

Date : Friday 16 July 2010
No : Issue 5
Contact : Sarah Anderson
Telephone : 0131 472 4108
Email : sarah.anderson@nfus.org.uk

The Parliamentary Update is a record of recent and upcoming events in the Scottish Parliament, Westminster and the European Parliament, including committee work, debates and questions, both written and oral, to the Scottish and UK Governments. For further information about any aspect of this document please contact Sarah Anderson on 0131 472 4108 or e-mail sarah.anderson@nfus.org.uk

IN THIS ISSUE

Feed-in Tariffs	1
Bees	2
Bovine Tuberculosis: Disease Control	2
Genetically Modified Organisms	3
Phytophthora Ramorum	4
EU Law	4
Poultry: Animal Welfare	5
June Agriculture and Fisheries Council	5
Rural Communities	6
Taskforce on Farming Regulation	6
Injuries and Fatalities	9
EU Food Labelling	9

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday 15th July

Feed-in Tariffs



Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change when he expects to make an announcement on a feed-in tariff rate for biomethane injection into the grid.



Gregory Barker: The Government are committed to increasing the amount of renewable heat in the UK; this is a crucial part of ensuring we meet our renewables targets, cutting carbon and ensuring energy security. We are committed to introducing measures to promote a huge increase in energy from waste through anaerobic digestion. Central to this will be work to facilitate an increase in the number of anaerobic digestion facilities producing biomethane from waste, which can be injected into the grid. We are currently looking at the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) proposals. Clearly there are benefits to the scheme, but we must also consider the impact of the costs, particularly given the financial constraints we must work

within and the potential impact that funding options could have on vulnerable people. We do want to provide certainty and clarity as quickly as possible but want to be sure that we are making the right decisions. We will look to make an announcement on the future of the proposed scheme as soon as possible.

Bees



Jeremy Lefroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research her Department has carried out on the effects of neonicotinoids on the honey bee population.



Mr Paice: As part of its pesticides research programme the Government fund a number of projects in support of the development of the pesticides risk assessment process. A number of these relate specifically to the potential impact of pesticides on honeybees, both from the wide scale professional use and home-garden use of insecticides. These projects were completed last year and final reports have been published. Previous work on the risk posed to honeybees by systemic insecticides, such as imidacloprid, has fed into the international risk assessment models for honeybees due to be adopted later this year by the European Plant Protection Office.

The rigorous EU scientific process for approval of pesticide active substances and the supporting national processes for individual products protect human health and the environment, including wildlife, provided products are used in accordance with the approval and any related conditions. This approval process takes account of the potential impact on bees. The Government will, of course, act immediately on any concrete evidence of adverse impacts of pesticides on bees in the UK.

Bovine Tuberculosis: Disease Control



Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research her Department has commissioned on the (a) possible links between badgers and bovine tuberculosis and (b) possible preventative measures; and what the results of such research have been.

Mr Paice: The information is as follows:

(a) The largest single piece of research on badgers and bovine TB is the Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT), carried out by the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB. The ISG's final report, published in 2007, explicitly states that badgers contribute significantly to the disease in cattle.

(b) The RBCT examined the impact of two different badger culling strategies on TB incidence in cattle. Results showed that annual proactive culling was associated with a 23% reduction in TB incidence in cattle herds in culled areas, but a 25% increase in TB incidence in herds in the surrounding 2 km un-culled ring. The increase in surrounding areas is thought to be due to changes in badger behaviour following social disturbance brought about by culling-the "perturbation effect". Since the end of the RBCT, regular monitoring of TB incidence has shown continued benefits of culling on TB incidence in proactively culled areas for at least 3.5 years after culling. A beneficial effect was also observed in the 2 km ring surrounding culled areas for 2.5 years immediately after culling stopped. Reactive, localised culling was stopped by Ministers in November 2003 as early interim results from the reactively culled areas showed an increase of 18.9% new confirmed TB cattle herd incidents when compared with survey-only areas.

DEFRA has been funding research into badger vaccines since 1998. An injectable badger vaccine has been shown to be both safe and effective in experimental studies and is now licensed for use. Research continues into an oral badger vaccine. Modelling work to help us understand the effect of vaccination, in isolation and in combination with culling, is ongoing.

In 2005, DEFRA commissioned a project to examine the effectiveness of biosecurity measures to prevent badger visits to farm buildings. This project finished in October 2009. It found that badger exclusion measures could, if properly employed and maintained, prevent 100% of badger visits to farm buildings, but that compliance varied widely among farmers.

