

Farming Link

Defra news for farmers and growers

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Overcoming RPA problems is 'number one priority'

Defra's new Secretary of State, David Miliband, recognises the difficulties faced by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). In an interview for *Farming Link*, he said: "My number one priority is to make sure the problems of the Rural Payments Agency are overcome, that the remaining payments are made for this year as soon as possible, and we learn the right lessons so that delivery of the 2006 Scheme and beyond is improved."

The RPA has pledged to learn lessons from ongoing reviews into the Single Payments Scheme (SPS). The introduction of the scheme has unfortunately not been as smooth as expected and the RPA recognises that this has affected the farming community.

The RPA started making payments on schedule in February 2006, but failed to complete the bulk of payments to farmers

by the end of March. As *Farming Link* went to press in late June, 92 per cent of the total £1.5bn SPS money had been paid to farmers.

The problems were attributable to a number of factors that will be fully investigated by Defra and the RPA. Separate investigations are being carried out by the Parliamentary Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the National Audit Office. A further Defra inquiry, the Hunter Review, is also looking at the long-term role of the Rural Payments Agency and will report back by the end of the year.

Looking ahead to 2006 payments, the RPA expects next year to be challenging as it manages the impact of the issues arising from delivering the 2005 Single Payment Scheme.

● **Turn to pages 4-5 to read David Miliband's interview in full**

More help for rural stress organisations

An extra £100,000 has been made available by Defra to key rural support organisations which help farmers deal with stress.

The decision follows an increase in calls to the charities by farmers concerned over the timing of payments under the Single Payments Scheme (SPS).

Sir Don Curry, Chair of the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy Delivery Group, said: "I am very pleased that the Government has responded in this way to the pressure these important organisations are under. This will certainly help them in their essential work at this vital time."



Red letter day for UK beef and cattle producers

On 2 May, the European Union's ban on the export of beef and cattle from the UK was lifted with the unanimous agreement of EU member states. National laws which implemented the ban in the UK were repealed on 3 May and exports resumed immediately.

Farming Minister Lord Rooker said: "The lifting of the ban on beef exports presents British farmers with a unique opportunity to regain sales overseas. This is welcome news for our farming industry, which makes some of the highest quality meat in the world."

It is now permitted to export:

- cattle born on or after 1 August 1996;
- beef and products containing bovine material from cattle slaughtered on or after 15 June 2005;
- bovine vertebral column or products derived from such vertebral column from cattle slaughtered on or after 3 May 2006.

It is essential that these conditions are

respected so as to maintain the confidence of overseas customers in our controls. Exporters must themselves check very thoroughly that produce for export complies with the rules.

Cattle producers are reminded that cattle born or reared in the UK before August 1996 cannot enter the food chain and must only be sent for slaughter to Older Cattle Disposal Scheme slaughterhouses. Cattle born or reared in the UK after July 1996 aged over 30 months must only be sent to one of over 50 slaughterhouses approved to slaughter cattle aged over 30 months. These cattle will be tested for BSE before being sold for human consumption.

i Further details about the resumption of beef and cattle exports can be seen in guidance notes which are available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/bse/index.html>.

Avian flu update

Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI H7N3) was confirmed on three poultry farms in Norfolk in April 2006. The restriction zones surrounding the premises in Norfolk were lifted on 26 May 2006. Low pathogenic avian influenza viruses occur naturally in wild bird populations in Europe and around the world. Occasionally these viruses will infect domestic poultry flocks.

It is crucial that bird keepers follow biosecurity measures at all times, not just during an outbreak of avian influenza. Defra has issued extensive guidance to bird keepers on biosecurity measures to protect against avian influenza, on the Defra website.

All poultry keepers with 50 birds or more must register their flocks with the GB Poultry Register, which was set up to prepare for any outbreak of avian flu.

Registration is a legal requirement if you keep chickens (including bantams), turkeys, ducks, geese, pheasants, partridges, guinea fowl, pigeons (if reared for meat), quail, emus, ostriches and rheas. If you keep birds as pets, rear them for personal consumption only, or have less than 50, you do not have to register, but it would be useful in the event of a disease.

If you want to register by phone or have any queries, call freephone 0800 634 1112, or visit the Defra website to download a form.

i For more information on avian flu go to www.defra.gov.uk and click on Avian Influenza in Quick Links.

Stakeholder group sets out health and welfare priorities



The independent stakeholder group, the England Implementation Group (EIG), is to publish its priorities for the next year to drive forward the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy in England.

The EIG was appointed last year by Defra and is made up of 13 individuals with expertise in farming, the veterinary profession and animal welfare.

One of the key priorities for the EIG is to support different industry sectors in developing their own health and welfare strategies, including setting up industry

councils, following the example of the pig industry.

