More in Common

Knight Frank

CLA

Beautiful, but overlooked?

What Britons think of the countryside and the rural economy

Foreword



James Farrell
Head of Rural Consultancy,
Knight Frank

Britain's countryside holds a special place in our national identity. Its landscapes are admired, its wildlife cherished and its farming traditions valued. That affection is an asset, but for those whose livelihoods depend on the rural economy, it raises an important question: how well does that appreciation translate into understanding of the businesses that sustain it?

Knight Frank and the CLA commissioned this research to explore that question. By examining how Britons regard the countryside and the rural economy, we wanted to test our own assumptions against perspectives from outside the sector.

The findings offer considerable encouragement, revealing public support for the people and businesses that sustain these communities and landscapes. They also invite us to consider how well the countryside is understood as a place of work and enterprise, and whether we have done enough to explain its contribution to the wider economy.

Through our work with farming families and rural businesses, we see how much the countryside's future depends on their ability to earn a living and invest with confidence. A fuller understanding of that relationship matters because public perceptions help shape support for the decisions that allow these businesses, and the communities around them, to thrive.

The CLA's Rural Powerhouse campaign makes the case for enabling the rural economy to fulfil its potential. That ambition serves a shared national interest: the fortunes of town and country are closely connected, and the benefits of rural prosperity reach well beyond the countryside itself.

The goodwill revealed in this research gives us a strong foundation on which to build. Our task now is to turn that affection into lasting support for a countryside where businesses can succeed and communities can flourish. Recognising the rural economy's contribution to Britain's future is essential to securing its place in the country's ambitions.

Foreword



Gavin Lane
President, CLA

Those of us who live and work in the countryside know it can be an isolating existence. For all its beauty, working the land and running businesses in small rural communities can make it feel as if the rest of the world is a million miles away.

Trying to grow a business can feel like treading water in any setting, but the specific challenges facing rural entrepreneurs rarely make the headlines, and rarely sit at the top of the government's agenda.

So it will please many of us to learn that the British public holds its farmers, business-owners and rural communities in such high esteem. It is a reminder that, however remote we may sometimes feel, the nation values what we do.

The CLA exists to champion rural land and business, and we know the countryside holds enormous economic potential. If government recognised and removed the barriers to growing a rural business, we could boost the economy, create good jobs and strengthen our rural way of life.

But we cannot expect government to act if the wider public does not see that potential too. The countryside must not become a museum: a pleasant place to visit, quaint for a day out and a glimpse of how people used to live, but not somewhere that contributes meaningfully to the nation's economic success.

This report should spur us on to hold a meaningful conversation about the role the countryside plays today, the greater role it could play, and the policies needed to unlock its enormous potential.

Introducing the Seven Segments

The British Seven segments were developed to move beyond traditional left-right or party-based analysis by exploring the deeper psychological, cultural, and value-driven foundations that shape public opinion.
This approach helps explain why political loyalties have fractured and offers a more nuanced understanding of what drives attitudes on issues like immigration, climate, and the economy—enabling more effective engagement with the public across a fragmented political and social landscape.



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Progressive Activists



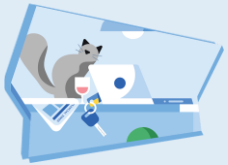
...an outspoken group that is politically engaged and globally minded, championing social justice but feeling alienated from mainstream politics

Incrementalist Left



...a group that leans left and trusts institutions, often stepping back from the news and avoiding politically fraught debates

Established Liberals



... a prosperous group that is confident in institutions, values expertise, and believes the system broadly works

Sceptical Scrollers



...a disengaged group that has lost trust in mainstream institutions and increasingly looks online for sources of truth

Rooted Patriots



...a patriotic group that feels overlooked by elites and wants leaders with common sense to protect local identity

Traditional Conservatives



... a nostalgic group that respects tradition, authority and personal responsibility, while remaining sceptical of rapid change

Dissenting Disruptors



... a frustrated group that craves radical change and backs strong leaders who promise to shake up a broken system

Britons' starting points on the countryside

‘Beautiful’ is the word Britons most associate with the countryside

In a word or two, how would you describe the UK today?



In a word or two, what comes to mind when you think of the British countryside?



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Fieldwork dates: 31 October - 1 November 2026

The public’s view of the countryside is overwhelmingly positive, with ‘beautiful’ being by far the word that comes to mind most often when thinking of it. This is in stark contrast to how people think of the UK as a whole, which is almost entirely negative.

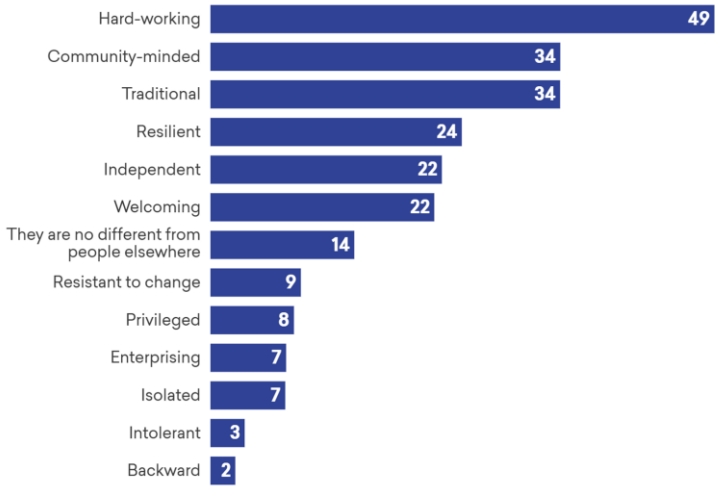
And most Britons, wherever they are based, use positive adjectives to describe rural dwellers

The public generally views those living in the countryside very positively, with just under half describing them as ‘hard-working’ with other popular choices being ‘community-minded’, ‘traditional’ and ‘resilient’. Very few would describe them as either intolerant (3 per cent) or backward (2 per cent).

There is some variation based on where people live, but it remains positive in outlook. Urban Britons are marginally more likely to think rural Britons are welcoming (26 per cent) and enterprising (11 per cent). They are also slightly less likely to think rural Britons are no different from everyone else (8 per cent). Generally though both those in cities and those across the UK view rural folk rather positively.

Perceptions of those in the countryside are very positive

Which three of the following, if any, best fit your impression of people who live in the countryside?



