

# MY COUNTRYSIDE

*"I love the beauty and history of the British landscape but for me rural life is part of the present, with huge strengths and serious challenges too"*



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Prime Minister **David Cameron** is Member of Parliament for the rural Oxfordshire constituency of Witney. He writes exclusively for Countryside Alliance members on his love of the British countryside and why it is a "buzzing 21st-century economy"

**T**he countryside is in my blood. I was brought up in the beautiful village of Peasemore in Berkshire and my childhood was pretty rural – lots of time spent outdoors, a lot of countryside activities – and that has never left me.

Country sports have been part of my life. I started riding very young, was put off by a rather wild pony but took it up again in later life. My grandfather was an amazing fisherman (who once cast for, and caught, my sock as it floated down river!). I love the peace and solitude of fishing off the rocks in Cornwall, even if I hardly ever catch anything.

Today my main rural pursuits are a rather muddy veg patch, which my children are starting to get really interested in, and long walks through the countryside, usually taking in a pub. My neighbour keeps pigs, which I help feed, and sheep, which my children have taken great delight in bottle feeding, if the ewe is incapable. I once helped him deliver a particularly tricky lamb, which he kindly named 'Dave' in the (I think unrealised) hope that it would fetch a premium at market.

So rural Britain is part of my life too – a real place of mud and muck, proper community ties and incredibly hard-working people trying to make a go of their lives. I love the beauty and

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history of the British landscape but for me rural life is part of the present, with huge strengths and serious challenges too.

I marched for the countryside, opposed the hunting ban and the Government I lead has promised a free vote among all MPs on repeal in this parliament.

I'm lucky that in my life I've been able to get to know many different parts of rural Britain. As Prime Minister I'm able to work regularly from Chequers in Buckinghamshire, tucked beneath the beech-woods of the Chiltern Hills. My family love it there – and we're able to escape London, and get out walking.

But it is my constituency of Witney in West Oxfordshire where we are really at home. It's a stunning bit of Britain, on the edge of the Cotswolds, with a real rural economy and thriving market towns. You can never forget, as an MP for a seat like mine, that the countryside isn't a vast museum. It's a buzzing 21st-century economy.

I know that sometimes officials don't seem to understand that, trying to impose all sorts of rules and regulations on rural businesses, farmers and country people. The result is that modern country life can sometimes seem like one big battle to keep on top of the paperwork and bureaucracy.

We've got to change that and we've got to keep what's so great about rural Britain. It's part of our soul as a country, important not just for conservation, not just for tourism, nor just for sustaining our rural economy, but for our own sense of identity and well-being.

So for me – as Prime Minister, as a rural constituency MP, and as a private individual – our beautiful British landscape has always been, and will always be, a national treasure which should be loved, enjoyed and protected for everyone's benefit. The beauty of our landscapes, the particular cultures and traditions that rural life sustains – for me, our countryside is what makes Britain great. ●