"The Pig Health and Welfare Strategy has led the way in showing the potential for the industry's livestock sectors to improve animal health and welfare while enhancing competitiveness. We would like to see all sectors having something similar and are pleased to see movement in that direction," said Helen Browning OBE, Chairman of the EIG. "Our role is to bring people together and support the sectors in finding their own approach to securing long-term improvements to animal well being, in line with the principles of the strategy."

Helen added: "We're keen to involve all interested parties in our work and to invite them to our bi-monthly meetings, which are open to the public. We publish all our minutes and papers on our website and you can contact the Group's secretariat for more information."

Another key EIG priority is to drive improvements in the monitoring of disease in livestock. Earlier detection would enable earlier intervention to reduce the cost and impact of the spread of disease. The EIG aims to work with Defra, the farming industry and vets to improve the way information is collected.

i For more information, visit www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/ahws/eig/index.htm

In brief

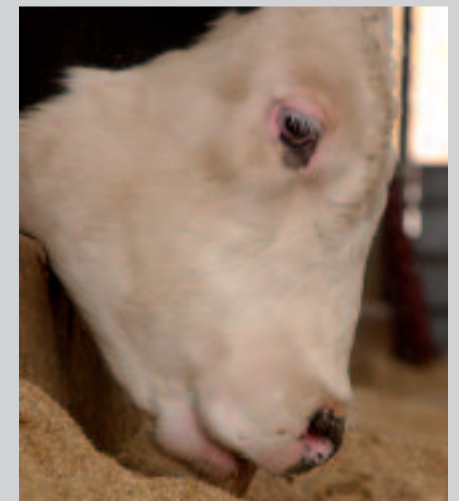
BSE testing on dead cattle that die or are killed on farms

Farmers who lose cattle aged over 24 months are required by law to report their dead stock to the Government's helpline.

Animals will be collected free of charge and tested for BSE – call the TSE helpline free on 0800 525 890 within 24 hours of discovery of the carcass.

Ravi Nagrath of the BSE team at Defra, said: "It's important that farmers contact us about dead stock over 24 months old to ensure we are able to meet our EU legal requirements. This is especially important in light of the beef export ban which has recently been lifted."

i For more information, visit www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/bse/othertses/index.html or contact Defra's Laura Murrell on 020 7904 8257.



Disposing of older cattle

It remains illegal to send older cattle – that is cattle born or reared in the UK before 1 August 1996 – to an abattoir that deals with fresh meat for human consumption. These cattle should be disposed of through the Government's Older Cattle Disposal Scheme (OCDS).

Sue Eades, the new Head of BSE and Animal By-Products Division at Defra, said: "The OTM rule change has been a great success. However, it is important that controls are maintained to ensure that ineligible older cattle remain excluded from the food chain."

If you're unsure whether your older cattle are eligible for the Older Cattle Disposal Scheme, contact the Rural Payments Agency on 0118 968 7333.

For the slaughter of cattle born or reared in the UK after 1 August 1996 that are over thirty months old (OTM), farmers need to use OTM-approved abattoirs. For further information call Defra on 020 7904 6375.

Fill in your forms electronically

Do you need to apply for exemptions from the new Environment Agency waste regulations or fill in your June Agricultural Survey?

You can now complete both these tasks online with Defra's new service for farmers, the Whole Farm Approach, at www.wholefarm.defra.gov.uk. Filling in the forms online takes less time than completing paper versions. "You're taken directly to the questions that apply to your business. It misses out sections that are irrelevant to you and really does save time. It's easy to follow, with tick boxes," said Tim Jauncey of the Whole Farm Approach Team.

Tim Bennett, former President of the National Farmers' Union, agreed: "It allows farmers to get on with running their business rather than chasing paper."

The Whole Farm Approach website also carries information on all the regulations that affect your business. "We've had feedback from farmers that

it's beneficial to have details of all the regulations and guidance in one place," said Tim Jauncey. "Don't worry if you have a slow internet connection or are concerned about the costs of connection, the Whole Farm Approach also provides a CD to work offline so you only need to connect to the internet for updates and to submit your questionnaires."

To take advantage of the new service, you'll need to sign up on the Whole Farm Approach website. You will then receive a CD and booklet, to guide you through full registration, which should take no more than a few minutes.

Farmers can also sign up for the new service, and meet some of the Whole Farm Approach team on the Defra stands at the shows on the Calendar (see back page).



To register online, go to www.wholefarm.defra.gov.uk.

i For more information on waste management, go to www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste

Weekly monitors aid farm health planning



Are you getting the best from your animals? Monitoring your animals weekly and considering proactive measures to identify and manage disease on-farm could be the best way to improve animal health – and boost long-term profits for the farming industry.

