



**Texel Sheep Society response to DEFRA's Health and Harmony consultation on the future of farming in the UK.**

*The Texel Sheep Society is the largest sheep breed Society in the UK, with a membership of 2300 breeders and the largest registry of Texel sheep in the world. British Texels are the most prominent terminal sire in the UK sheep sector, representing 30% of all sires used, while Texel cross females make up 12.5% of the UK national flock.*

***A recent study by the leading New Zealand genetics & Business consultancy firm highlighted;***

**The future financial benefits of genetic improvement from the use of the Texel breed are predicted to be significant. The estimated financial benefits of genetic improvement between 2016 until 2035 (20 years) amount to £244.2 million, or £23.1 million annually. The benefits can be attributed both an increased penetration or market share of the Texel breed, and also accelerating rates of genetic progress in economically important traits.**

*The breed has a huge influence on the UK sheep sector and the Society and its breeders are making significant progressive strides in the field of genetic improvement to further serve the UK industry. The Society's collaborative work with partners in the R&D and meat processing sectors is groundbreaking and targeted at improving both disease resilience, farmers' ability to meet processor requirements and the consumer eating experience.*

*The Society actively engages with a large number of industry organisations both in the UK and overseas and firmly supports the need for UK sheep farmers to adapt and modify their systems in order to maximise output in the most efficient manner possible.*

#### **P19 questions**

**Please rank the following ideas for simplification of the current CAP, indicating the three options which are most appealing to you:**

- a) Develop further simplified packages - A**
- b) Simplify the application form - D**
- c) Expand the online offer - B**
- d) Reduce evidence requirements in the rest of the scheme - C**

#### **P23 questions**

**What is the best way of applying reductions to Direct Payments? Please select your preferred option from the following:**



- a) **Apply progressive reductions, with higher percentage reductions applied to amounts in higher payment bands**
- b) **Apply a cap to the largest payments**
- c) **Other – X**

There is no 'best way' of applying reductions to direct payments. Any reductions to direct payments will harm businesses in one way or another. While larger businesses can harness economies of scale they are also more exposed to the risk that is inherent in the agricultural sector.

Larger businesses benefit rural communities in providing employment and investing in rural infrastructure and committing to the future of rural communities and containing their spend in the rural economy.

**What conditions should be attached to Direct Payments during the 'agricultural transition'?**  
Please select your preferred options from the following:

- a) **Retain and simplify the current requirements by removing all of the greening rules**
- b) **Retain and simplify cross compliance rules and their enforcement**
- c) **Make payments to current recipients who are allowed to leave the land, using the payment to help them do so**
- d) **Other**

Direct payments during the transition phase should be made by retaining and simplifying the current requirements and removing greening rules while also simplifying cross compliance and its enforcement.

**What are the factors that should drive the profile for reducing Direct Payments during the 'agricultural transition'?**

Reducing direct payments during the transition phase places a great number of businesses at risk and should only be considered once full transition terms, including trade agreements with the remaining EU27 are known.

**How long should the 'agricultural transition' period be?**

The agricultural transition must be a minimum of five years due to the complex and long-term nature of agricultural production cycles. Change in agriculture is determined by these cycles and cannot be undertaken at the flick of a switch. For some sectors, such as beef and dairy even a five year transition could be challenging.

**How can we improve the take-up of knowledge and advice by farmers and land managers? Please rank your top three options by order of preference:**

- a) **Encouraging benchmarking and farmer-to-farmer learning -**



- b) Working with industry to improve standards and coordination - B
- c) Better access to skills providers and resources - A
- d) Developing formal incentives to encourage training and career development -
- e) Making Continuing Professional Development (CPD) a condition of any future grants or loans - C
- f) Other (please specify)

There would be great benefit to the industry in tying future support payments to a form of CPD for all farm staff which could be delivered at a local and regional level through local agricultural colleges. Colleges have struggled to diversify and exist in many areas, removing this proven and useful resource from local and regional farming communities.

