



Agriculture Bill: making farm support lead to better animal welfare

Key facts...

- ★ As the UK leaves the EU, the Agriculture Bill provides a unique opportunity to radically transform the farm subsidy support system into a meaningful subsidy support system that benefits all stakeholders: animals, producers and consumers.
- ★ The RSPCA supports the Bill in defining animal welfare as a public good to ensure a new subsidy support system promotes the adoption of higher welfare standards.
- ★ We support the change in the Agriculture Bill that abolishes 'business as usual' or basic legislative compliance for subsidies.
- ★ We support funded pilots from 2021 to deliver measurable goals to incentivise and deliver improved animal welfare, including animal health.
- ★ There are concerns that the Bill contains no financial framework for farm spending post 2022, so there is no guaranteed funding to meet the Government's ambition. The RSPCA recommends a minimum spend is set to pay for deliverable animal welfare improvements.

Context

Brexit is the most defining event for farming, and how we support farmers financially in the UK, since the 1947 Agriculture Act. Currently, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) sets the farm support policy framework for the UK, but is not specific in how the policy is delivered by the UK Government. Despite many reforms since 1992, it remains a policy that transfers approximately 80% of its budget to farmers and producers with few outputs expected other than production and compliance with baseline legislation. Although EU funding has been available for farm animal welfare since 2007, the budgets are small, 0.5% of the 2018 budget. In England, no funding has ever been provided for animal welfare payment schemes. It could be considered unsurprising then that in England the CAP has resulted in environmental degradation¹ and negative impacts on animal welfare² by failing to support higher welfare systems of production and creating conditions allowing more intensive farming methods.

Animal welfare is a public good and is an area where UK citizens want improvements. Fifty-two percent of respondents to Defra's Health and Harmony consultation selected world-class animal welfare as the most important public good that government should support³. Seventy-two percent felt the Government should set standards to ensure greater consistency in information to improve understanding of welfare at the point of purchase³. In previous surveys, 62% felt that animal welfare did not currently receive enough importance in the country's food policy, and 72% were willing to pay more to buy animal welfare-friendly products⁴.

However, this willingness to pay more can only be realised where the market for higher welfare is operating successfully in being both available and identifiable, and where the consumer can easily understand the inherent welfare issues. No sector other than shell-eggs has mandatory method of

¹ Portugal, L (2002) *OECD Work on Defining and Measuring Subsidies in Agriculture* <http://www.oecd.org/site/agrehs/35215642.pdf> (accessed 27.11.17)

² EFSA Welfare of animals during transport. <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/1966>

³ Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit: Summary of responses (September 2018)

⁴ European Commission (2016) *Attitudes of Europeans Towards Animal Welfare, Special Eurobarometer 442*

production labelling. We welcome the Government's announcement that they are looking at extending mandatory labelling⁵. Whereas the public were able to comparatively easily understand the welfare issues for laying hens kept in battery cages, the welfare issues for other species, for example lameness and mastitis in dairy cattle and foot health in sheep, are more difficult to convey simply to the public. It is particularly in these areas where market failure is clear, and neither welfare nor public goods are being delivered, where funding for animal welfare is most required.

Does the Agriculture Bill deliver a new farm support system for animal welfare?

A long term objective of the new British farm support system must be to promote the adoption of meaningful higher welfare standards and welfare outcomes for farm animals and ensure a vibrant and competitive farming and food industry. The RSPCA set out in its report, *'Into the fold: targeted financial support to improve farm animal welfare'*⁶ its proposals for a new farm subsidy support system to provide support for capital and ongoing costs to improve animal welfare beyond current standard industry practice, and to encourage and help farmers obtain membership of recognised higher animal welfare farm assurance schemes.

The Agriculture Bill is essentially an enabling Bill that allows the Minister to make legislative changes under secondary legislation, so it is difficult to anticipate what this legislation will propose. However, the Bill sets a clear direction and the RSPCA supports the following areas:

- Establishes animal welfare as a public good (Clause 1).
- Gives the power to introduce measures to incentivise animal welfare outcomes (Clause 1(f)).
- Takes the new farm support system away from direct payments and, instead, towards payments that reward farmers for producing goods that better meet public interests, such as products from animals that have been reared to higher welfare standards (Clauses 7 and 8).
- Grants powers to amend CAP legislation (Clause 3).
- Sets a final date for the end of direct payments (Clause 8).
- Links the clear desire from consumers for improvements in farm practices to payments for public goods, incentivising producers to invest in improving the welfare of their animals (Clause 11).
- Grants powers to improve transparency in the supply chain (Clause 12), including amending marketing standards to enable the introduction of mandatory method of production labelling in sectors such as broilers and pigs (Clause 21).
- Outlines a common UK approach to ensuring that the UK meets the WTO rules under the Agreement on Agriculture (Clause 26) whilst allowing devolved authorities to set out their own detailed programmes (Clauses 27 and 28).