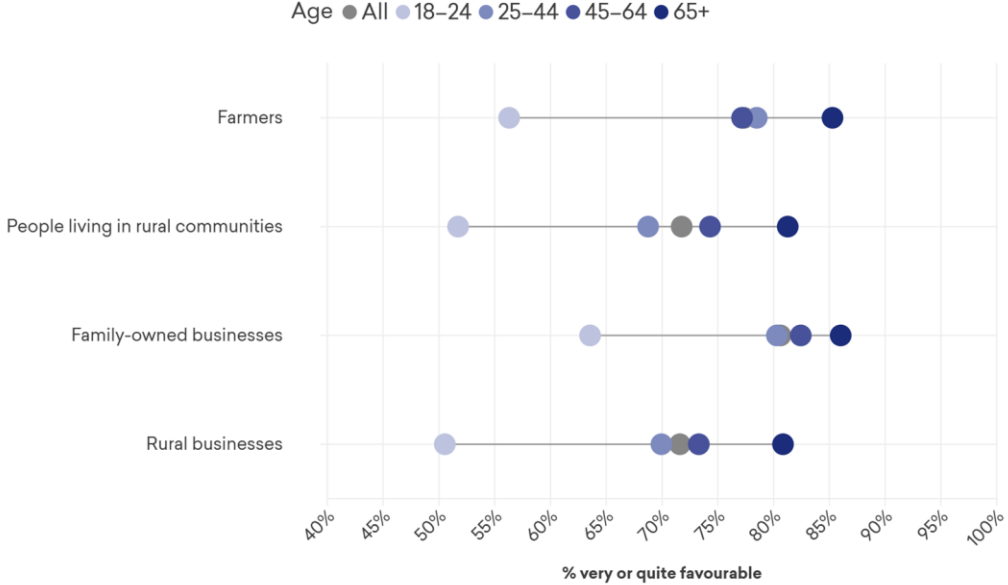
Most Britons think positively of farmers, though the youngest are outliers

Similarly, views of farmers, rural communities, and both family-owned and rural businesses are very positive. Nearly 40 per cent have a very favourable view of farmers and family-owned businesses, with roughly 80 per cent viewing them at least somewhat favourably.

However there is some variation by age, with those between the ages of 18 and 24 being less likely to view all of the listed groups favourably. Despite this large gap though, young Britons still hold a largely favourable view of all of the groups, with unfavourable rating sitting between 9 and 12 per cent.

Younger Britons have a less favourable view of rural people and businesses

How favourable or unfavourable is your view of each of the following?



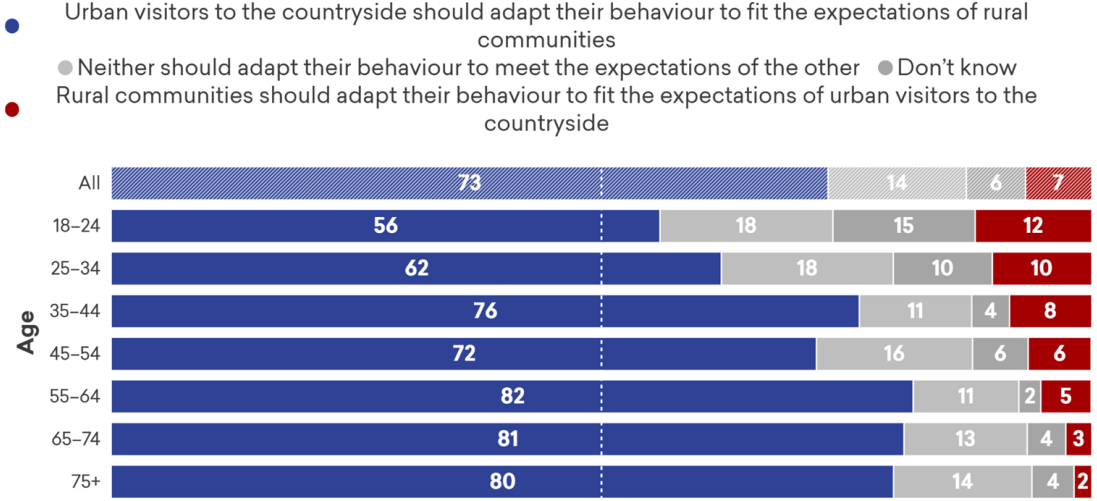
Across divides, there is consensus that urban visitors should adapt to rural communities rather than vice versa

The public overwhelmingly feels that urban visitors to the countryside should adapt their behaviour to meet the expectations of those living there. In line with the public's views on rural communities, there is much respect for the people who make their livings and go about life in the countryside.

There is variation by age, but even a majority of the youngest Britons agree that urban Britons should adapt to rural expectations. Younger groups are more likely to feel neither should adapt, but this is a point where the public finds a great deal of consensus.

Britons are largely agreed that urban visitors should adapt to rural expectations

Thinking about when people visit the countryside, which comes closest to your view?

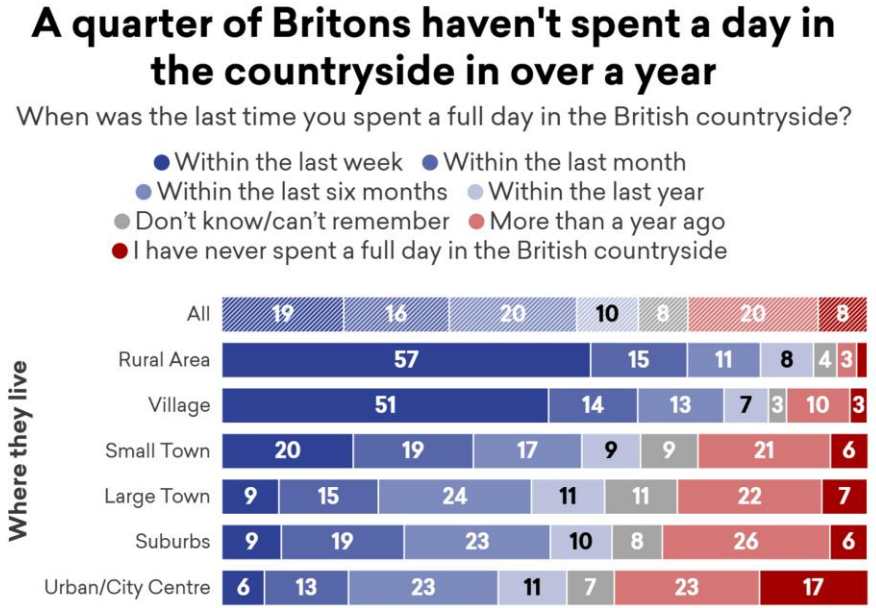


Experiences and understanding of the countryside

Two in five urban dwellers have not visited the countryside this year

17 per cent of those living in cities and urban areas say that they have never spend a full day in the countryside in their entire lives. Beyond this, those living in urban or suburban areas are much less likely to spend time in the countryside than rural Britons, with the difference being quite stark.

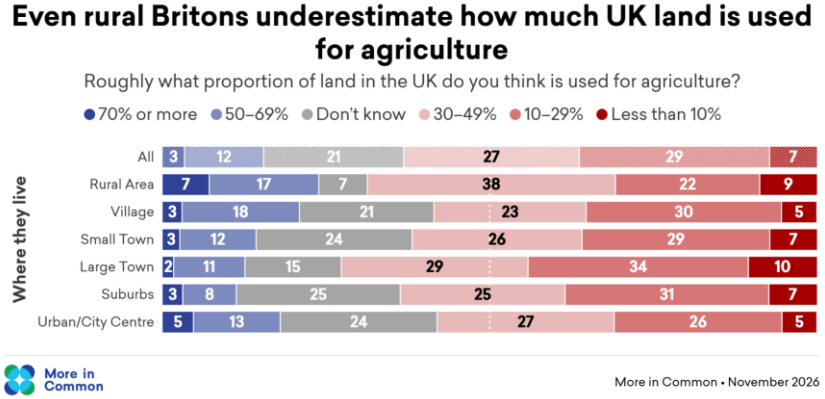
This goes to show that while people view the countryside positively, regardless of where they live, the reality is many in cities have little to no experience of the countryside.