This would help ensure all farm staff remain up to date with the latest developments in health and safety, animal health and welfare, pest and disease management, resource and environmental management and air and water quality management.

Decentralising delivery of this CPD would enable it to be tailored to local production and environmental systems and requirements, which are diverse across English regions, while also enabling it to be delivered in a setting which those involved will find comfortable, engaging, convenient and within the travel budget of low skilled workers.

Furthermore, localized delivery will garner support for local agricultural colleges and enable these institutions to better engage with the local and regional farming community, enabling better provision for learning and CPD in future and an adaption of the knowledge they are exchanging with the local community.

This CPD requirement should be required for all employees within a business retained for more than six months to limit the impact on seasonal employees. It should be targeted at upskilling the permanent workforce on farms to enable career progression and higher standards at all levels in the supply chain to garner improvement in knowledge and productivity at the farm level.

P26 questions

**What are the main barriers to new capital investment that can boost profitability and improve animal and plant health on-farm? Please rank your top three options by order of the biggest issues:**

- a) Insufficient access to support and advice -
- b) Uncertainty about the future and where to target new investment - A
- c) Difficulties with securing finance from private lenders -



- d) Investments in buildings, innovation or new equipment are prohibitively expensive - **B**
- e) Underlying profitability of the business -
- f) 'Social' issues (such as lack of succession or security of tenure) - **C**
- g) Other (please specify) -

**What are the most effective ways to support new entrants and encourage more young people into a career in farming and land management?**

Young people should be shown the breadth of careers open to them in agriculture and encouraged to pursue careers as both employers and employees. This is NOT achieved through school careers advisors, which is seriously lacking!

Access to low interest funding on flexible terms will be essential to the development of young people at all levels in the farming industry and enable them to progress within the farming industry.

**Does existing tenancy law present barriers to new entrants, productivity and investment?**

FBTs offering short-term tenancies with little or no long-term security make planning and investment hard to impossible and provide challenges to securing funding and ensuring long-term business planning.

While lifetime tenancies can result in reductions in land values and inhibit landowners, there needs to be some effort to recognise the needs of tenants in planning secure and sound futures.

## **P28 questions**

**What are the priority research topics that industry and government should focus on to drive improvements in productivity and resource efficiency? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:**

- a) Plant and animal breeding and genetics - **A**
- b) Crop and livestock health and animal welfare - **B**
- c) Data driven smart and precision agriculture - **C**
- d) Managing resources sustainably, including agro-chemicals -
- e) Improving environmental performance, including soil health -
- f) Safety and trust in the supply chain -
- g) Other (please specify) -

**How can industry and government put farmers in the driving seat to ensure that agricultural R&D delivers what they need? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:**

- a) Encouraging a stronger focus on near-market applied agricultural R&D - **C**



- b) Bringing groups of farms together in research syndicates to deliver practical solutions - B
- c) Accelerating the 'proof of concept' testing of novel approaches to agricultural constraints -
- d) Giving the farming industry a greater say in setting the strategic direction for research funding - A
- e) Other (please specify)

Levy funds should be directed through a similar system as the successful Innovate UK funding regime currently does, allowing it to be targeted at research which is capable of delivering meaningful results which can have maximum benefit for commercial businesses that are investing their own private funds.

This would provide extra value to the research funds, by matching private and levy funds to meet commercially important areas. Retaining a keen focus on productivity, profitability and sustainability in farming or all types and delivered as locally to farmers as possible. It should seek to encourage collaboration between farmers, researchers and others in the supply chain to foster the best possible uptake and collaboration to deliver new technology and development of innovation and entrepreneurship at all levels of the industry.

This is an area of the current use of levy funds which is inefficient and unproductive, with levy directed to R&D requiring significant use of financial overhead to deliver, manage and monitor the funding. When a proven successful system is already in place through Innovate UK mechanism or CIEL.

