



NSA written evidence to Agriculture Bill

The National Sheep Association is a charitable company, structured as a membership association, working to further the success and sustainability of sheep farming in Britain. We represent around 6,500 -7,000 individual sheep farming members, and 82 sheep breed societies, from across the whole of the UK. The NSA is based in Malvern, Worcestershire. We would be happy to provide further evidence in person.

Our view

NSA largely supports the Agriculture Bill and believes it proposes a positive direction for the sheep industry. While the Bill now recognises the importance of food security more so than in previous drafts, it is imperative this is developed further and that the importance of being able to supply healthy, local and nutritious food to our domestic market is recognised. We believe it is not enough just to measure levels of food security, the Bill should require action to be taken to optimise self-sufficiency and even explore areas where import substitution can be made. We welcome that the Bill now recognises some important areas such as soil health and native breeds amongst other public goods. We strongly believe the Bill must go further to recognise the importance of protecting British standards. This is not solely to protect British farmers whose costs may be inflated by achieving higher standards, but because Britain will not meet its objectives of seeing improved environmental and animal welfare outcomes if it allows problems to be offshored. The NSA would recommend that long term funding commitments for agriculture and land management be included and we are becoming increasingly concerned that the time needed for transition, in particular relating to ELMS, is too short to allow for a smooth transition. Relating to this we are strongly of the view that all UK nations need to work to a common framework and timetable for change.

Suggested changes to the Bill

- Insertion of a clause to recognise the importance of food production and security in the UK and for domestic protection.
 - The NSA believes a clause is required to ensure the recognition of British produced food and to require the Government to take action to optimise domestic production and seek to substitute imports where climatic conditions change and new economic opportunities arise.
- Insertion of a clause to legislate against products of lower environmental, welfare, traceability, and employment standards to be imported into the UK.
 - British food is produced using some of the highest standards in the world. British farmers are proud to do so and sheep farmers are proud to run extensive and high welfare systems. However, farmers **must not** be forced to compete with imports produced cheaply abroad under lower standards. This would not only undercut the UK market but would prevent the UK making any difference to global production standards.

- Insertion of a longer transition timetable.
 - NSA is concerned the transition outlined, especially given the delay the Agriculture Bill has had getting to the stage it is now, is not sufficient and could leave farmers in a threatened position if new programmes are not ready in time, and the Bill has resulted in the end of BPS before the new scheme is prepared. NSA believes a 'volatility cushion' should be inserted to allow ministers the ability to continue a BPS payment beyond 2027, should new schemes not be ready and functioning correctly.

Phil Stocker

Chief Executive

National Sheep Association

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