



National Sheep Association

Key points to make in preparation for the second reading of the Agriculture Bill

With the UK's impending departure from the EU, a new Agricultural Bill for England (and relating to the powers of our devolved nations) is an essential necessity. The NSA welcomes this first draft and is now keen to ensure the Bill is scrutinised in order to become truly fit for purpose.

The opportunities created by a new Agriculture Bill, tailored to the needs of the UK, cannot be underestimated. NSA believes we must grasp these opportunities with the aim of creating a new future for agriculture in the UK – one that values the role of quality food production and domestic supply chains; values efficiency, productivity, and resource/climate friendly farming; and integrates our productive farming activities with a host of beneficial by products that society has long benefitted from, such as landscape, environments, wellbeing, culture and rural economies.

The NSA considers that successful agriculture – food production and land management – should be accepted as being a core fundamental need of any nation.

The sort of agricultural framework we want

- A common UK-level framework for trade development, farm support and regulation, developed in true partnership with the involvement of all four nations.
- The current UK budget retained for farming, land management and rural development, accepting a shift towards delivery of public goods.
- Funding for the four UK nations retained at current levels and ring-fenced for farming/land management and rural development.
- Development of our domestic market, including through better public procurement and with broad targets for self-sufficiency.
- Continued, tariff-free access to the EU single market, plus bespoke trade deals with non-EU markets that mitigate any potential impact on the sheep sector by implementing, for example, quotas and 'competition levellers' based on delivery of public goods.
- Protection for the migration of labour from other countries where the need exists, for example on farms, in abattoirs and for seasonal work such as shearing.
- A mechanism to allow WTO rules to adopt a shift from 'income foregone' to 'reward for public good', plus a broadening of the definition of public goods beyond agri-environment.
- Recognition of the high value of grassland and pastoral sheep farming.
- Simplification of current inspection processes, including the role of RPA, and utilisation of existing farm information already being used.
- Maintenance of core regulatory frameworks to protect trade and reputation – but a move to more flexible and practical regulatory delivery warning 'innocent offenders' and punishing 'deliberate offenders'.



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National Sheep Association is an organisation which represents the views and interests of sheep producers throughout the UK.
NSA is funded by its membership of sheep farmers and its activities involve it in every aspect of the sheep industry.

your business your future

NSA agrees with much that is included in the draft of the Agriculture Bill

- A seven-year transition period.
- A general move towards reward for public goods.
- A move away from the principle of income foregone and towards reward for goods and services delivered.
- The range of purposes that the Government may provide assistance for – although we would like to see recognition of the public good of food production, both in terms of food security and also contribution to cultural heritage and rural economies.
- Support for productivity through product quality and efficient resource use measures.
- Measures to strengthen the farmers' place in the supply chain and measures to intervene in the marketplace in times of difficulty.
- Provisions to create a domestic system of recognition of Producer Organisations to encourage collaboration.
- Provisions to make regulations imposing obligations on first purchasers of agricultural products in relation to contracts with producers.

NSA also welcomes the involvement of Wales and Northern Ireland in the Agricultural Bill and urges the UK to act together to avoid any internal trade disruption or unfairness.

NSA would like to see discussion and amendment of other part of the draft Agriculture Bill

- Agriculture should feature more strongly, with recognition that it is about food (and fibre) production. Specifically, we want to see funds for agriculture and land management targeted towards active and productive farmers.
- We are concerned about proposed delegated powers to give financial assistance and guidance, and strongly advise against agencies such as National Parks, the National Trust or RSPB, for example, taking on such functions.
- There should be a mechanism for setting multi-annual budgets relating to the Agriculture Bill, to provide longevity in policy and planning, and a commitment to maintaining budgets to devolved nations at current share levels.
- The continuation of appropriate migrant labour (non-seasonal and seasonal) needs to be ensured where it can be shown it cannot/will not be met by the indigenous workforce.
- Investment should be available to develop rewarding and good quality employment.
- The list of public goods must be broadened to include food production, in recognition that society needs access to affordable, quality food that contributes to human health and nutrition. Food production also contributes to the nation's food security, while activity around artisan foods with provenance is part of our cultural heritage and contributes to the rural economy.
- The list of public goods should also include outcomes that improve health and wellbeing, and in addition, recognise the beneficial role of permanent and ley grassland and its management by grazing animals.
- Clarity is needed on if the biodiversity of our farm livestock and plants are included in the list of public goods or things of value that can be supported. Our wide genetic pool and diversity of sheep breeds relating to landscape is something in need of recognition and support.
- Assurance is needed that any scheme to reward public goods will be offered at both entry and deeper levels, and that an entry level will be non-competitive and available to any farmer who chooses to engage.
- Specific powers should be included to restrict food imports (of the staple types we produce in the UK) unless they are of the same environmental, welfare and social standards
- Regarding collecting and sharing data, we are concerned about the powers to access information and feel these go too far.

- While there is sense in the 'delinking of payments' and facility to offer lump sums, a structure is needed to ensure this money is for genuine agricultural gain and linked to succession/ opportunity planning.
- The Bill should give greater provision for secure land tenure agreements subject to compliance with agreements. This should not dissuade short-term grass lets, for example, but should give tenants greater security and confidence to invest in long term best practice.

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