Peter Rudman, Chairman of the Farm Health Planning Communications Group, a partnership between Defra and the farming industry, said: "It's about getting the best out of your animals. Sometimes it's not obvious to a farmer when an animal has a certain disease but it could reduce production levels and reproductive performance."

A Farm Health Planning Working Group was established in 2004 to facilitate a close working relationship between government, the farming industry and within the farming industry itself. The working group is made up of interested parties and independent experts from across the livestock industry.

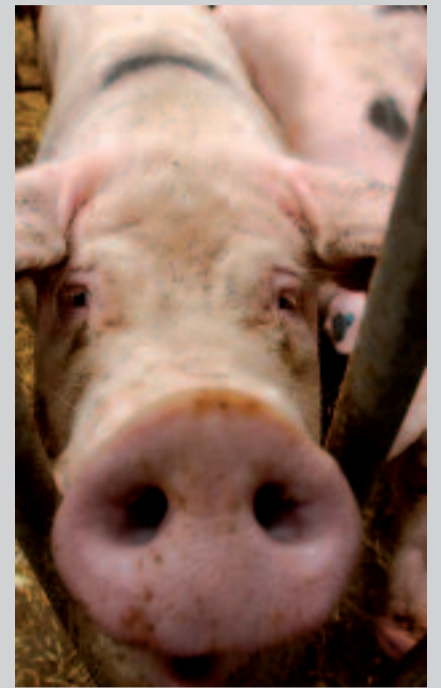
Peter added: "Farmers could work closely with their local vets to monitor the health of their animals and work out whether to vaccinate, for example, against Bovine Viral Diarrhoea. A vet could weigh up the costs of vaccination against potential profit several years down the line. Farm health planning is about monitoring your animals daily or weekly by building this into the working day. It's about boosting animal health as well as profits – and reducing losses. It could boost milk yield or raise the calving index.

"The adoption of dynamic health planning by the whole industry will improve the health of animals and improve the profitability of businesses."

Defra is working with the farming industry to develop tools such as cost-benefit models to assist farmers' decision-making and templates to help farmers plan ahead.

i For more information, visit www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/ahws/fhp/index.htm

In brief



Welfare of animals in transport: consultation

If you transport animals as part of your business, you may want to take part in Defra's consultation on the welfare of animals in transport.

The consultation outlines proposals for raising standards in transportation, to comply with a new EU regulation which will come into force next January. It will affect farmers who transport their own animals as well as others such as livestock hauliers and animal breeders.

i You have until July 31 to submit a response. To get a copy of the consultation document, go to <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/farmed/transport/eu-transportreg.htm> or phone 020 7904 6566.

Pre-movement testing of cattle for Bovine TB: reminders

With the introduction of statutory pre-movement testing of cattle, herd owners need to think ahead about when they plan to move animals. A clear test remains valid for movement of the animal for 60 days, so don't leave it to the last minute to get the test done. Give your Local Veterinary Inspector plenty of notice so that you get a TB pre-movement test done when you need it.

This is also a reminder that from the 1 July cattle herd owners in England will be responsible for meeting the costs of all pre-movement tests, as is the case in Wales and Scotland. To ease the transition to pre-movement testing, the Government introduced a state aid scheme allowing for one free test per herd owner in England up to 30 June.

Warning on Bovine Mastitis

Dairy farmers have been warned to be on their guard against herbal products in intramammary syringes being promoted for use in cases of Bovine Mastitis.

The Central Mastitis Review Group (CMRG) says that a number of herbal products in applicators indistinguishable from standard intramammary syringes have been promoted for use in the disease.

"The presentation of these products in intramammary syringes could

understandably lead some dairy farmers to incorrectly assume the products are suitable for administration to cows by the intramammary route," it states.

"Dairy farmers are advised that these products are illegal. They are not authorised veterinary medicines. They are of unproven safety, efficacy and quality, and their use may be detrimental to cow welfare."

The CMRG, a collaborative stakeholder group whose members include

veterinarians, scientists, producer representatives and other groups, also points out that under The Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2005 it is now illegal not only to sell or administer these products, but also to possess them. Anybody, including dairy farmers, found in possession of these products is liable to prosecution.

i The CMRG secretary can be contacted on 01872 272150

"Let's work in part

David Miliband, the new Secretary of State at Defra, talks us through his plans for working with the farming industry on everything from CAP reform to climate change

David Miliband took over from Margaret Beckett as Secretary of State for Defra in mid-May. As well as meeting representatives from the farming industry, David has been out and about on farm visits to help get up to speed on issues from crop prices to bio fuels. He keeps in contact with farmers through his weblog at www.davidmiliband.defra.gov.uk

Q What are the challenges for today's farming industry?

"I think the biggest challenge is how you manage an industry or a business at a time of change. There is a changing global context, changing consumer needs and changing natural environment. It's tough for the farmer who gets up every morning and faces that challenge: how do you pay your way in a rapidly changing context? It's our job to help them.