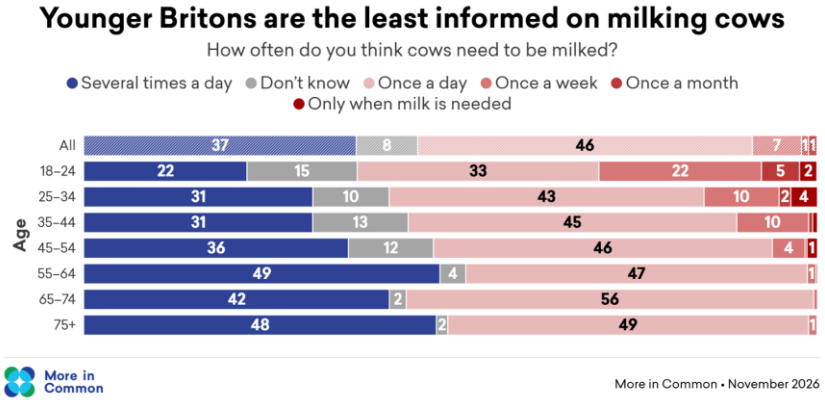


Knowledge of how the countryside works is patchy

Most of the public, even those who live in rural areas, significantly underestimate the amount of land in the UK that is used for agriculture. In fact a plurality of Britons feel the answer is between 10-29 per cent, less than half of the reality.

On other metrics of rural life, the public has a reasonable grasp on things. 9 in ten Britons know potatoes grow underground, although only 37 per cent are aware that cows need to be milked several times a day, with this falling to 22 per cent for under 25s. However, the severe underestimation of how much land is used for agriculture, suggests a lack of understanding of the rural economy.



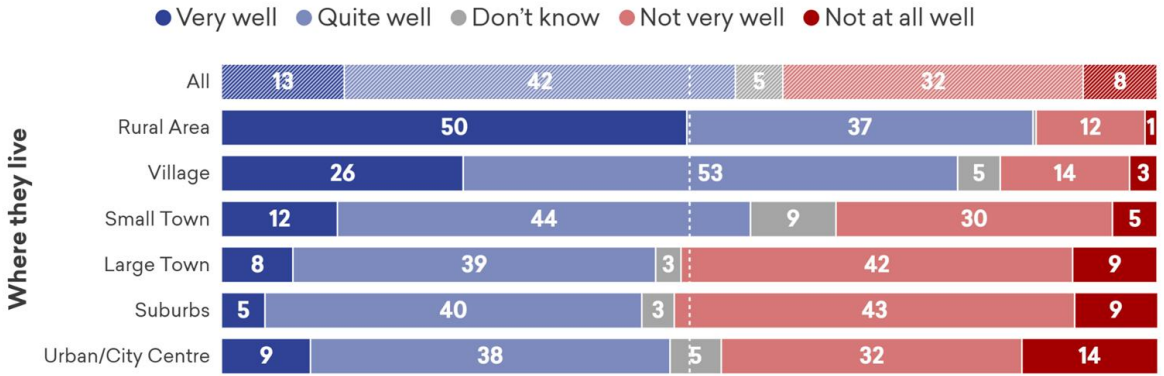


Almost half of those outside rural areas say they don't understand the countryside

It is predictable that those in rural areas would be more likely to feel they understand the day-to-day realities of rural life, and this is very much shown in the data. However, Britons in cities are split down the middle, with even halves feeling they do and do not understand rural life.

Nearly half in urban areas do feel they understand rural life

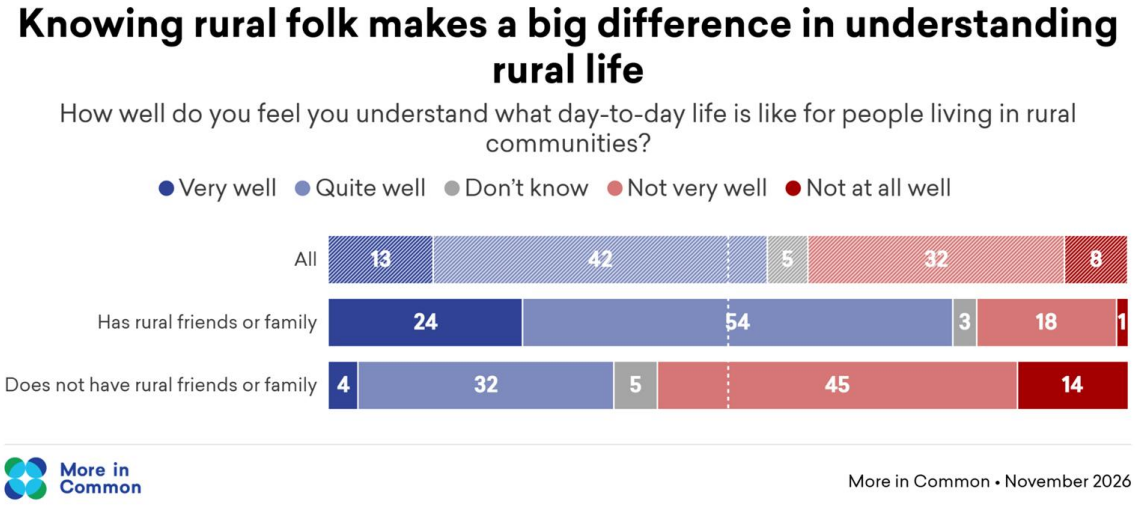
How well do you feel you understand what day-to-day life is like for people living in rural communities?