This duplication should be considered as potential waste of funds.

**What are the main barriers to adopting new technology and ideas on-farm, and how can we overcome them?**

The main barriers to the adoption of new technology and ideas are largely financial. New technology often comes at considerable cost and low margins within the farming sector.

In many areas of their businesses UK farmers are highly innovative and entrepreneurial and rapidly adopt and adapt new technologies. However, accessing funding for these new technologies is often difficult and must be balanced with other priorities, particularly in younger businesses.

There are challenges in both the adoption of new technologies and changing the culture within the industry to adapt production systems to ensure productivity can be maximised from existing resources while promoting environmental diversity.



### **P30 questions-**

**What are the priority skills gaps across UK agriculture? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:**

- a) Business / financial - **A**
- b) Risk management - **B**
- c) Leadership -
- d) Engineering - **C**
- e) Manufacturing -
- f) Research -
- g) Other (please specify)

**What can industry do to help make agriculture and land management a great career choice?**

Industry needs to recognise and where possible challenge the long-hours culture which exists in the sector and provide clear, structured career paths to allow young people to progress in both on-farm and off-farm roles.

It should also demonstrate at every opportunity, including careers fairs and through targeting of schools careers officers the modern nature of the industry and the high level of technology now used within the industry to encourage young people to engage with the sector.

Improved cooperation and investment in local agricultural colleges can make a significant impact on ensuring the agricultural industry is fit for the future with another generation of young people keen and enthused about its future.

**How can government support industry to build the resilience of the agricultural sector to meet labour demand?**

Government must promote a platform for attracting, upskilling and retaining labour for the agricultural sector from both the UK and overseas through a reinvigorated seasonal workers scheme.

The availability of seasonal labour to much of the horticultural sector is vital for a productive, competitive UK industry able to deliver, safe, affordable food in a sustainable manner for the UK population.

Failing to do so will result in the exporting of production overseas to territories where production and environmental standards cannot be guaranteed or controlled. This is an unacceptable option which fails to deliver for either UK producers or consumers.



## P35 questions

Which of the environmental outcomes listed below do you consider to be the most important public goods that government should support? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) Improved soil health - **A**
- b) Improved water quality - **B**
- c) Better air quality -
- d) Increased biodiversity -
- e) Climate change mitigation - **C**
- f) Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment -

Of the other options listed below, which do you consider to be the most important public goods that government should support? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) World-class animal welfare - **C**
- b) High animal health standards - **B**
- c) Protection of crops, tree, plant and bee health -
- d) Improved productivity and competitiveness - **A**
- e) Preserving rural resilience and traditional farming and landscapes in the uplands -
- f) Public access to the countryside -

Are there any other public goods which you think the government should support?

Competitive food production is the most important public good provided by the farming sector. Government must recognise the value the UK agricultural industry delivers in terms of maintaining current levels of food self-sufficiency and progressing self sufficiency to higher levels to limit UK consumers' exposure to food price volatility resulting from an over reliance on world trade.

Changing consumer demand and consumption patterns will doubtless affect all of the above, but more than ever a greater consumer awareness of how and where their food is produced means high standards in all aspects of production are essential.

A greater focus on animal derived food integrity is vital to secure the UK's role as a leading global producer of safe and healthy animal derived food to maximise consumer trust in British food.

This will require improved cooperation and collaboration across the entire food supply chain from government through to farmers, processors, retailers and consumers. All have a part to play in making the British food and farming industry the best in the world and one capable of supplying healthy food to a nation.



In addition the socio-economic impact of future farming policies, particularly in less favoured areas, must be fully appreciated and considered. There are huge benefits to rural communities from sensible, pragmatic agricultural policies, both directly and indirectly through the sustaining of rural communities and economies.