"I want British farming to be an industry that is profitable, that contributes to the health of the countryside and the health, wealth and environmental strength of the country as a whole.

"Farmers know they are in the frontline in the fight against climate change. I see the alliance of British agriculture and environmental concern as being absolutely critical to the future of the country. There is really only one agenda: how we balance what we take from the planet with what we give back. We've got to make sure their knowledge, expertise and commitment accumulated over the generations is used to good effect.

"I know that British farmers want to sell their produce on a level playing field. They want the Government to negotiate a fair market in Europe and around the world. They want us to minimise the regulatory burden and also ensure payment systems are run in a sensible and efficient way, hence the understandable annoyance about the situation with the Single Payment Scheme."

Q What are your immediate priorities?

"My number one priority is to make sure the problems of the Rural Payments Agency are overcome, that the remaining payments are made for this year as soon as possible and we learn the right lessons so that delivery of the 2006 Scheme and beyond is improved.

"At the moment (mid June), over 90% of the money has gone out. There remain just over 2,000 complex cases the RPA is working on very hard. And we've got to sort out the small claims. The priority is to get to farmers the money they're owed.



"2006 payments (in 2007) will be difficult but there is a full-scale drive to make sure we make as much progress as possible. I know Defra has to restore its reputation for efficiency and effectiveness and the RPA is absolutely critical to that.

"I don't think the problems with the RPA are to do with the lack of staff. The Chief Executive has been replaced and there's been extra short-term deployment of staff to get Hill Farm Allowances out. What people need to know is that we're absolutely focused on getting a dependable system in place as soon as possible."

Q Some farmers feel the UK imports too much food to the detriment of UK farmers. What's the best way forward?

"Protectionism, with tariffs and quotas for imports, is not the way forward. We think it's important to make sure all markets are open as soon as possible. And that British

farmers are able to compete successfully on the global market, profiting from their many strengths, given the support that foreign farmers are given.

"The EU decoupled payment from production as part of the 2003 CAP reforms. Additionally, farmers are increasingly supported for the environmental benefits they deliver for the countryside and the public, particularly through agri-environment schemes under Pillar 2 of the CAP. The challenge in the medium term is the review of the entire EU budget, including the Common Agricultural Policy, coming up in 2008/9.

"And there's a link between the Common Agricultural Policy and the World Trade talks. Farmers are understandably annoyed about American farming subsidies. Here, the European Commission's clout in foreign markets and its negotiations with foreign governments are important. The final elimination of quotas, subsidies and tariffs is strongly in the interests of British farming."

nership”



David Milliband (right) with Richard Macdonald (Director General of NFU), Peter Kendall (NFU President) and farmers David Uren and Nigel Budde at Old Idsworth Farm in Hampshire

Q Many farmers complain about EU red tape...

“I’m very clear that unnecessary red tape is not in anybody’s interests. We’ve got to root it out. It’s important that regulation is proportionate and risk-based. It’s very important to show the public that animal health and welfare and product safety are taken seriously. Nothing would be worse for the British farmer than to have their reputation for quality and safety compromised.

“And we should bear in mind that every time we complain to the EU about the regulatory burden, we potentially create the room for people in other countries not to follow the rules. We strongly support the European Commission taking action against infringements – the EC has been taking an increasingly stringent line with poor performers. But I think we’ve got to be careful not to suggest that 24 countries flout the rules and we’re the only one that follows the rules.”

Q Where do you stand on diversification?

“Farmers know that diversification is absolutely critical to their future and future funding. We can’t force people to do what they don’t want to, but prices for produce are set in world markets not just in the UK. And it’s important that farmers are given every support to compete effectively in those world markets. Farmers are going to have to make choices about what they do. Government needs to make sure farmers are given the right incentives.

“Aside from the Environmental Stewardship scheme (see article right), there are a range of other measures the Government supports on forestry, water management and habitat support and these are all open to farmers. In particular, our new Rural Development Programme (2007-2013) will continue to provide support specifically aimed at improving the competitiveness of the farming and forestry sectors.”

Q What’s your view on renewable energy and bio-fuels?

“I acknowledge there is currently a debate about nuclear power which is very low carbon emitting, but no one pretends a decision on nuclear rules out the need for very significant action on energy efficiency, renewables and biofuels.

“Defra and the DTI are already putting significant sums into both research and production. There’s already a commitment that five per cent of all petrol sold on forecourts will come from renewable sources. There’s a lot of potential that we should try and exploit. I’ve got an open mind on the extent to which we should do this.”

Q What’s the latest on Bovine Tuberculosis?

“There’s a problem in some parts of the country with Bovine Tuberculosis. There have been significant trials and investigations that I’ve been briefed on. It’s a complex problem with multiple causes.