As an enabling Bill the direction in some areas will only be confirmed once secondary legislation is agreed. To assist this, the Agriculture Bill should be amended and clarified in the following areas:

- Establish a minimum animal welfare financial envelope, as there is no agreement on funding post 2022 (Clause 1).
- Clarify that higher welfare farm assurance schemes can be given financial assistance to improve animal welfare (Clause 2(4)).
- Set ambitious goals under the framework for future investment that could include increasing the number of animals in a sector that are being produced under higher welfare farm assurance schemes, and reducing animal health problems by setting disease reduction targets (Clause 2).
- Ensure that the schemes under the Bill can be funded by placing a duty on Ministers to set multi annual budgets (Clause 3).
- Agree that mandatory method of production labelling schemes can be introduced (Clause 21).

⁵ Rt Hon Michael Gove MP (2018) *Farming for the next Generation* (speech to the Oxford Farming Conference)

⁶ <http://politicalanimal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Into-Th-eFold-web-version.pdf> (accessed 25.09.18)

- Include language to ensure that improvements in farm animal standards do not leave UK producers at a competitive disadvantage when negotiating future trade agreements; for example, imports of animal based products must meet at least UK baseline animal welfare standards (Clause 27).

Using pilots to improve animal health and welfare

There have been around 50 specific animal welfare schemes operating elsewhere in the EU since 2007. Between 2007 and 2013, 21 RDPs included animal welfare schemes, with 77,750 holdings receiving support for making animal welfare commitments beyond the relevant mandatory EU or national standards. Such schemes are popular and effective. The RSPCA has given Defra recommendations for the animal welfare trials and propose that these go ahead after 2021. These include:

- **Dairy cattle: improving access to pasture:** payment to provide access to fields for at least six hours a day and a minimum of 110 days per year.
- **Dairy cattle: mastitis reduction:** payment for pain relief treatments and proven, effective interventions that improve mastitis.
- **Sheep:** payments to improve lameness management such as accredited foot care training for all herdsmen, annual mobility scoring of the flock by a registered mobility scorer and proven, effective interventions that improve lameness, e.g. improved farm tracks.
- **Pigs: reducing mutilations, such as tail docking:** payments to farmers for rearing pigs with intact and unbitten tails (as measured at the abattoir by a vet or paraprofessional).
- **Broilers: additional space:** payment to reduce stocking density to 30kg/m² for indoor reared birds. This can have benefits on health and welfare, such as reduced hock burn⁷.
- **Beef cattle:** Liver lesions and acidotic rumen payment for proven, effective interventions that reduce the prevalence of these conditions.
- **Ducks:** payment to provide full body access to open water, as per the requirements of the RSPCA Welfare Standards for Ducks.
- **Income foregone for producing to higher welfare standards:** income foregone payments can be calculated by comparing rearing costs on a RSPCA Assured farm with those operating to baseline standards and deducting any higher welfare payment premiums.

Conclusions

The RSPCA broadly supports the aims and goals in the Agriculture Bill and welcomes the inclusion of animal welfare as a public good for the first time in an English RDP. We agree with the direction Defra has set for animal welfare and will work with the Government on piloting schemes from 2021 that can enhance and improve animal welfare, including health. In particular, we support the policy statements that:

- Endemic diseases and health conditions have a significant impact on productivity across the livestock sector, and better welfare can contribute towards healthier animals to drive up farm productivity and profitability.
- The new policy should not only maintain, but enhance and strengthen, animal welfare and should consider funding innovative approaches to improving farm animal welfare.
- Farmers should not have to compete with overseas producers whose farm animal welfare standards may not be as robust as our own.
- Price is not the only concern to consumers: consumers buy certain products for a range of reasons, which also includes provenance.
- Better mandatory labelling to ensure higher standards are easily understood by consumers, as it is not always clear to the consumer what standards underpin welfare terminology.

⁷ RSPCA (2006) *Everyone's a Winner*