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Knowing rural people helps Britons understand rural life

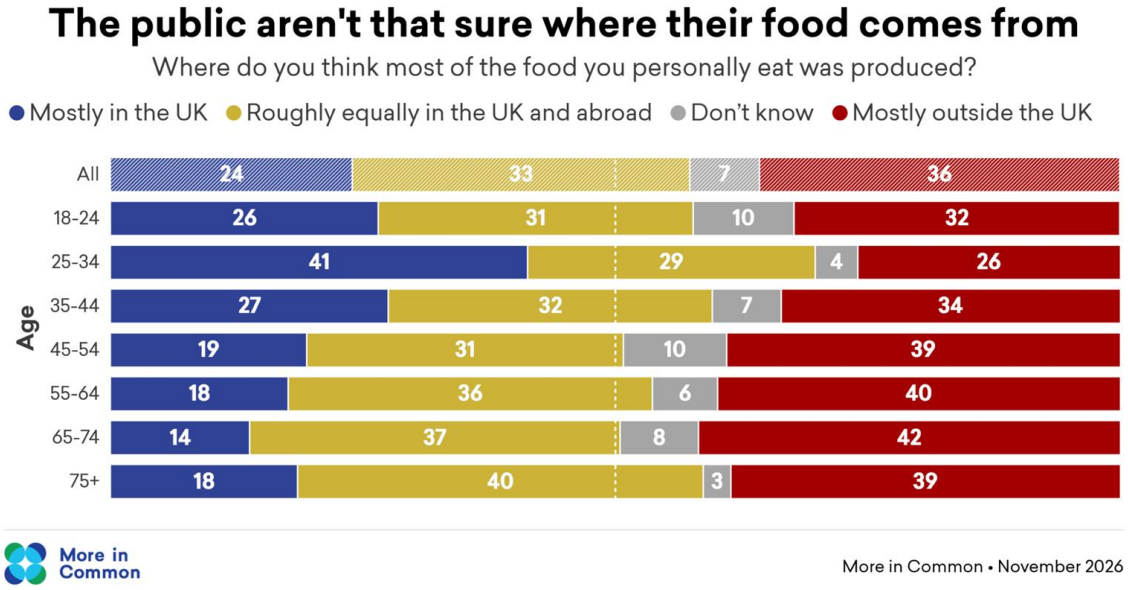
In fact, having close friends or family from rural areas seems to be a stronger indicator of understanding. Those without rural friends or family are the most likely to feel they don't understand rural life, whereas the those who do have rural friends and family overwhelmingly feel they do understand it.



Most Britons don’t know that most of their food is produced in the UK

Only one in four Britons think that most of the UK’s food is produced in the UK; in fact, 60 per cent is produced domestically. Two in three either think that the food is equally locally produced, and imported, or mostly imported. Young people’s knowledge is slightly better here than older Britons.

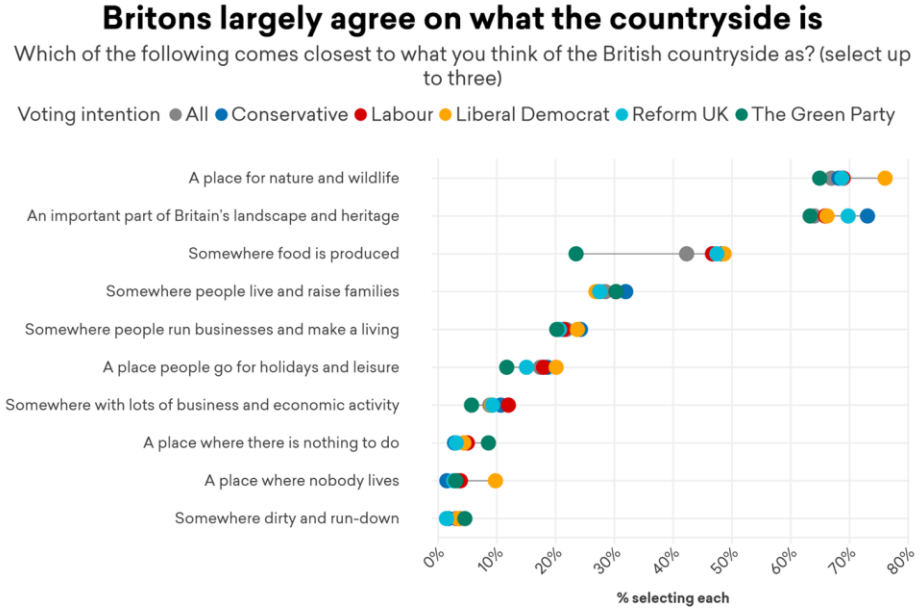
This speaks to the earlier point, where despite the public’s affection for the countryside, they don’t understand the scale of the rural economy. More than that, most Britons are unaware that most of their food is produced in the UK, despite wanting food to be produced in the UK.



Britons are divided on many issues, but agree on seeing the countryside as a place of nature not business

Two thirds of Britons think of the countryside as a place for nature and wildlife, with just under two thirds seeing it as part of Britain's landscape and heritage.

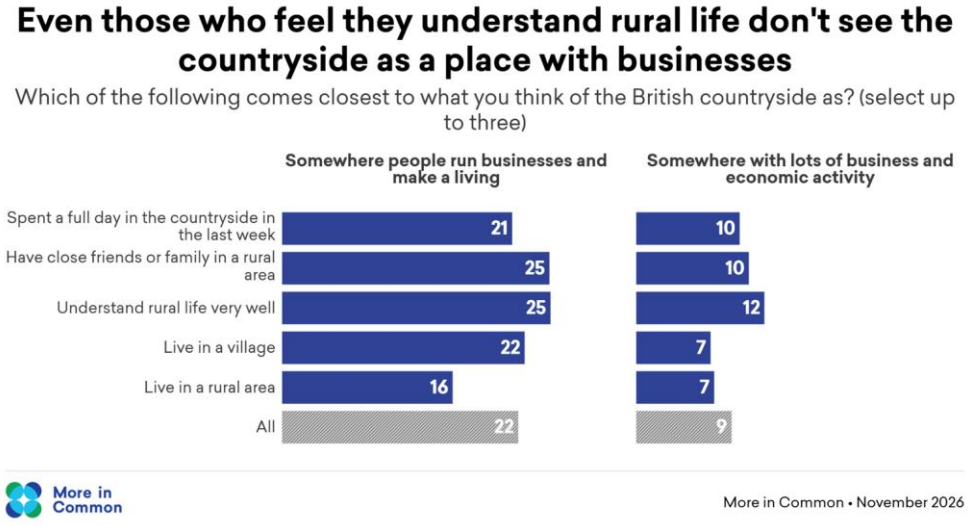
This perception holds true for Britons regardless of the party they support, which is interesting in of itself. There are variations, such as Green voters being less likely to see the countryside as a producer of food, which may be the result of their much younger voter base. However in a time where the public is very divided on a range of issues, they are quite united on perceptions of the countryside.



Regardless of first-hand experience, only one in ten see the countryside as a place with lots of business

Only 9 per cent seeing it as a place with lots of business and economic activity. Britons are more likely to see it as somewhere that people run businesses and make a living (22 per cent), but it's just not seen as a major economic area by most.

Even those living in rural areas, those who feel they understand the countryside and those with connections to it, have this same perception. It is not just a disconnect between rural and urban areas, as much as it's a disconnect between the public and the reality of the rural economy.