“The latest figures I’ve seen suggest a fall of 26 per cent in Bovine TB in the last six months, which is pretty significant. We need to understand why it’s happened.”

Final word

David is keen to stress his continued support for rural communities. He’s already familiar with many of the issues that affect the countryside from his time as Minister for Communities and Local Government, pre-Defra – a brief that applied equally to urban and rural areas.

“We know farmers are at the heart of rural communities, they are active citizens and that’s very important for the communities of our country. We want farmers and land managers to be active stewards of the countryside and we want them to be paid for it.

“My main message is that Government is open for a serious discussion about the long-term future of the industry. We understand there will be tough decisions but we want them to be taken in the proper context and with the proper information. And we want a real partnership with British farmers.”

THE BENEFITS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP SCHEME



Mark Hudson (left) with Tony Percival, Regional Manager for the North West Rural Development Service

Over 21,000 farmers have now signed up for the Government’s Environmental Stewardship schemes which top up farmers’ earnings in return for adopting practices that promote wildlife and enhance the landscape.

The number of farmers taking part in the Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) scheme is now 20,734 (a total of 2,767,547 ha) with 372 receiving funding through the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme (23,649 ha).

Mark Hudson, a tenant farmer from Ormskirk, Lancashire, has around five hectares of land in the entry level scheme and around three hectares under ELS’s predecessor, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, that he signed up for around nine years ago.

The improvements Mark has made under the two schemes include hedge planting, leaving two-metre strips around fields and six-metre strips around water courses, as well as squaring off fields to leave the corners for wildlife to establish.

Mark said: “With the improvements we’ve made over the years, we’ve seen increased numbers of mistle thrushes, buzzards, kestrels and hawks. Leaving the strips at the field margins encourages more beneficial insects including bees and butterflies which attract small birds like sparrows and finches – and they attract the bigger birds. Leaving grass to grow in the field corners over the last year for the ELS, we’ve seen a lot more ground-nesting birds such as partridges this spring.”

In several years’ time, once the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) has finished, Mark hopes to apply for the higher level scheme. “For the HLS, one idea is to look at installing bird boxes, but we’d need to get an environmental report done to pinpoint the options for improvement. Then we can make a submission to Defra,” said Mark.

If you’ve not yet signed up or you’re in the first year and not yet seeing measurable improvements, Mark’s advice is to be patient: “It’s worth taking a serious look at the scheme. It enables you to take the field margins and corners out of production. And these are areas that wouldn’t yield much anyway. And by encouraging more insects, we’re hoping to cut down on aphicide and save money,” said Mark. “You don’t see changes overnight, but you will in a few years’ time. It took four or five years for our initial improvements under the CSS to take effect.”

i For more information, visit www.defra.gov.uk/rds

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Our last front page: an apology

After the March issue of *Farming Link*, you probably received a letter from us apologising about the front page news story. The story said that most of the £1.6bn owed to farmers under the Single Payment Scheme would be distributed by the end of March. This didn't happen. And we're sorry to have misinformed you.

So how do mistakes creep in? As with any quarterly newsletter, stories get written up to a month in advance to meet deadlines for printing and distribution. A month in the farming industry is a long time and inevitably some stories will move on.

Lots of you pointed out our mistake – thanks to everyone who wrote or emailed. Please keep your letters coming, we're keen to hear your views and encourage debate on everything from the price of milk to climate change.

And with an increasing emphasis on diversification, we're particularly keen to hear from anyone who has started a new business venture, who would like to share lessons learned with other farmers or growers.

The Editor

Letters can be sent to:

The Editor, *Farming Link*, Defra, Area 6C, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR or email farming.link@defra.gsi.gov.uk

The Editor reserves the right to edit letters before publication.



Water quality and nitrates update

Recent media reports about the possible impact of new EU water laws on farmers are misleading, according to Defra's water quality team.

Chris Ryder, Head of the Water Quality Division at Defra, said: "Contrary to recent speculation about the possible impact on farmers when Water Framework Directive measures come into force alongside those of the 1991 Nitrates Directive, decisions on quality standards for water bodies have not yet been made.

"Tackling water pollution caused by agriculture is a challenge we must meet if we are to get the quality of our water into line with the Water Framework Directive by 2015. We need to take action to achieve that," said Chris.

Consultation with farmers is the way forward. "The exact detail of what we do will be developed in close partnership with all those interested or affected. A guiding principle will be that what we do – and its cost – must be proportionate," Chris said.

Over the next two years, Defra and the Environment Agency will continue working with all interested parties to develop programmes of measures under the Water Framework Directive. A key part of this will be measures to bring about more

catchment sensitive farming – the adoption of water-friendly farming practices. A consultation is planned for later this year on what further measures need to be introduced in addition to the £25 million supportive initiative in priority catchments (see story on page 7).