#### **P42 questions**

**From the list below, please select which outcomes would be best achieved by incentivising action across a number of farms or other land parcels in a future environmental land management system:**

- a) Recreation
- b) Water quality - B
- c) Flood mitigation
- d) Habitat restoration
- e) Species recovery
- f) Soil quality - A
- g) Cultural heritage
- h) Carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas reduction - C
- i) Air quality
- j) Woodlands and forestry
- k) Other (please specify)

**What role should outcome based payments have in a new environmental land management system?**

All environmental payments should be based on some sort of outcome measure, but care must be taken not to put stringent requirements in place which cannot be achieved in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

**How can an approach to a new environmental land management system be developed that balances national and local priorities for environmental outcomes?**

All future environmental schemes must take account of the needs of the local environment and aim to fulfill the needs to localized environmental areas. These priorities should be set in consultation with those involved in local environmental management, crucially, those with interests in farming the land.

**How can farmers and land managers work together or with third parties to deliver environmental outcomes?**

Farmers and land managers already work with a wide range of individuals and organisations to deliver local and national environmental outcomes. Care must be taken to ensure any future



environmental schemes recognise the key role farmers play in the success of delivering environmental improvements and maintenance on a day to day basis outside of schemes.

There is an increasing need for harmony between any productivity compromise resulting from a focus on improving the environment. It must be remembered that England has a hugely diverse land use, climate and topography and is facing a huge population rise challenge. All of these must be considered in equality along with regulatory challenges, such as planning restrictions imposed upon rural businesses as they attempt to expand and adapt to changing consumer demands.

#### **P45 questions**

**Do you think there is a strong case for government funding pilots and other schemes which incentivise and deliver improved welfare?**

**Should government set further standards to ensure greater consistency and understanding of welfare information at the point of purchase? Please indicate a single preference of the below options:**

- a) Yes
- b) Yes, as long as it does not present an unreasonable burden to farmers - **Y**
- c) Perhaps in some areas
- d) No, it should be up to retailers and consumers
- e) Other (please specify)

**\*if you answered 'perhaps in some areas', please elaborate.**

**What type of action do you feel is most likely to have the biggest impact on improving animal health on farms? Please rank your top three choices from the below list, in order of importance:**

- a) Use of regulation to ensure action is taken -
- b) Use of financial incentives to support action - **A**
- c) Supporting vets to provide targeted animal health advice on farm - **C**
- d) Making it easier for retailers and other parts of the supply chain to recognise and reward higher standards of animal health - **B**
- e) An industry body with responsibility for promoting animal health -
- f) Research and knowledge exchange -
- g) Transparent and easily accessible data -
- h) An understanding of animal health standards on comparable farms
- i) Other (please specify)
- j) N/A – Cannot rank as they are all equally important.

**How can the government best support industry to develop an ambitious plan to tackle endemic diseases and drive up animal health standards?**



Government can help in a number of ways. Firstly by making greater investment in disease surveillance and monitoring to ensure all involved in the farming sector adequately understand the key disease challenges facing UK farmers and their livestock.

Parallel to this should be investment in research into key endemic diseases to aid development of breeding programmes to breed animals resistant or resilient to endemic diseases, particularly production limiting diseases such as mastitis, footrot in sheep, as well as TB and digital dermatitis in cattle.

Work by the British Texel Sheep Society is already underway to identify bloodlines resistant to mastitis, footrot and Maedi Visna within the breed, further government support to extend this work and encourage its uptake among the wider sheep industry could rapidly reduce the incidence of these two endemic diseases in the UK national flock, lifting productivity and significantly reducing reliance on antibiotics to treat these conditions among the sheep sector.

Eradication schemes for other endemic diseases, such as BVD and Johnes in cattle and maedi visna in sheep should also be explored, while development and use of vaccines for other endemic issues should also be explored.

And, as the UK leaves the EU, the UK government must ensure future imports of breeding stock and germplasm into the UK have known, high health status to ensure the health of UK livestock is not compromised by the importation of disease as has been the case in the past.