The rural economy

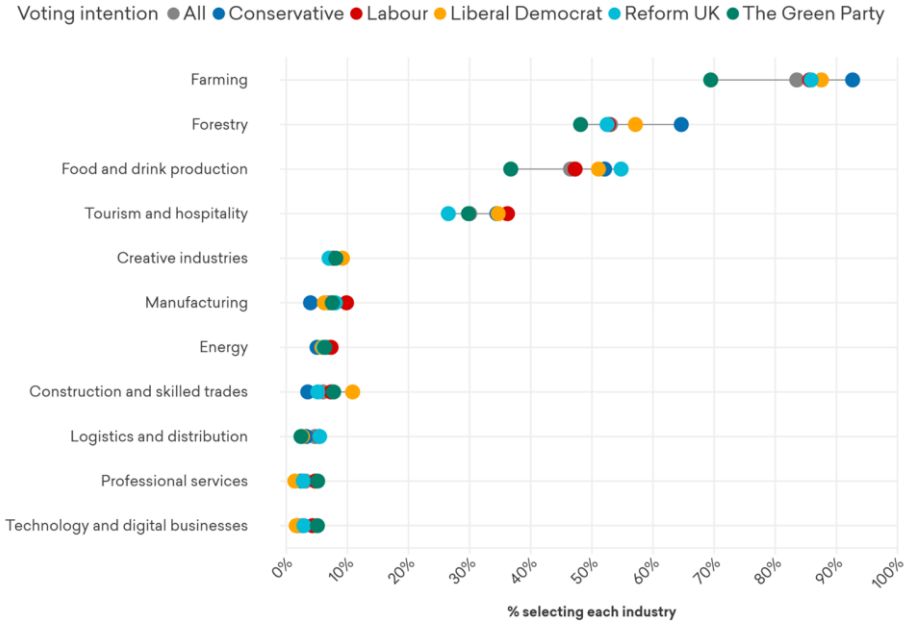
The rural economy is seen almost entirely as farming

When it comes to industries the public associates with the rural economy, farming (84 per cent) wins by a country mile. Forestry (53 per cent) is the second most chosen option, with more than half of the public associating it with the rural economy, with food and drink production (47 per cent) in third place.

This is visible across supporters of different parties, with there being much more consensus than disagreement. Green voters again stand out, being less likely to associate the rural economy with industries like farming, forestry and food production, again in line with the relative youth of that group. But in an increasingly divided Britain we see more evidence that that public is not divided on how it sees the countryside.

Different party supporters tend to see the rural economy the same way

Which of the following industries do you associate with the rural economy? Select up to three.



Britons value the economic benefits of the countryside in terms of farms and food production

The public see the value in protecting the wildlife and nature in the countryside, as well as farms, rivers and woodland. But when it comes to what people think needs to be protected, local businesses and jobs are quite low on that list (16 per cent). When looked at by age we see older Britons are more concerned about farms, whereas younger Britons care more about air quality.

Pubs land at the bottom of the list, alongside churches, shops and local institutions (9 per cent). The concern is almost entirely concentrated on the natural environment of the countryside, with little regard for the rural economy, and struggling businesses.

Older Britons are more likely to think farms need to be protected

What do you think is most worth protecting about the British countryside? Select up to three.



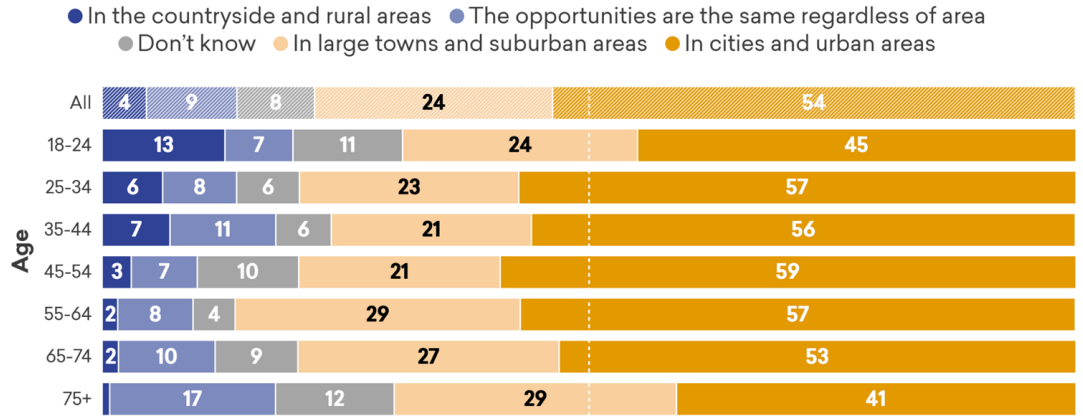
Most think urban areas have the best employment prospects for young people, though younger groups are more positive

There is little optimism about career opportunities for young people in rural areas, with the vast majority of people feeling that the best opportunities lie in either urban areas, or large towns and suburban areas.

Interestingly the most optimistic group about career opportunities in rural areas, are those between the ages of 18 to 24. Nonetheless, Britons of all ages see greater opportunities in urban areas than rural areas. So even if the public don't understand the rural economy, they can perceive the lack of economic opportunities in rural areas.

Young people are the most positive about rural job prospects

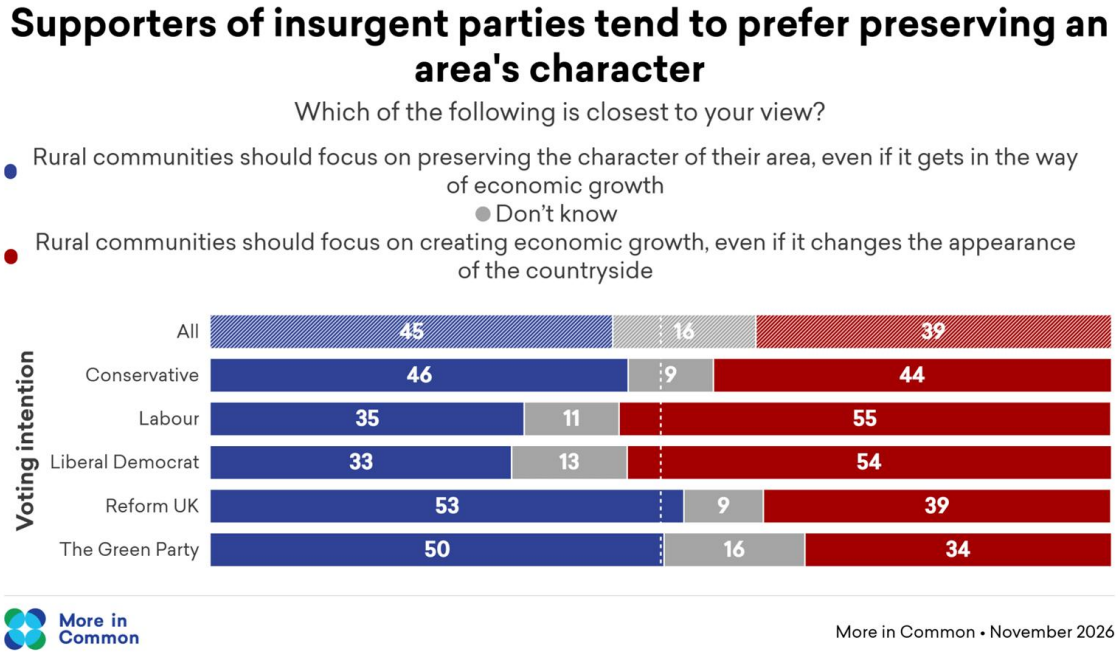
Thinking about a young person starting their career, where do you think they would find the most employment opportunities?



