

Facts, figures and projects

Business water risk

- [WWF](#) found that 69% of the UK's water footprint is related to food production; with 28% within the UK and 41% internationally.
- The 2018 World Economic Forum [Global Risks Report](#) puts water as one of the top five risks to the economy, in terms of projected impact. Three of the other top five risks are water-related (extreme weather events, natural disasters and failure of climate change mitigation activities.)

UK fresh water

- The UK's water catchment areas are delicate environments. Despite water quality in UK rivers having improved since the 1950s, [latest figures](#) show that 86% of river water bodies in England fail to reach *Good Ecological Status*.
- In 2017, WWF found that 14% of UK rivers were '[over-abstracted](#)'. This means water removal causes the rivers to drop below levels required to sustain wildlife.
- The [Office for National Statistics](#) estimates the value of freshwaters for the whole of the UK is £39.5 billion.

UK soil and agriculture

- In England, [agriculture](#) uses almost 70% of land and accounts for over 50% of nitrate lost to the water environment, 25% of phosphorus and 80% of pesticides.
- The [Committee for Climate Change](#) estimates that the UK has lost 84% of its fertile topsoil since 1850. Erosion continues at a rate of 1 to 3cm each year.

UK Water Ambition projects underway



The Courtauld 2025 Water Ambition will see UK businesses act within their own operations, and in local **catchment-based projects**, to improve water efficiency and tackle water stress. The initial focus will be on six UK catchment areas identified by the Rivers Trust as critical areas for sourcing key foods such as fresh produce, dairy and crops. All currently suffer water stress in terms of quantity and availability, or for the quality of current supplies.



The six are:

1&2. Cam & Ely Ouse / Broadlands (East Anglia) Catchments

The agri-food & drinks sector in the Anglian region contributes £3.4 billion per year to the UK's GVA – the biggest contributors being poultry meat, wheat, fresh vegetables and pigs. It supports more than 150,000 jobs and provides 18% of the national farm-gate output. It's one of the driest, water-stressed areas of the country.

- a) Cam & Ely Ouse is home to more than 30 chalk streams, which are a unique and threatened habitat. Over 80% of the water bodies in this catchment fail to reach good ecological health, with agricultural pollution and 'over-abstraction' being significant contributors.
- b) The Broadlands includes the Broads National Park and is England's largest wetland habitat, home to 25% of our rare and endangered species; and the Wensum. Over 90% of rivers in the area are failing to reach good ecological health, with diffuse agriculture pollution and over-abstraction a significant factor.

Water Ambition project: Coca-Cola has worked with WWF-UK and the Norfolk Rivers Trust since 2012 to support water sensitive farming practices in both catchments, which are key sourcing locations for its supply chains in terms of sugar beet. This has led to more than 280 million litres of water being replenished (equivalent to 112 Olympic size swimming pools). It has helped reduce agricultural pollution and improve water quality, and benefited farmers through adopting sustainable cost-saving practices. The work will continue and upscale the existing exemplary water-friendly farming work, which is supported by Coca Cola and Tesco.

3. Medway Catchment

The Medway Catchment is one of the largest catchments in Southern England, covering 930sq miles, and one of the driest in the UK. It produces a significant percentage of the UK's irrigated crops. Farming varies from intensive fruit and vegetable farming, arable and beef farming on grassland. More than 90% of producers in the Medway say irrigation is 'very important' or 'crucial' to their business. And half are concerned they will not have enough water to meet their future business needs.

The River Medway estuary is one of the most important natural wetlands in northern Europe.



Water Ambition project: [NIAB EMR](#) is a Centre of excellence in research supporting the horticultural sector. It is in the process of establishing the Water Efficient Technology Centre. This will address issues of irrigation efficiency in the horticulture sector by developing, demonstrating and promoting best practice in integrated crop-specific production systems. Currently the work is focused within greenhouses, but working with the South East Rivers Trust and Kent County Council the project will expand and extend this work to develop best practice for water efficiency and surface water management, and wild life improvements, outside of polytunnel and greenhouses which can be shared across the sector.

4. Wye & Usk Catchment

The Wye is one of the most significant and important rivers in the UK which is reflected in its EU designation as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). But the river and wider catchment are under significant pressure which are affecting the sustainability of the agriculture sector (soil loss & health) and the viability of the local economy (pollution impacting tourism and restricting development)

To date, the Wye and Usk Foundation (WUF), working with partners such as the Environment Agency (EA/Natural Resources Wales) Natural England, have worked with over 600 farmers, opened up over 760km of 'new' habitat, improved the riparian habitat of 309km and restored 63km of formerly fishless water in the upper catchment. This has allowed the establishment of a successful fisheries marketing scheme – which is attracting fishermen from around the world - which now providing the funds for ongoing maintenance.

