communities and those working with them.	Work with the National Association of Local Councils to provide Parish and Town Councils with information on how to consider flood resilience when working with local communities, including writing Neighbourhood Development Plans.	2025	ACRE
	Strengthen awareness of rural flood resilience matters across risk management authorities to support those managing flood risk to better understand how they can support rural communities and businesses to be more resilient to flooding.	2024	ADA and EA

(R): this is part of an existing action in the FCERM Strategy Roadmap to 2026



# Useful links and contacts



Environment Agency (EA)

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)



National Farmers Union (NFU)

[www.nfuonline.com/](http://www.nfuonline.com/)



Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)

[acre.org.uk/](http://acre.org.uk/)



Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA)

[www.ada.org.uk/](http://www.ada.org.uk/)



Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

[www.cla.org.uk/](http://www.cla.org.uk/)



Natural England (NE)

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/  
natural-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england)

Work Plan 2024–2026 accessible link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-flood-resilience-partnership-2024-to-2026-work-plan>