Another essential measure to tackle water pollution – and a 'basic measure' under the Water Framework Directive – is the Nitrates Directive Action Programme. This applies in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones where the level of nitrate in water is above 50 mg per litre. When nitrates from fertilisers or manure end up in rivers or lakes, they can boost algal growth, endangering plant life and using up oxygen, which suffocates fish. The Action Programme is currently under review and there have been several workshops across the country seeking views of farmers. Defra is preparing a public consultation on proposals for revising existing measures to bring them in line with the requirements of the Nitrates Directive.

Defra acknowledges the need to work closely with the farming industry on the aspects of all these initiatives that affect them. "We will be explaining and consulting at all stages," said Chris.

In brief

School scheme takes the classroom into the countryside

A national scheme is increasing schools' access to farmland and providing safe, educational places for farmland and countryside teaching.

The Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS) gives farmers training and accreditation so they can offer fun, educational school visits covering a wide range of subjects, many of which are included in the National Curriculum.

Farmers accredited with the scheme can educate all ages from pre-school to GCSE level. Farmers complete three one-day courses in preparing for farm visits. Once accredited, the farm receives a certificate, a logo to use for promotional purposes and a listing on the 'Teachernet' website. Accredited farms are inspected bi-annually.

Maria Samouel of Ladyland Farm, Horley, has received accreditation for her farm. She said: "The visits have been absolutely brilliant so far. The children really enjoy getting involved with the activities on the farm. Our CEVAS accreditation gives parents and teachers peace of mind."



Journalists should be in touch, too

■ In reply to D. Jordan's letter "Are farmers in touch with the public?" there are a few points I would like to mention. Indeed, farmers are trying hard to meet the requirements of the consumer and lead the world in terms of traceability, assurance schemes and product quality, whilst meeting Defra requirements too.

He/she is very right, we cannot pass on additional business costs directly to the public, but I once remember someone saying that we are the only industry which can make a living by buying at retail and selling at wholesale! Obviously, many farmers have diversified to reduce this effect on their individual incomes.

Perhaps D Jordan should also have researched the wider farming implications of Europe and beyond. An analysis between the UK and France or even Southern Ireland

would have provided a less biased view. Something which I assume a journalist should be "in touch with".

The majority of farmers are intelligent and good business people, who respect the countryside. It is unfortunate that not all people think so.

H Richardson (a Lancashire farmer's wife)

Payments timetable

■ On reading *Farming Link* I was shocked at your second paragraph, again totally incorrect, similar to the last *Farming Link* where you quoted Lord Bach as saying entitlements will be with us by middle of January, how wrong he was. Someone must by now realise there are huge problems still to be sorted out.

What would have been interesting is the payment window of SPS for 2006.

R D Dale Farms, Moreton-in-Marsh

The Great Britain Poultry Register

Don't throw caution to the wind. Register now.



We're taking steps to prevent an outbreak of bird flu and reduce the impact of the disease if it occurs here. Register your poultry, gamebirds and certain other bird species with us, and that information will mean we can give you the right help. Call us free on 0800 634 01112 or visit defra.gov.uk

Defra sets goals for sustainable food industry

Defra has published its strategy to tackle the impact of the food industry on precious resources such as energy and water and its contribution to climate change.

The Food Industry Sustainability Strategy has been developed by Defra, the food and drink industry and key stakeholder bodies including the British Retail Consortium and the Food and Drink Federation. It aims to improve the industry's environmental, social and economic performance by developing a strong partnership between government and industry. It addresses all sectors of the food industry beyond the farm gate to the consumer's plate.

Fresh Start opens door for farming's new entrants

A ground-breaking initiative to help new entrants find openings in the farming industry has been launched in Sussex and is set to be rolled out in the south of England, with the aim of ultimately making it available nationwide.

The Fresh Start Academy aims to encourage new entrants into the industry by improving their business skills and teaming them up with retiring farmers in a unique matchmaking and training project.

Initially the scheme will cover East and West Sussex. However, negotiations are under way to raise funding that will enable the pilot to be extended from Plumpton and Brinsbury Agricultural Colleges to Sparsholt College, Hampshire and Hadlow College, Kent and then throughout the south east in the next two years.

Fresh Start, industry-funded and Defra-supported through the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy, is an initiative focused on encouraging new blood into farming and related rural businesses.

Denis Chamberlain, Chairman of the Fresh Start Stakeholder Group, said: "The Academy is a great initiative. It will provide a stimulating environment for potential agricultural entrepreneurs to add business skills to their technical knowledge. By involving consultants and land agents in

the Academy we can also identify possible business opportunities for entrants at the same time.

"The Academy involves three elements – matchmaking, training and mentoring. We are creating and refining a model which, eventually, can be rolled out across the country."

