



ROAD KILL
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Farming

Zac Goldsmith

The principal sculptors of our countryside are farmers, and as they are under unprecedented pressure, there's one thing we can all predict without fear of being wrong – that the British countryside is going to change dramatically over the coming years.

The question is how? If current trends continue – if the agricultural establishment, namely the Government, National Farmers' Union and the giant food conglomerates – has its way, then the changes will be invariably for the worse. That is my opinion, of course, but poll after poll has demonstrated that it is also the opinion of the vast majority of people, farmers and consumers.

And there's a very good reason for this. The establishment has set itself the task not of finding solutions to the rural crisis, but of managing it. Time and again, the message from government and big producers is that a further erosion of our farm base is not only inevitable but necessary. If the market is allowed to select naturally the global economy's most efficient players, so the argument goes, then Britain's backward farmers will benefit from long-overdue streamlining.

Within the narrow context of their peculiar worldview, they're right. Small farmers can't realistically compete with giant monocultures in the south – or not without endless subsidies. For some to have a chance of being internationally competitive, many others would have to go. But why should they? What good would subjecting Britain's farmers to the brutality of the global economy actually achieve? More importantly, what would be the consequences?

Small farms are already giving way to larger farms, and farm workers are already leaving the land, *en masse*. So it's not hard to imagine where trends will lead us. A handful of small 'museum' farms will remain, dominated by large expanses of industrial agriculture, for which land itself is little more than a coincidence. The physical countryside will



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