Britons are split on economic growth in the countryside if it changes its character

45 per cent of Britons would choose to preserve the character of a rural area at the cost of growth, while 39 per cent would choose the opposite.

Supporters of different parties differ on how they see this though. Supporters of insurgent parties like Reform UK and the Green Party lean towards preservation of character, while Labour and Liberal Democrats lean towards economic growth. The Conservative supporters on the other hand are split on the issue, with not obvious leaning.



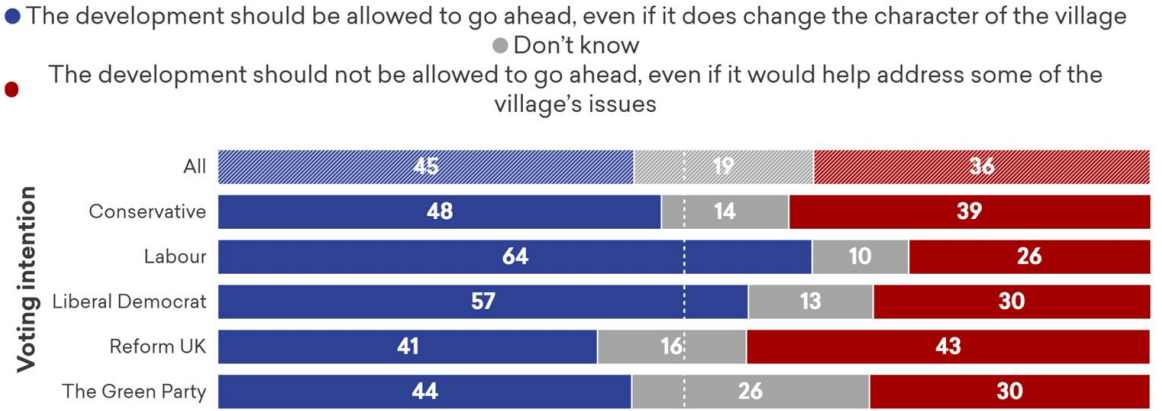
But Britons do tend to prioritise growth and development if local businesses are threatened

When real stakes are put before the public though, they are shown to be moveable. When a hypothetical scenario of a village losing their businesses and school is put forward, the public goes from slight opposition to development, to qualified support for it.

This type of scenario drives weakens opposition greatly from Green and Reform voters, while Labour and Liberal Democrats become even more in favour. Conservatives again though are mostly divided on the issue..

Practical arguments weaken resistance to development

A rural village is at risk of losing local businesses and its school because too few people live there year-round. A new proposal aims to build homes on nearby fields, including affordable housing for locals. However, some are concerned that the new development would change the character of the village, and ruin some of the views. Which comes closest to your view?



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Talking about the countryside

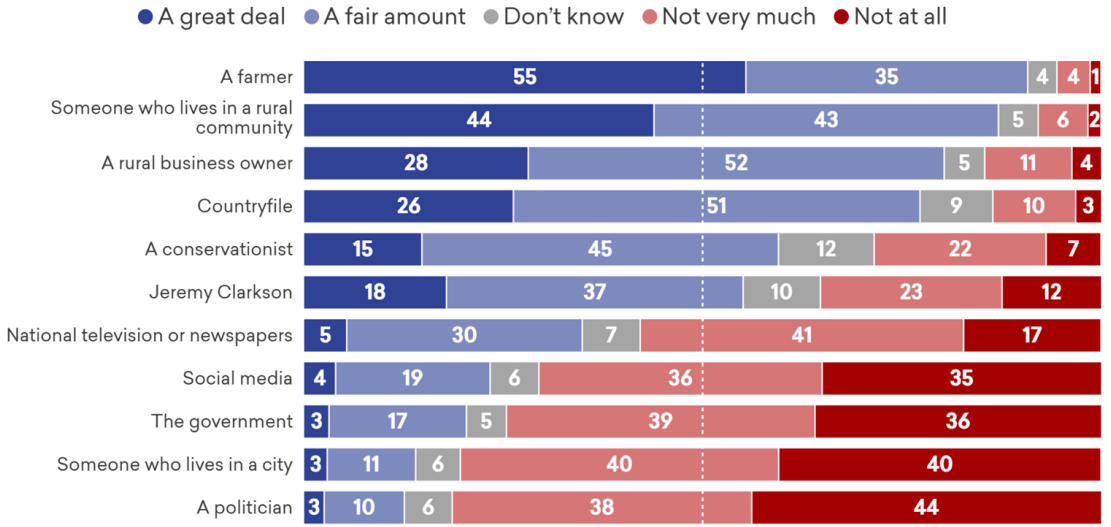
Farmers are the most trusted voice on rural life, politicians the least

Farmers, alongside people who live in rural areas, are trusted the most to explain the realities of country life. Other trusted sources include rural business owners, conservationists, Countryfile and Jeremy Clarkson.

The least trusted figures are politicians, city dwellers, the government as well as both print and social media. Much of this speak to Briton's distrust of institutions and the media, however even putting that aside, the trust the public has in farmers is overwhelmingly strong.

9 in 10 would trust a farmer on what life in the British countryside is actually like

How much would you trust each of the following to explain what life in the British countryside is actually like?



Younger Britons are more trusting of social media, while older Britons favour Countryfile and Clarkson

There is real variation between generations when it comes to trust in the countryside though, with Gen Z in particular being notably less trusting of farmers, rural communities and especially Countryfile. Baby boomers conversely are much more trusting of all of these.

Gen Z and Millennials are much more trusting of social media though than older generations, as well as being slightly more trusting of the government, politicians and those who live in cities.

Not all generations trust the same figures equally

How much would you trust each of the following to explain what life in the British countryside is actually like?

Net trust (% trust a great deal or a fair amount minus % not very much or not at all)

	All Britons	Gen Z (28 and below)	Millennials (29–44)	Gen X (45–60)	Baby Boomers (61–79)
A farmer	+85	+66	+85	+86	+95
Someone who lives in a rural community	+79	+51	+77	+84	**+91**
A rural business owner	+66	+46	+65	**+71**	+74
Countryfile	+64	+31	+62	**+71**	**+74**
A conservationist	+31	+14	+21	+33	**+46**
Jeremy Clarkson	+20	+8	+17	**+28**	+23
National television or newspapers	-23	-31	-18	-27	-24
Social media	-47	**-16**	**-21**	-56	-80
The government	-54	-45	-42	-59	-67
Someone who lives in a city	-66	**-49**	**-52**	-70	-85
A politician	-69	-58	-55	-73	-86

Boxes mark the three messengers each generation trusts most relative to all Britons

Farms are seen as family businesses

Most Britons see the typical British farm as a family-run business, with nearly three quarters seeing them this way, whereas only 15 per cent see the typical farm as a large company-owned enterprise.

