



All-Party Parliamentary Group for Farming Inquiry

“The Future of Farming after the Agriculture Bill”

Why the report is necessary:

Whilst other All-Party Parliamentary Groups have focused on specific farming sectors, and interrelated areas such as the environment, until recently there has been no single cross-party Parliamentary Group that focused entirely on Farming.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Farming (APPGF) was established in late 2017 to promote all aspects of farming and contribute to policy making as the industry prepares to leave the European Union.

In late 2018 the APPGF held a short inquiry with the aims of:

- Establishing how farmers can contribute to the protection and enhancement of the environment – the public good – while continuing to produce food profitably under the new framework established by the Agriculture Bill.
- Understanding how new arrangements can be put in place to ensure providing public good is consistent with other policy objectives and plans for public expenditure.
- Producing a set of written recommendations that can be submitted to the Secretary of State and Parliament as the legislation evolves and is amended.

Progress of the Agriculture Bill:

- The progress of the Agriculture Bill was significantly impacted by Parliamentary Business around the UK leaving the EU and the APPGF report was therefore delayed. Continuation of the Bill was confirmed in the Queen's speech on 14th October 2019.
- Evidence, both in person at two meetings and from written information was provided by a broad representation of farming including:

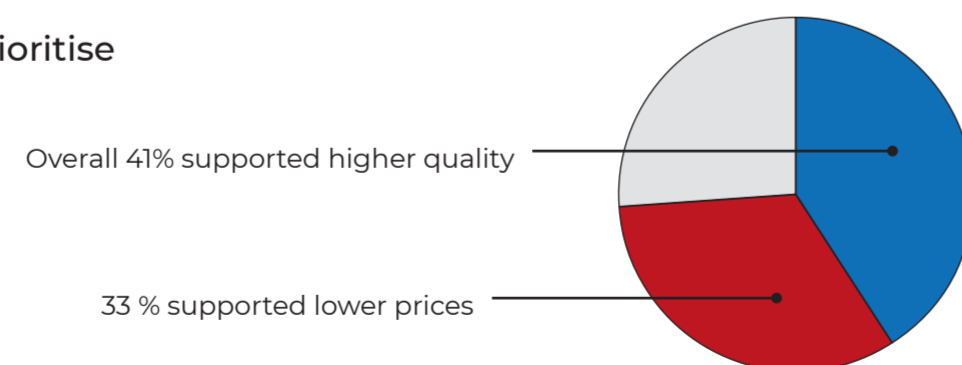


Key themes from evidence provided to the APPGF:

- The Agricultural Bill was widely welcomed as an improved framework for sustainable farming, improved animal health and welfare, restoration and management of soil and water resources, avoiding medicines resistance, climate change amelioration, flood prevention, and for the natural environment and its support, especially as compared to the current EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- There is a remarkable lack of focus in the Bill on food, and this is detrimental not just for farmers but also for consumers and the Government. At the time of the inquiry, no work on the Government's own Food Strategy had been progressed but since the inquiry, organisations such as the NFU are now producing their own food plans, working with interested groups. In addition, the National Food Strategy has been launched to work with a range of organisations from various sectors. The delivery of food quality and security is an important public good outcome, whether this is via the Agricultural Bill or another integrated mechanism.
- A compelling theme was assuring food standards that deliver high food quality, food safety and environmental and animal protection. Evidence showed that World Trade Organisation rules do support a range of trade measures that would protect standards in these areas, if based on scientific factors and/or public morals, and if consistently applied. There was real concern that even if Defra was minded towards high food standards, its views would be secondary to international trade considerations.
- The public would appear to support such a focus on food quality and wider environmental and animal protection.
- The Agriculture Bill is an enabling Bill, and the Government appears determined to keep it that way during its parliamentary scrutiny. This makes parliamentary scrutiny of the subsequent secondary legislation of all these related Bills crucial to ensure effective policies and delivery for farming.
- Workforce skills issues are not confined to the farming industry itself. Evidence from delivery outcomes and the recent report from the Institute of Government would indicate the sector specific expertise and knowledge base appears to be in considerable decline, in part due to high staff turnover, in Defra and its agencies.
- Farmers are also looking for integrated delivery and regulation of policies and legislation. A single integrated farm/land business plan should be able to accommodate sustainable and profitable farming, improved animal health and welfare, avoiding medicines resistance, restoration and management of soil and water resources, raising productivity, flood prevention, and support the natural environment. Regulation should be based around delivery of this integrated plan and included outcomes from the Stacey review of regulation. Support for capital investments to progress changes are also important as ongoing support, and these approaches should also allow coordinated and cooperative local action by farmers to be accommodated.
- Farming is a long term enterprise subject to cyclic factors. One area of the CAP that was commended was its seven-year period in line with the EU budget cycle. UK Taxation policy already recognises a five year cycle for farming, and there remain substantial concern that the Agriculture Bill, the Trade Bill, the Environment Plan and Bill, and the Food Plan do not recognise the long term nature of farming. The absence in the Bill of long term Rural Development provisions, the role of the Shared Prosperity Fund, and the impact this would have on farming was noted.

