

Supporting British farmers

Our long-standing commitment to British Sourcing helps us to build strong relationships with producers through our Farming Groups, and to offer everyone products produced to good animal welfare standards, regardless of their budget.

Since December 2018, 100% of our own-brand Fresh and Frozen meat range has been British. In 2019 we expanded our commitment to British produce - for example, sourcing 100% of our mushrooms from the UK. In 2020, we have also been able to extend our British season on British Tulips from 3 months to 6 months.

Our Farming Groups

More than 3,700 farmers and growers feed into our own-brand fresh supply chain and our farming groups, which we set up in 2011, include just over 300 British farmers. By working with our farming groups we can support British farmers to achieve profitable returns, strengthen supply chain relationships, provide our members and customers with high-quality fresh British products, and address challenges such as animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and supply chain transparency.

Each group meets around three times a year to share best practice and get advice from industry experts.

This year, due to the pandemic, we have had to adapt to new ways of working, moving to virtual engagement, and organising free mental wellbeing webinars to help address challenges faced during the year.

We expect our farmers to adhere to our assurance bodies; either Red Tractor or RSPCA, and work in line with our five pillars:

-  Health, welfare and quality
-  Community
-  Responsible resources
-  Environmental
-  People and skills

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, we've been unable to audit our complete farming group, but have maintained a requirement for our farms to meet the standards of our Health, Welfare and Quality pillar as a minimum.

In 2020, we agreed amended targets with our farmers that take the impact of Covid-19 into account, encouraging farmers to seek improvements, and rewarding great results.

We have also been using social media and virtual events to help farmers connect with topics such as mental wellbeing, and share their stories with our customers.

Co-op continues to invest in British Farming

- **100%** of Co-op branded fresh meat has been British since May 2017
- **100%** of Co-op branded frozen meat has been British since 2018
- **100%** of Co-op branded eggs, milk, fresh cream, cheddar cheese and block butter are British
- First retailer to launch **100% British** grow-your-own cherry tomatoes, beef tomatoes and strawberries selling in pots



We had ten farming groups in 2020



Dairy



Lamb



Beef



Laying hens



Pork



Salmon



Turkey



Chickens

———— Livestock farming groups ————

Field and Vegetable
CropsFruit and Protected
Crops

———— Produce grower groups ————

In 2020, we started looking at how we could build on our insights collected from previous years. Working with environmental specialist ADAS RSK Ltd we are developing plans with our farmers and supplier partners to reduce the on-farm GHG emissions across our Farming Groups, by setting ambitious targets to reduce emissions from our dairy and beef production. To enable this, we are developing a suite of tools that will empower our farmers to make practical changes on their farms to reduce their carbon footprint aligned to Co-op's broader science-based targets.

For more information on our Environmental Mapping project, you can read our report [here](#).

Farming Pioneers

Now in its sixth year, our Farming Pioneers programme continues to champion the next generation of farmers and growers, aged between 21 and 35. Through a free 30-month training programme, we're teaching business skills like lean management and succession planning, as well as exploring salient issues like mental health.

The first two cohorts have now graduated, enabling them to make changes within their farming enterprise to create a more efficient, forward-thinking business.

We aim to continue investing in and expanding the Farming Pioneers programme so more young people can benefit from the scheme.

We continued the programme throughout the pandemic, bringing pioneers together through virtual sessions to discuss how their own businesses were coping and adapting, as well as guest speakers.



“ The programme has been a great opportunity to develop my business skills and has helped me focus on taking our business forward. I'm now in joint partnership with my father and in 2019, I succeeded the farm tenancy, something which would not have happened as quickly and easily without the support and competence I have gained from the programme.

The pioneers allowed me to meet some forward-thinking farmers and make connections which will last a lifetime. ”

Mary Ankers joined the first group of Co-op Pioneers in 2016

64* active members of our Farming Pioneer programme (2019: 104)

*We were unable to recruit new members in 2020 due to Covid-19.

Environmental - Mapping

We believe that taking a proactive approach to finding a more sustainable future for farmers will not only help to increase efficiency, but will also show our members and customers that we're taking their requirements seriously. In 2019 we completed the third year of our Environmental Mapping project, which measures carbon footprints and biodiversity across our Farming Groups. Our farmers have been able to use their individual reports to see how their carbon footprint has changed between Year 1 and Year 3, benchmarking themselves against the average performance for their group.