P48 questions –

**How should farming, land management and rural communities continue to be supported to deliver environmental, social and cultural benefits in the uplands? There are a number of challenges facing rural communities and businesses.**

**Please rank your top three options by order of importance:**

- a) Broadband coverage - **B**
- b) Mobile phone coverage -
- c) Access to finance -
- d) Affordable housing - **C**
- e) Availability of suitable business accommodation -
- f) Access to skilled labour - **A**
- g) Transport connectivity -
- h) Other, please specify -

**With reference to the way you have ranked your answer to the previous question, what should government do to address the challenges faced by rural communities and businesses post-EU Exit?**



Government must ensure it allows access to overseas labour where required within the agricultural and horticultural sectors, crucially on a seasonal basis in the fruit and vegetable sectors and also on an ongoing basis in the meat processing and packaging and distribution sectors.

Ensuring rural business are able to compete in the digital age is fundamental to the future of the rural economy and will be increasingly important in time to come.

An increasing level of trade is being done via the internet and various online portals, meaning access to reliable high speed broadband is vital for the survival of many rural businesses.

Rural communities and businesses must have good local transport links to be able to attract both local and non-local labour and customers and to support local enterprises in developing to their fullest potential.

Likewise affordable rural housing is essential to ensure rural labour forces can be retained and accommodated in the areas where they are required and rural communities and services can be sustained, including schools, post offices, shops etc... Further degradation of rural services and businesses will result in significant migration out of rural areas, leaving many rural businesses without sufficient available labour.

Younger people can be retained in rural communities if communications, such as broadband and transport links allow them to have a standard of living comparable to their non-rural dwelling counterparts. Business and social opportunities will help ensure skilled labour can be recruited and retained in rural communities.

P51 questions

**How can we improve inspections for environmental, animal health and welfare standards? Please indicate any of your preferred options below.**

- a) Greater use of risk-based targeting - C
- b) Greater use of earned recognition, for instance for membership of assurance schemes - A
- c) Increased remote sensing -
- d) Increased options for self-reporting - B
- e) Better data sharing amongst government agencies - D
- f) Other (please specify)

There should also be an opportunity to recognise membership of approved breeding schemes and organisations, such as those which are zootechnical recognized or have significant engagement into objective measurement recording programmes that utilise breeding values over and above sole use of pedigree.



P54 questions

**What factors most affect farm businesses' decisions on whether to buy agricultural insurance? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:**

- a) Desire to protect themselves from general risks (e.g. – revenue protection) – **B**
- b) Desire to protect themselves from specific risks (e.g. – flooding, pests or disease) – **A**
- c) Provision of government compensation for some risks – **C**
- d) Cost of insurance -
- e) Complexity and administrative burden of insurance -
- f) Availability of relevant insurance products -
- g) Other (please specify) –

**What additional skills, data and tools would help better manage volatility in agricultural production and revenues for (a) farm businesses and (b) insurance providers?**

**How can current arrangements for managing market crises and providing crisis support be improved?**

**How can we improve transparency and relationships across the food supply chain? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:**

- a) Promoting Producer Organisations and other formal structures? – **B**
- b) Introducing statutory codes of conduct? – **A**
- c) Improving the provision of data on volumes, stocks and prices etc.? – **C**
- d) Other (please specify)? -

**What are the biggest barriers to collaboration amongst farmers? –**

The biggest barriers to collaboration are usually trust, need and benefits. There is often a lack of trust, with many farmers not seeing the need or benefits from collaborating.



However, there is often unrecognized collaboration between farmers through organisations such as breed societies. The Texel Sheep Society's recent work in driving collaboration in research and development projects, utilising Innvate UK and CIEL, with partners in the research and development and processing sectors, is a clear indication of the direction of travel required in the industry to deliver change for the future.