A public survey of 1200 respondents conducted in May 2018 by Censuswide on behalf of the APPGF found:

When asked "Should UK food policy prioritise lower prices or higher quality?"



When asked "After Brexit, which should British farmers prioritise more: producing food or protecting the environment and animals?"



Recommendations for Parliamentarians

The objectives and delivery of the Agriculture Bill, the Trade Bill, the Environment Plan and Bill, and the Food Plan require significantly more transparent policy coordination and greater parliamentary scrutiny, and this would include related secondary legislation.

It is recommended that details of the various bills are challenged. Including:

- How will the Agriculture Bill, the Trade Bill, the Environment Plan and Bill, and the Food Plan be fully integrated for food, farming, the environment and consumers.
- How there will be full parliamentary review of secondary legislation in these areas?
- How food quality and security will be supported as public goods?
- Who is responsible for setting Trade Standards for agricultural products, what role will there be for using the 'public morals' provision, and how will the impact of Trade Standards on farming be balanced with consumers considerations?
- What is the future funding cycle for support for farming, and how will farmers be assured that changes will not be introduced at short notice?
- How will farmers who are already delivering public goods be equitably supported in comparison to those who will require support to achieve public good outcomes?
- How can farmers be assured of the delivery of support that is straightforward, coordinated, integrated, and outcome based, with low-impact regulatory oversight, and that is implemented through farm/land business plans that allows them to work both individually and in cooperation with others?
- How will the skill base, within farming be developed to improve productivity, and within Government to develop and deliver policy in this area, and be assured for the long term?
- How will Rural Development be supported after the UK leaves the EU, how will the Shared Prosperity Fund operate, and how will it be integrated with farming?





"The Bill is a good framework to move away from the Common Agricultural Policy, but it does not do justice to food"



"A multi-annual framework is essential for the delivery of environmental public good and investment in farming. A provision for Rural Development needs to be included in the Bill"



"It is vital that UK standards are not undermined by cheap low-quality food. World Trade Organisation case law shows that countries can require imports to meet animal welfare trade standards equivalent to its own standards"



"Our future agricultural policy should seek to ensure those farming the UK's land can continue to produce safe, quality, affordable food within the marketplace, to deliver environmental goods and to maintain our high animal welfare standards. It must also recognise the interconnectedness of these outcomes – if farms are not operating as productive and resilient food producers, they will fail to deliver the environmental and other public goods society benefits from."



"The UK public rightly expect high standards of animal welfare on our farms. Good animal health is a bedrock on which good welfare outcomes can be built. This Bill offers an opportunity to raise animal health and welfare standards for all producers beyond the legal minimum."



"Well equipped and healthy farms properly invested in for the long term, efficient and productive farms producing quality products, minimising waste and losses and optimising effort and investment, with Incentive and reward for a wide range of public good and benefit aligned to regional and national interests and priorities can be delivered by a 'smart' integrated farm plan that makes a statement over where the business is going and its needs"



"The new system (for public good funding) must make business sense for farmers. Without their buy-in and support we risk missing an opportunity to deliver sustainable improvement to our natural environment and cost effective delivery of public good and services"

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