

# Key reflections from the ‘Big Tent’ event in Lowland England

MARCH 2026

The Big Tent event in Ely highlighted the value of the LUNZ Hub in bringing together farming, research, and policy perspectives to address the complex challenge of land use in lowland England.

Throughout the day, we heard from expert speakers sharing their experiences, challenges and perspectives on land use systems in Lowland England. Across the sessions it was clear that achieving net zero is a technical, social, economic, and place-based challenge. Here are our key reflections.

---

## Beyond technical solutions

Approaches like paludiculture and agroforestry clearly hold environmental potential, yet their real-world uptake is shaped by economic viability, market access, policy support, and farmer decision-making. The event highlighted the need to engage more deeply with the social and behavioural dimensions of change.

## Trade-offs are unavoidable

A recurring theme was the need for honesty about trade-offs. There is no single solution that can simultaneously maximise food production, biodiversity, and climate mitigation. Instead, the sector must navigate compromises and distributional impacts - who gains, who loses, and who gets to decide.

## Right practice, right place

A key tension lies between national policy frameworks and local realities. Soil conditions, peat depth, and water levels vary dramatically even within a single farm. This reinforces the importance of “right practice, right place,” and more flexible, context-specific approaches.

## Water as the system driver

Water emerged as a unifying theme across discussions. Water table management directly influences emissions, productivity, and biodiversity, making it a critical focus for both research and policy in lowland landscapes.

## A shifting relationship with ‘net zero’

The Lunzopoly session surfaced growing scepticism around the term “net zero.” Participants described it as poorly communicated, overly simplified, and difficult to implement in practice. This points to a need to shift focus from abstract targets to grounded, actionable transition pathways.

## Inclusion and power dynamics

The event highlighted the need to broaden participation and address who is represented and whose voices are heard. Transitions risk excluding smaller or less-resourced farmers and marginalised groups unless these dynamics are actively addressed.

Participatory formats helped surface diverse perspectives and created space for more meaningful dialogue.

## What Could Future Big Tent Events Hold?

The Ely event reinforced the value of the Big Tent as a space for collaboration, challenge, and shared learning. Looking ahead, future events could:

- Focus more on practical implementation pathways
- Bring in a wider and more diverse range of farmers
- Centre equity and inclusion
- Deepen dialogue on markets, behaviour change, and transitions
- Build ongoing learning platforms beyond one-off gatherings
- Shift the narrative from net zero targets to people-centred transitions

Ultimately, the Big Tent offers a rare space to move from conflict to collaboration, grounding discussions in real landscapes, real constraints, and real opportunities for change.



Scottish Government  
Riaghaidas na h-Alba  
gov.scot



Department of  
Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs

