

## Parliamentarians for Agroecology

Parliamentary Briefing: Agroecology and Rights of Nature  
May 2026

In May 2026, Parliamentarians for Agroecology's parent organisation, Real Farming Trust, hosted a conference with NYU School of Law's [More-Than-Human Life \(MOTH\) Program](#) on ecocentric policy and governance, including the rights of nature.

The accelerating climate and biodiversity crises are prompting growing international discussion about how legal, political and economic systems can better recognise humanity's dependence on and interconnection with the living world. Increasingly, this conversation is taking shape through the emerging framework of "rights of nature" or "more-than-human rights", which argues that ecosystems and living nonhumans should not be treated solely as property or resources, but as living systems with intrinsic value and the right to flourish. Advancing this perspective would entail mainstreaming the interests and well-being of the living world more fully into law, policy and governance.

At the same time, agroecology is gaining global recognition as a practical framework for transforming food systems to work with ecological processes rather than against them. Defined by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as an approach that applies ecological and social principles to farming and food systems, agroecology seeks to strengthen the relationships between soils, water, plants, animals and people while supporting resilient rural economies and healthy food production.

## Agroecology and Rights of Nature

Modern industrial food systems have often treated land, rivers, soils, seeds and animals primarily as economic inputs. This has contributed to severe ecological degradation, including soil erosion, biodiversity collapse, water pollution and growing climate vulnerability. Agriculture is simultaneously one of the sectors most exposed to ecological breakdown and one of the sectors most capable of restoring ecosystems if managed differently.

The Rights of Nature movement challenges the assumption that nature exists solely for human extraction and consumption. Instead, it promotes governance systems that recognise ecological limits, interdependence and long-term stewardship. Countries including Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, New Zealand and Spain have all introduced legal innovations recognising ecosystems as rights-bearing entities or granting stronger ecological protections.

Agroecology offers a practical pathway for implementing many of these principles within food and farming systems. While progress has been made across the UK to transition towards a more nature-friendly approach to farming, efforts remain largely fragmented. By embedding the rights of nature across agricultural policy, Government can create a productive, resilient, and socially just food system—one that restores and protects nature while supporting our farmers, and securing the nation's food future.

## What is agroecology?

Agroecology offers a practical framework for transforming the UK's food system to meet environmental, social, and economic goals. Defined by the UN FAO as "[an integrated approach that applies ecological and social principles to the design and management of agricultural systems](#)," agroecology recognises that farming is part of a wider system linking

land, food, and communities. It seeks to optimise the relationships between plants, animals, people, and the environment while promoting resilience, fairness and long-term sustainability.

Agroecology aligns closely with the goals of the [2020 Agriculture Act](#) (and was explicitly mentioned in the legislation) by supporting biodiversity recovery, soil health, and rural economic growth. Agroecological systems—such as mixed farming, agroforestry, and pasture-based livestock—help reduce dependency on synthetic inputs, increase carbon sequestration and build resilience to climate shocks—which helps deliver the objectives of the Government’s current [National Food Strategy](#). Crucially, agroecology also considers fairness in supply chains, equitable access to good food and the role of farmers as land stewards.

### Rights of Nature and ELM

As England continues to develop and refine the Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes, there is a clear opportunity to align food and farming policy more closely with ecological reality and long-term resilience. The emerging principles behind Rights of Nature—recognising the intrinsic value of ecosystems and the need for long-term stewardship—offer a useful lens through which to strengthen the Sustainable Farming Incentive.

For ELM to reach its full potential, it will be important to move beyond a model that treats environmental outcomes as discrete add-ons, and instead support whole-farm systems that reflect the interconnected nature of landscapes. Many English farms already manage complex mosaics of grassland, arable land, woodland and water systems; ELM schemes should enable and incentivise integrated management across these habitats. Agroecological approaches are particularly well placed to deliver this, integrating food production with improvements in soil health, biodiversity, water management and climate resilience.

As pressures on food systems intensify—from climate change, biodiversity loss and economic uncertainty—the rights of nature represent a critical legal tool to improve agricultural support systems. With the right design and political support, it can help position English agriculture at the forefront of a transition towards farming systems that sustain both people and the wider living world on which they depend.

### Key asks

Parliamentarians for Agroecology (P4A) would encourage you to:

- **Table a simple Written Parliamentary Question to Defra**, asking how ELM is supporting farming systems that value ecosystems as living systems that require long-term care—aligning with emerging Rights of Nature principles while remaining grounded in practical farming.
- **Publicly support the proposed *Nature’s Rights Bill*** introduced by Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle in 2025, including by attending related parliamentary events, engaging in debate on the Bill, and exploring how Rights of Nature principles could strengthen agricultural, land-use and environmental policy within the UK.

For more information, please contact;  
Honor May Eldridge, coordinator, [parliamentarians.agroecology@gmail.com](mailto:parliamentarians.agroecology@gmail.com)