

Rural Performance

It is remarkable how resilient the farmland market has been this year, given the extraordinary political events close to home and economic trading of blows further afield, according to Savills.

The appetite for farmland remains largely unchanged, there are ready buyers for good quality land who are still prepared to pay sensible prices and will even pay above the going rate where circumstances are favourable or there is an element of competition. What is perhaps equally noticeable is that poorer land is also seeing increasing demand from buyers looking to invest in the environment, apart from anything they see that support mechanisms are likely to favour stewardship going forward.

As the industry experienced in 2003, the expected change of support regime is delaying decisions to market land, regardless of the presence of active buyers in a quiet market.

According to Savills research, in the south east of England, 9,854 acres of farmland have been marketed during 2019 to the end of August, compared with 11,305 acres in the same period in 2018, a decrease of -13%. This compares with a decrease in supply across Great Britain of -33% (England -29%) for the same period, from 86,193 in 2018 to 61,479 acres in 2019.

Pricing remains important. It is noticeable that farms and land are sticking where the price is over-ambitious and those that have their price level adjusted to a less ambitious level are quite quick to regain traction in the market place. The message therefore is simple – if you are a serious seller, be a realist on value and success is far more likely to come to you. An off-market offering can be used to test the water, but ultimately we are finding that price sensitivity stretches even that far.

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The picture is similar at both country and regional levels. The average value of prime arable and grade 3 grassland across GB is around £8,700 and £5,500 per acre respectively. However there is a broad range of prices achieved either side of the average, with neighbours working quickly to secure rare opportunities to acquire adjoining land and there is renewed international interest in farmland assets in well located areas. In the south east, we have seen average values of around £9,000 – £9,500 for prime arable and £6,000 – £6,500 per acre for grade 3 grassland.

The recent correction in the value of bare commercial farmland is now creating opportunities for investors to make a reasonable return, and conservation-minded buyers continue to express an interest in marginal and high-nature value areas. It is important in current market conditions with so little supply available and the wide range of variables that influence prices paid, to not over rely on average values.

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13%

Reduction in farmland being marketed to end August 2019 compared to same period 2018

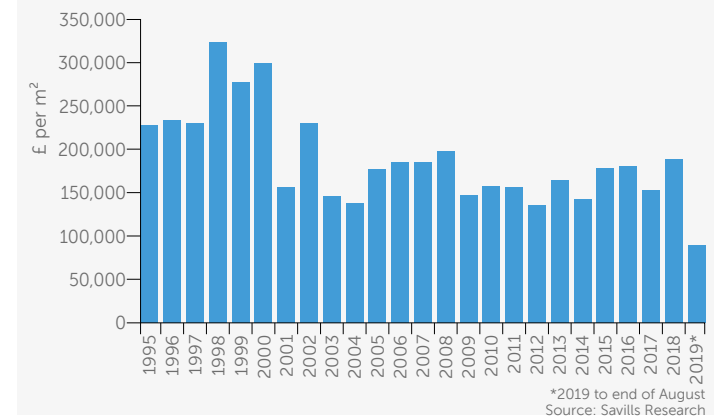
Savills



Aerial view of Court and Brookers Farm near Gravesend.

Great Britain – Publicly Marketed Farmland

Lowland farms/farmland over 50 acres with VP marketed in the national press, regional press and internet sites (since beginning 2013)





PHOTOGRAPH BY KENT & SUSSEX HOLIDAY COTTAGES

LEADER assisted a farmer on the Romney Marsh to convert a 200 year-old derelict 'Looker's Hut' into visitor accommodation.
Photo: Kent & Sussex Holiday Cottages

LEADER Grant Funding in Kent

Kent's LEADER programme is a source of funding for rural businesses, farmers, foresters and communities to help secure a sustainable future for the rural economy. The LEADER Programme is a bottom-up, community-led approach to the delivery of the Rural Development Programme for England funded by Defra and the European Union. The planning, decision-making and implementation is via Local Action Groups made up of private, public and community sector volunteers with a wide range of knowledge and experience of local rural issues.

LEADER in Kent has a budget of £5.25m for 2015-2020 and applications are currently closed. The programme has been very popular and over-subscribed to the extent that approximately £370,000 of additional funding was awarded to both the Kent Downs and Marshes & West Kent areas. The emphasis is on providing jobs and growth in rural areas. It has a rolling funding mechanism with a minimum grant of £2,500 and a maximum of £50,000 to £100,000 (higher under certain circumstances), at a rate of 40% of eligible costs for commercial projects. Recent LEADER projects include:

Simpsons Wine Estate – New Press Room

LEADER has helped to support the expansion of the Winery Facilities at Simpsons Wine Estates and construction of a new Press Room. The business was established in 2013 to produce Method Traditional English sparkling wines from a newly established 30ha (74 acre) vineyard in Barham, near Canterbury. The business has 10ha currently in production, but this will triple to 30ha in 2019, giving the potential to crop 300 tons of grapes producing 2100 hectolitres of wine or 210,000 one litre bottles.