**What are the most important benefits that collaboration between farmers and other parts of the supply chain can bring? How could government help to enable this?**

Major benefits can be realized through greater collaboration in research and development as outlined above with the potential to deliver meaningful and significant change in production systems across the UK industry. However, the most important benefit to be realized through collaboration is an improvement in profitability in businesses and across the sector.

P60 questions

**With reference to the principles set out by JMC(EN) above, what are the agriculture and land management policy areas where a common approach across the UK is necessary?**

All areas of agricultural and environmental management policy should be broadly similar across the UK, with the same fundamental principles in force in all countries in the Union. There are already areas of policy in other sectors which differ across the devolved nation and have a significant impact on socio-economic affairs in communities across the UK.

**What are the likely impacts on cross-border farms if each administration can tailor its own agriculture and land management policy?**

There will be varying impacts on cross border holdings depending on the policies implemented by each administration. Coordinated policy frameworks are required across these administrations to reduce the negative impact on cross border holdings.

One only has to look at the disparity in student funding across the devolved nations to see the massive impact variance in funding policy can have in the delivery of key public goods. Disadvantaging youth based solely on their residential post code.

Divergence in agricultural policy, both in terms of future support payments and future regulation could cause significant disparity in businesses which have common trading partners and cross-border trading arrangements.



P63 questions

**How far do you agree or disagree with the broad priorities set out in the trade chapter?**

International trade arrangements must not negatively impact on UK farmers by allowing imports from countries with lower animal welfare and production standards than exist and are required in the UK.

Imports from other countries potentially have lower standards, but UK importers are often unaware of standards in use in countries from which they are importing.

Reducing standards within the UK is not something the UK public would condone and, therefore, it is essential that future imports meet UK basic standards in all aspects before being offered for sale to UK consumers to ensure UK farmers are able to compete on the same level as overseas suppliers.

**How can government and industry work together to open up new markets?**

Government and industry should work together to promote the high standards applied in UK production chains and the high quality of produce as a result. However, this must not be done at the expense of promotion and any promotion done to open up new markets should be coordinated across the devolved nations under a single British brand to demonstrate a coordinated and collaborative approach to marketing. With the value of provenance also adding value where appropriate and to support those regional products.

More than 35% of UK sheepmeat consumption is exported, with a similar level imported as a result of seasonal production and trading patterns within the sheepmeat sector.

As food supply chains across the globe become increasingly integrated it is vital that UK producers are allowed maximum opportunity to trade both domestically and internationally.

**How can we best protect and promote our brand, remaining global leaders in environmental protection, food safety, and in standards of production and animal welfare?**

This should be done through inward and outward missions from and to potential export markets and demonstrating the high standards first hand to key influencers. Crucially, this should be the responsibility of one single pan-UK organization without political influence or confusion.

**P64 questions -**



### **How far do you agree with the proposed powers of the Agriculture Bill?**

In principle the powers outlined in the command paper are a logical transition from CAP. However, there is much more detail required before any significant comment can be made about the future direction of UK policy.

However, a five year transition is short in terms of agricultural production cycles and the UK government appears to lack sufficient in depth knowledge of the industry and specific sectors to make informed decisions. Greater importance must be placed on accurate measures of performance and success in the agricultural industry to ensure government is well informed in its decision making process.

A number of other countries have already made giant leaps in genetic progress ahead of the UK and this must be rectified from the outset to allow the UK livestock sectors to compete on a global stage, but by also ensuring a healthy competition exists within the sectors to drive further efficiency and productivity.

### **What other measures might we need in the Agriculture Bill to achieve our objectives?**

A revision of UK Agriculture marketing is urgently overdue to ensure levy funds are being appropriately used to support the marketing and promotion of UK agricultural produce both domestically and internationally. This has been identified by major stakeholders as a critical area of weakness of the current levy body.

No matter how efficiently and environmentally sensitively UK farmers produce food if there is insufficient appropriate marketing and promotion it will be for nowt. UK farmers deserve to see their levy funds used in the best way possible through promotion and education around food.