This may be indicative of the positive regard in which farms and farmers are held, as the animosity some hold towards large business, doesn't translate to what they see as a family-owned and operated business. Especially when farms are seen as the providers of everyone's food (35 per cent), or a part of the British landscape (20 per cent), or a family home (16 per cent). Whether they're understand is accurate, the public's view of farming is very positive.

Farms are overwhelmingly seen as family businesses

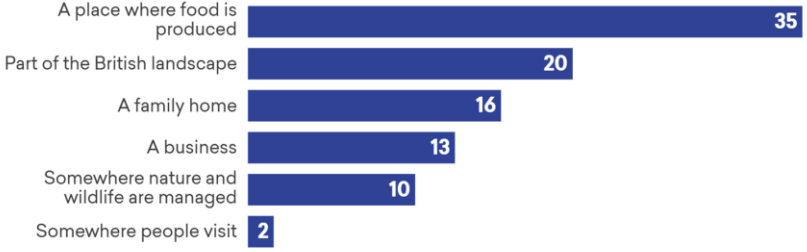
Which of the following do you think best describes the typical British farm?



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When you picture a typical British farm, which of these do you think of first?



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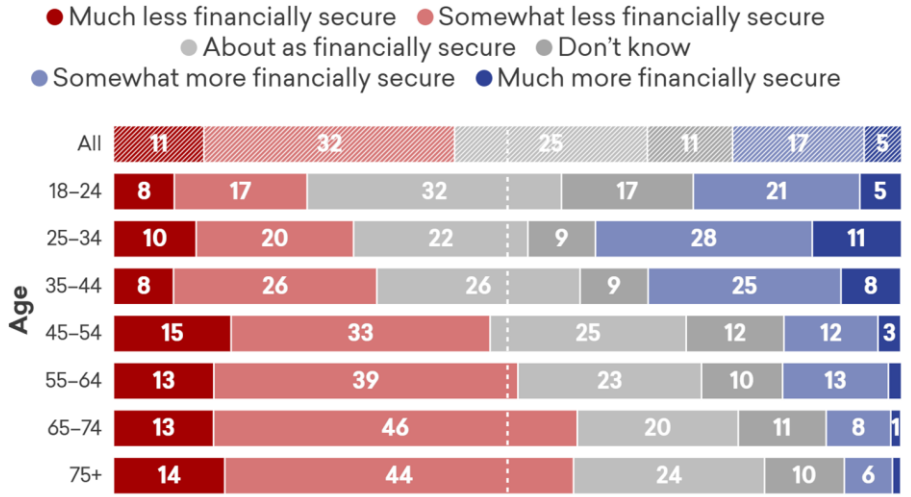
And Britons worry about farmers' livelihoods

Britons tend to think that a household running a typical family farm, is likely to be less financially stable than the average UK household.

This is varies most by age though. Younger Britons are also more likely to think farms are better-off than the average household, but older Britons are more likely to to think the opposite. So while Britain tends to think a typical farm isn't that financially secure, there is a divide on this issues between the young and old.

Older Britons tend to feel a typical farm is less secure than an average household

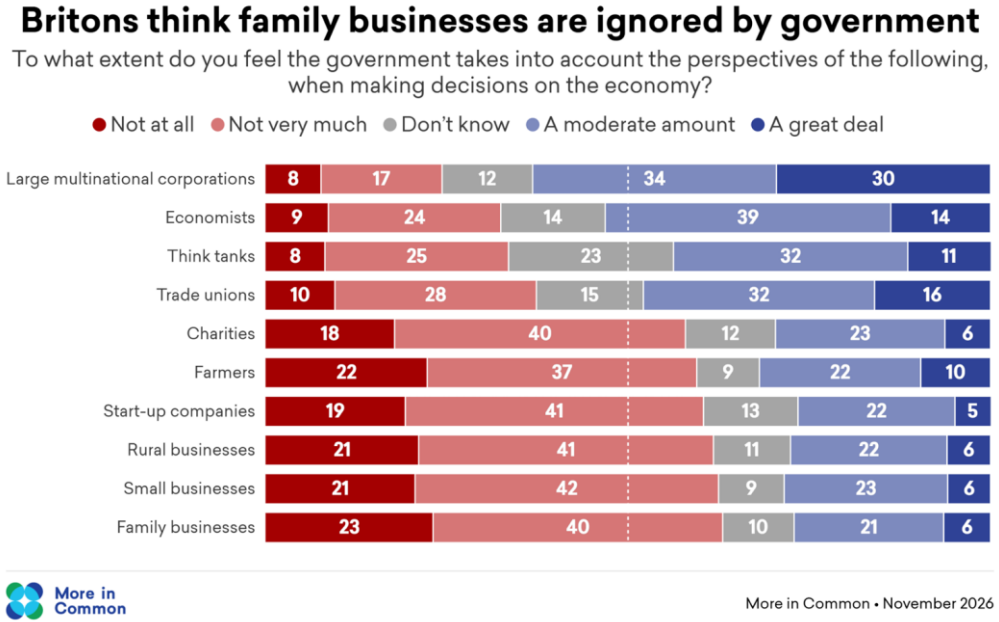
Compared with the average UK household, how financially secure do you imagine a household running a typical family farm to be?



Most think government listens to multinationals; few think it listens to rural businesses or farmers

Generally speaking, the public doesn't tend to think that the government listens to many organisations when making economic decisions. The few people do think are listened to are multinational corporations, economists, think tanks and trade unions.

The public thinks the government is the least likely to listen to family businesses, small businesses and rural businesses. In addition, the public also thinks government ignores start-ups, farmers and charities, painting a picture of a public who feel the government listens to those in power and those in politics, but not ordinary business people.



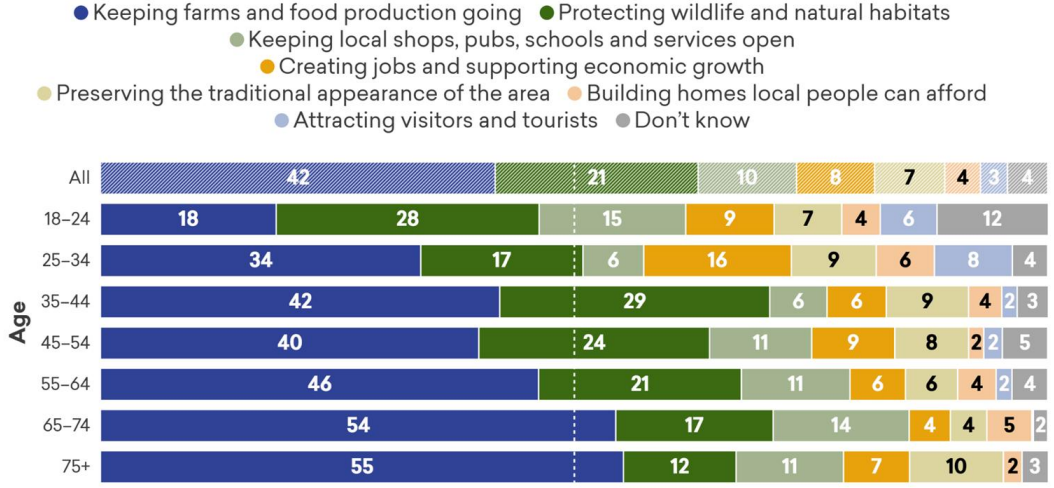
When forced to choose one priority, Britons tend to favour keeping farm and food production going

While the public struggles to see the countryside in terms of jobs and business, it understands farming and food production is an industry under strain and in need of support.