The new press room will help to facilitate a significant increase in the productions of Simpsons' English Wines. There will be seven new products created including five different sparkling wines and two still wines. It will also create additional processing facilities for other vineyards to use – both large and small producers.

Great Field Farm – Bumble Barn

LEADER has helped assist an established B&B business of 27 years to create new environmentally friendly accommodation for tourists to the Canterbury area. The new lodge was



Bumble Barn, Canterbury.

manufactured in the UK along Passivhaus principles, built from mostly natural, low impact materials, featuring high-performance insulation and air-tightness. The exterior is clad in low-maintenance natural cedar with a sedum roof to enable it to blend into its rural environment, while allowing visitors to benefit from views of the countryside.

The building was constructed off-site, in ready-made, fitted sections before being assembled on site in a few days ready for occupation to minimise impact on existing tourist accommodation close by. The new self-catering lodge is helping the business to cater for larger groups and meet the growing demand for high quality, eco-friendly accommodation in Kent.

The Looker's Legacy

LEADER assisted a farmer on the Romney Marsh to convert a 200 year-old derelict 'Looker's Hut' into visitor accommodation. This will bring a unique heritage feature of the Marsh back into economic use as a small 'couples retreat' in a building of architectural and historical significance.

The project involved the restoration of the Looker's Hut to contain a bedroom and bathroom and construction of a modern, contemporary extension as an entrance kitchen, dining and living space to match the scale of the original building. The use of natural cladding on the modern extension was designed to complement its rural setting.



Treehouse – The Lodge Farm, Stelling Minnis.

Treehouse – The Lodge Farm

LEADER helped the owners of a smallholding in Stelling Minnis to create a unique, luxury visitor accommodation as part of their business. The new 'Treehouse' uses sustainable materials to blend with its surroundings in the long term and reflect its location with a Kentish oast house style roof. The treehouse was designed and installed by Nid Perché, a specialist French company who develop and install buildings to unique designs.

Kent County Council Village and Community Hall Grant Scheme

Community buildings are important components in sustaining inclusive and active communities, particularly in rural areas where fewer venues and services are present. They are host to a wide variety of activities catering for all sections of the community. Often, they are the only community facility in a neighbourhood, available for public use. They serve as a social centre, arts centre, sports centre and, in some cases, provide education, health or retail services.

In Kent there are around 300 village halls and many more community sports and recreation centres, social clubs, and church halls, and their importance to the health of our communities is growing.

Village and community halls are also important contributors to Kent's economy, supporting local jobs directly (cleaners, caretakers, grounds maintenance) or indirectly (pre-school staff, shop and post-office staff, fitness instructors, caterers). They also use local building firms, electricians and other local services.

The majority of community buildings are run by small charities and local volunteer trustees and are heavily reliant on fundraising. Often with a leaky roof, poor kitchen or toilet facilities, a cold, damp hall with community activities being turned away from using the building because there is simply not enough room. This leads hall management committees to turn to Kent County Council's Village and Community Hall Grant Scheme.

Over the last 20 years 180 community halls throughout Kent have benefitted from over £4m in funding from Kent County Council to support the building, refurbishment and development of facilities that provide vital space for the communities they serve. Action for Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) has a major role in the operation of the scheme, as well providing a specialist comprehensive advice and information service to the volunteers who run and manage community halls. Recent examples of supported projects:

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The Margate Caves Centre & Community Centre

At the heart of the Margate Caves Centre project is the Visitor Centre – funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery. The building's dramatic exterior provides a new landmark on the route from Margate's Old Town to Dalby Square, Northdown Road and Cliftonville. The visitor centre provides access to the restored Caves and features a shop and café. At the rear of the visitor centre is the Community Centre, supported by the County Council's Village and Community Hall Scheme, offering flexible spaces which can be used for a range of activities. It is available as a base for schools visiting Margate or for local groups to meet. The community rooms open onto gardens which cover the Caves themselves.

Wye Village Hall and Pavilion Refurbishment

KCC supported the refurbishment of this disused village pavilion near Ashford as a community room. Work included a stripped out shower area and making good internal floors and walls, improved access for people with disabilities, repairs to the exterior cladding and insulation and the installation of a small kitchen area and toilet. The Pavilion will be made available for the whole community but will have an emphasis on youth provision. The refurbishment will allow the local Youth Club to run again and provide enhanced facilities for local Cubs, Scouts and Brownie groups.

For more information:

www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/community-grants-and-funding/village-and-community-hall-grant-scheme

For more information:

www.ruralkent.org.uk



Margate Caves Centre & Community Centre.

PHOTO: KENT COUNTY COUNCIL