Stakeholders are drawn from across the industry. Barclays Bank is funding national co-ordinator, Steve Lindsay. The Sussex initiative is being co-ordinated by Douglas Jackson from the Burgess Hill office of agricultural consultants Laurence Gould and the whole effort is supported by organisations ranging from sector skills body, Lantra; NFU; Tenant Farmers Association; and the CLA, to professional bodies like CAAV and RICS and the National Trust.

Paul Coburn, Chairman of West Sussex Young Farmers Club, is a member of the Academy and is delighted by the positive feel to the initiative.

"The Academy is providing me with new opportunities and topping up my bank of knowledge and skills to make the most of these opportunities. It is attracting a very high calibre of speakers and tutors who are really inspiring Academy members. It is following a practical approach but is promoting agriculture as a positive career move."

ERDP schemes transfer date

From 1 October, administration of project-based schemes under the England Rural Development Programme will transfer to the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs).

Between now and October, the Rural Development Service will be processing all outstanding applications to the scheme which closed to new applicants on 30 June. Handing over administration of the schemes will take place on 29 September. Those involved in the scheme will receive a letter at that time containing details of their new contact point in the relevant RDA.

The RDAs will also be responsible for the delivery of socio-economic funds through the new programme which will run from 2007-2013. The RDAs will ensure that funding is prioritised within each region to reflect regional circumstances. This means there will be a greater emphasis on applications designed to address a long-term vision for each region, based on region-specific need and identification of priorities. The format may, therefore, be different in each region.

Defra, the RDAs and their regional partners will make sure that funds under the new programme can be accessed as soon as possible in 2007 following European Commission approval of the proposed England Programme.

In brief



Sustainable pesticide use

Are you following best practice for the storage, use and disposal of pesticides?

This spring Defra published its Strategy for the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products. It covers pesticides used to protect plants from pests, diseases and weeds.

The strategy aims to achieve high standards in environmental protection whilst maintaining the economic viability of crop production by:

- reducing pesticide contamination of surface and groundwater
- reducing the impact on biodiversity
- maintaining the quality and quantity of food produced
- promoting the development and use of a range of approaches to pest, disease and weed control which will help reduce dependence on chemical pesticides.

i For more information, go to <http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/environment.asp?id=70>

Tackling diffuse water pollution

As part of its plans to tackle diffuse water pollution in rivers, lakes, groundwaters and coastal waters and meeting Water Framework Directive requirements, the Government has now appointed a network of advisors to help farmers in priority areas or catchments, which cover 40 per cent of England's agricultural land. These 40 areas have been identified for action as they are most at risk of adverse environmental impact from diffuse water pollution from agriculture.

The network of advisors, known as Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers (CSFOs), will work with farmers and other stakeholders to encourage water-friendly farming practices such as protecting water courses, better soil protection, livestock management and manure management.

Officers are currently gathering information about the priority areas and preparing their action plans for engaging with farmers. This summer, Catchment Steering Groups will be set up to give local farmers a say in the findings and discuss activities to improve water quality. Farmers will be able to participate in workshops and

conferences and sign up for on-farm visits and demonstrations.

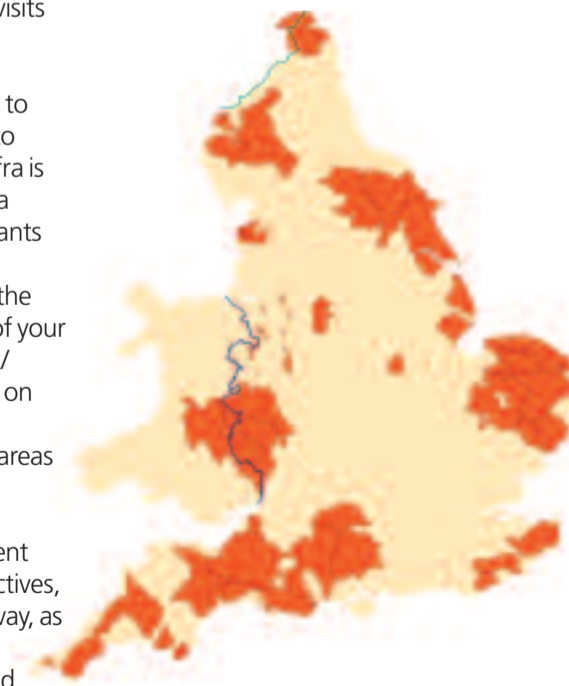
Next year, farmers in the priority catchments may be able to get grants to help towards the costs of converting to water-friendly farming practices – Defra is currently evaluating the responses to a consultation on a proposed capital grants scheme.

To find out if your farm is in one of the priority areas and get contact details of your area advisor, go to www.defra.gov.uk/farm/environment/water or call Defra on 0800 587 4079.