Overall, the public feels farming ought to be a priority for rural communities, with four in ten feeling this way. There is variation by age though, as the youngest Britons would prefer nature and wildlife be put before farming. The older the public gets though, the more it leans towards prioritising farming, with a majority of those over 65 choosing farming and food production as the priority for rural communities.

Young Britons choose nature, while older Britons choose farming and food production

Which of the following do you think rural communities should prioritise most?



Across age groups, most want Britain to focus on growing its own food even if that increases prices

The public overwhelmingly back a focus on British produced food, even if it costs more. The only group that seems to differ on this point is those between the ages of 18 and 24, however even this group shows majority support for British produced food.

The levels of support for local produce amongst older sections of the population are noteworthy, with nearly 100 per cent of those over 75 backing the idea. This is a topic where the public finds consensus, but among older generations, there is practically no disagreement at all.

Older Britons almost unanimously want locally produced food, younger Britons are less sure

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



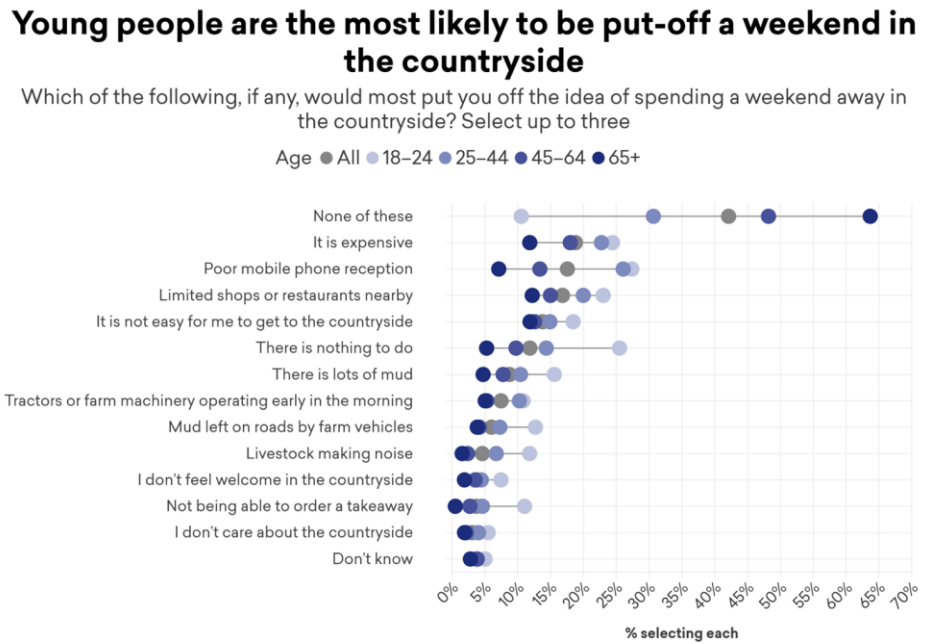
Cost and phone reception worries are the main barriers that stop Britons visiting the countryside

One of the most direct ways in which Britons can support the rural economy is by going out and visiting it. This is something that the public sees little issue with, as the most selected barrier to visiting the countryside was 'None of these' at 42 per cent, suggesting that for most there is little stopping them from going and spending their money in the community.

However, young people are more likely to be put-off by all of the suggested reasons, especially the perception that there is nothing to do. But for the rural economy, there are positive signs that there are no major barriers that are stopping most people from going out into the countryside.

Young people are the most likely to be put-off a weekend in the countryside

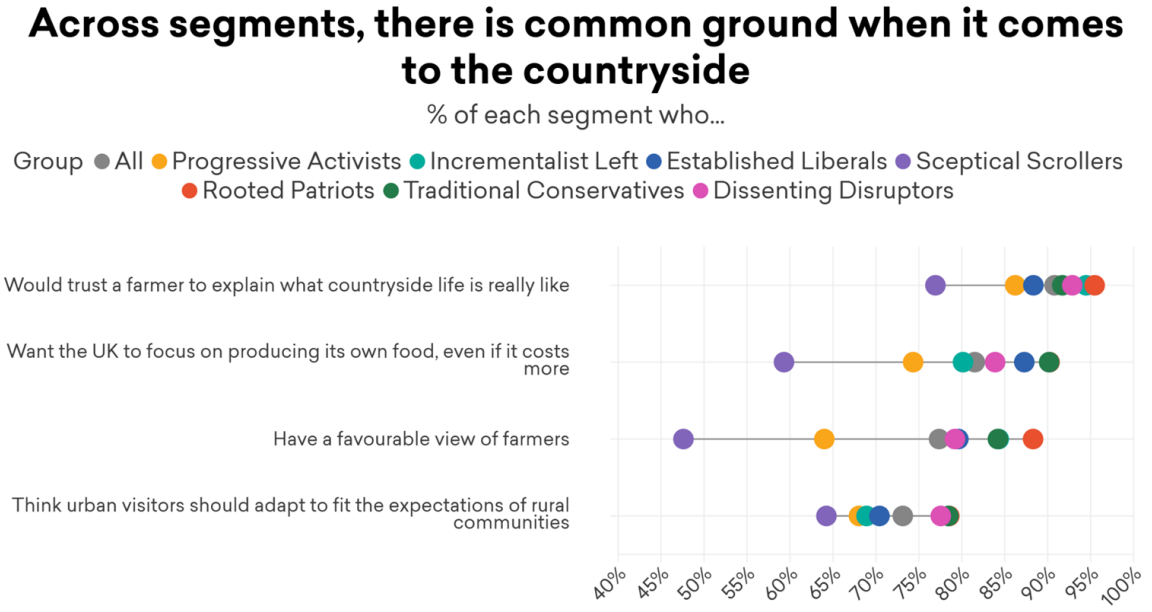
Which of the following, if any, would most put you off the idea of spending a weekend away in the countryside? Select up to three



But Britons of all worldviews see the countryside in a positive light

Across segments, the public holds a lot of goodwill towards the countryside. This is slightly lower among Sceptical Scrollers, a very young, urban and politically incoherent group, but the rest of the country is firmly behind rural Britain.

They trust farmers and see them very favourably, they feel that when visiting it is on urban people to respect rural expectation, and even if it costs them more they want to see food being produced in Britain. The country backs the countryside.





Thank you