Following the establishment of the Wye Catchment Partnership (WCP) in 2014 there is now a shared understanding of the principal problems and their causes and the WCP acts as a focal hub in delivering actions to correct the issues that have been collectively identified.

A collective action project, now being developed under Courtauld 2025 and led by the Rivers Trust, now provides the opportunity for businesses to identify some of the key issues from supply chains within the catchment get involved in developing the solutions.

5. Eden Catchment

Healthy ecosystems are vital to ensuring clean and safe water, nutrient rich, stable soil for farmers and for the long-term health of indigenous wildlife and biodiversity. All of these factors are important to businesses as they impact on the supply of natural resources, manufacturing processes, transportation and supply chain; so healthy ecosystems are essential for long term business and environmental sustainability. By



understanding the shared value of natural assets to businesses, and facilitating collaboration between business, suppliers, farmers and delivery partners, local networks can be developed to better manage the landscapes they operate within. Increasing understanding of the benefits and returns for farmers, communities, businesses and the environment of better landscape management will provide a business incentive to invest resource in nurturing healthy ecosystems.

In the Eden catchment, BITC are working using the landscape enterprise network analysis (LENs) to establish the commercial interest for a network of businesses. The LENs approach has been developed by BITC, Nestle and 3Keel and [an assessment for Cumbria](#) was undertaken in 2017, establishing the shared interests of six businesses in the area. In the next phase this analysis will be expanded to more businesses, to deepen understanding of how business values natural assets in this catchment. Collaborative investment in protecting and developing these areas would provide a return for these businesses and contribute to the long-term health and sustainability of the Eden Catchment.

As the catchment pioneer for the Government's 25-year environment plan this is a high-profile catchment which has the opportunity to inform policy at the national level. Additionally, this project will leverage world class research. This includes existing research from the UK demonstration test catchment and new research from [Resilient Dairy Landscapes Programme](#), led by N8 universities. A range of interventions have already been established to address soil, water and habitats. This research will monitor and evaluate the impact of these interventions, demonstrating the value of animal welfare and environmental management interventions for businesses within the catchment. The team are already working with a number of partners, including First Milk, United Utilities, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), Rivers Trust, Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) and Natural England to help deliver this programme.

6. Tamar Catchment

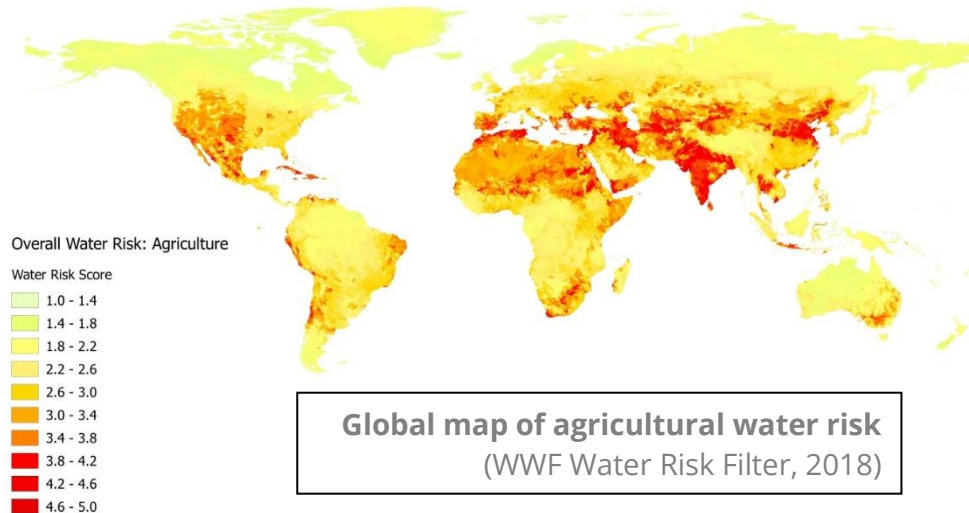
This project will support and expand the range of best practice initiatives available to reduce the impact of agriculture, particularly from dairy farming and build water resilience within the catchment.

International Water Ambition Projects in Development

With around two thirds of the UK's food water footprint located outside of the UK, businesses are also taking action overseas in key sourcing locations. The map below shows the overall water risk score for agricultural crops globally.

We know that countries such as Spain, South Africa and Kenya are important sourcing locations for food consumed in the UK, and that they are facing significant agricultural water risk:

- **Spain** produces 20% of the UK's imported fruit and vegetables, but 12% of its cropland is at high water risk.
- **South Africa** produces 20% of our imported oranges and other citrus fruit but 13% of its cropland is facing high water risks.
- **Kenya** produces 36% of the UK's imports of green beans, and some of Kenya's agricultural areas are suffering from water risks.



Our international water ambition projects will enable businesses to act in these key sourcing locations, by joining or initiating projects in priority catchments and supporting good water governance at a regional and national level. These projects are currently under development.



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