For farmers outside the 40 priority areas who are keen to adopt water-friendly farming practices, Defra is looking to support a number of existing catchment projects with the same aims and objectives, and which are delivered in the same way, as projects in the priority catchments.

All measures are part of the England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative (ECSFDI), a two-year £25m project launched this spring to help the country to take early voluntary action to tackle diffuse water pollution from agriculture, and help contribute to meeting the objectives of the EU's Water Framework Directive.

PRIORITY CATCHMENTS



England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative 2006-2008 Priority Catchments

— Scottish political boundary

— Welsh political boundary

Need advice on how the Single Payment affects your business?

Defra's Farm Business Advice Service can provide free, confidential business advice for farmers on the implications of the Single Payment Scheme. You can get advice over the phone and from clinics and workshops – contact the service in your region on the phone numbers below. Services may vary from region to region and the level of advice you receive will depend on your individual circumstances.

Devon and Cornwall 0845 600 9966

Somerset 0845 721 1112

Wessex (Dorset) 0845 458 8558

Wiltshire 0845 600 4141

Gloucestershire 0124 286 3863

West (Avon) 0127 537 3373

West Midlands 0845 365 1256

South East 0845 365 1257

North West 0870 870 7380

North East 0870 870 7381

Yorkshire and Humber 0870 870 7382

East Midlands 0870 870 7383

East of England 0870 870 7384

i For more information, visit www.defra.gov.uk/rds/farmadvice/default.htm

Crop management guide updated

A Guide to Managing Crop Establishment, originally produced in 2000 by the Soil Management Initiative Ltd, has been revised to include updated case studies.

This new revised version remains a practical, informed tool for farmers, advisors and the farming industry alike.

The guide demonstrates how management practices have changed over the past six years and the effects of these changes on the farming industry. Of course the case studies are not intended as a blueprint; under various circumstances different techniques would be more appropriate; a flexible approach is important.

It includes guidelines for the progressive adoption of improved cultivation practices – whether plough-based or via reduced cultivation. It also provides guidance to improve soil management, reduce input costs and protect both profitability and the environment.

The guide will also help you to complete your soil protection review and to complete the Entry Level Stewardship soil management plan.

i The guide is available from Defra Publications, Admiral 6000, London SW1A 2XX, email: defra@cabertown.co.uk or phone: 08459 556000. When placing your order, you must quote the full title, *A Guide to Managing Crop Establishment* and order code: PB11882.

Calendar

July - October 2006

July

Sunday 2 - Wednesday 5

- Royal Show at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire. www.royalshow.org.uk

Tuesday 11 - Thursday 13

- Great Yorkshire Show in Harrogate, Yorkshire. www.greatyorkshireshow.com/

Friday 21 - Sunday 30

- Annual Review of Controls of Imports of Animal Products April 05 - March 06 published

Friday 28 - Sunday 30

- CLA Game Fair at Broadlands in Romsey, Hampshire. www.gamefair.org.uk

September Thursday 14

- Westmorland County Show at Crooklands near Kendal in Cumbria. www.westmorland-county-show.co.uk

Wednesday 20 - Thursday 21

- Dairy Event at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire. www.dairyevent.co.uk

October

Wednesday 18

- Pesticides Residue Committee Open Business Meeting in York.

All dates were correct as we went to press but may be subject to change. Please check the Defra website for the latest information. There will be a Defra stand at the shows in the calendar.

Contacts

To order more copies, change your contact details or stop receiving **Farming Link** write, quoting your CPH number, to:

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Defra, Garman Road, London,
N17 0HW**

Tel: 020 8376 4468

Fax: 020 8885 7569

Email: defra@mba-group.com

For questions concerning **Defra activities:**

Defra helpline 08459 335 577

Costs charged at local rate

Email: helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk

The Defra helpline is a general information line for the public and stakeholders. If helpline staff are unable to provide information they will connect callers to other Defra staff who can deal with enquiries on specialist issues.

**Department for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)**

Nobel House, 17 Smith Square
London, SW1P 3JR

Tel: 020 7238 6000 (Switchboard)

Fax: 020 7238 6591

Website: www.defra.gov.uk

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London

SW1P 3JR

or email

farming.link@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Avian influenza

Protect your birds from bird flu

Biosecurity involves using good hygiene to reduce the risk of disease spread. If you keep birds, simple biosecurity measures can help to protect them. For example:

- Keep your birds away from wild birds as much as possible.

- Keep bird feed and any standing drinking water free from contamination by wild birds and other animals. This might mean feeding and watering undercover.
- Make sure your clothes, footwear and hands are clean before and after contact with your birds. Ensure visitors do the same.

Remember, be vigilant. If you suspect your birds are sick, contact your vet immediately.

Good biosecurity makes sense at all times.

Visit the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk or call 08459 335577 for more information.