Research into immunocontraception as a method of controlling badger numbers is being funded through programmes elsewhere in DEFRA. As the results will be relevant to TB control, DEFRA's TB Programme will review the findings of this study when they become available.

Genetically Modified Organisms



Mr Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what projects on public attitudes to genetically-modified crops, food and feed her Department has funded since 1997; what the (a) topic, (b) start date, (c) cost and (d) project code was of each such project; who the main contractor was in each case; and which such projects have been completed to date.

Mr Paice: DEFRA part-funded the 'GM Nation' public debate that was planned and run by an independent steering board in 2002 and 2003. The board appointed the Central Office of Information as the prime contractor for the debate. The total cost was £562,000 of which DEFRA contributed £282,000. Other funding contributions were made by the former Department of Trade and Industry and the devolved Administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This was not a research project as such and therefore did not have a project code.

DEFRA also funded a research project, code CB02023, on the willingness of consumers to pay to reduce or eliminate GM products or derivatives from the supply chain. The contract started in April 2003 and ended in January 2004; it was carried out by the University of Manchester at a cost of £94,550.

Phytophthora Ramorum



Dr Wollaston: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent estimate she has made of the rate at which phytophthora ramorum is spreading (a) nationally and (b) in the South West; (2) what recent estimate she has made of the geographical extent of phytophthora ramorum.

Mr Paice: Since the first detection of *Phytophthora ramorum* in Sussex in May 2002, a systematic programme of surveys has been carried out by the Food and Environment Research Agency and the Forestry Commission covering nurseries, garden centres, woodland and other sites in the wider environment, with action being taken to destroy infected plants that posed a risk of further spread, especially *Rhododendrons*.

While the disease caused by the pathogen has spread, and is now found in much of the south-west of England and Wales, occasionally in other parts of the south of England, and to a much lesser extent in Scotland, the rate of spread and the intensity of infection has been slowed by the action taken.

In August 2009, the pathogen was found for the first time in Japanese larch, a commercial forestry tree species, at sites in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset, and surveys have found a number of further sites where trees have been infected. These surveys have intensified and are ongoing, supported by aerial surveillance by helicopter. Infected sites totalling around 1,850 hectares have been found in Devon, Cornwall, Somerset and in South Wales. The evidence suggests that all of the woodlands that have been found with dead and dying larch could have become infected as a result of a weather event causing aerial spread, possibly in 2008. The extent of subsequent spread is still being investigated.

EU Law



Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the cost to her Department of compliance with regulations arising from EU obligations in the last 12 months.

Mr Paice: The last estimate of the cost of EU regulation to British businesses made by DEFRA was contained in the second Forward Regulatory Programme published in April 2010. This

publication includes new regulatory costs stemming from the EU between April 2010 and April 2011. DEFRA has not to date estimated the overall cost of either all individual EU regulation or domestic regulation, however we are currently reviewing our regulatory landscape (both stock and pipeline measures) in line with commitments made in the coalition agreement to significantly strengthen the approach to reducing the burden of regulation.

We also recently announced two specific reviews which will capture and scrutinise regulation originating from the EU. The Task Force on Farming Regulation, announced on 9 June, has been set up to identify ways to reduce the regulatory burden placed on the farming sector. A similar review on 'Waste' policy in England was announced on 15 June.

Poultry: Animal Welfare



Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she plans to take to ensure that UK standards on the welfare of chickens reared for meat production are maintained following the implementation of Council Directive 2007/43/EC; and if she will make a statement.

Mr Paice [holding answer 13 July 2010]: Member states, including the UK, were required to bring in laws, regulations and administrative provisions to comply with Council Directive 2007/43/EC by 30 June 2010. Animal Health conduct random, targeted and risk based inspections of farmed premises to check the welfare of livestock and to ensure compliance with the regulations. Appropriate action will also be taken by Animal Health should welfare concerns be identified by the Food Standards Agency Operations Group (formally the Meat Hygiene Service).

Wednesday 14th July 2010

The European Commission has a system in place to ensure that Community legislation on animal welfare is properly implemented and enforced. This includes a planned programme of visits by the Food and Veterinary Office to member states under the meat chicken directive.

Ministerial Statement on June Agriculture and Fisheries Council



The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mrs Caroline Spelman):

[...] On agriculture, Council conclusions on the international competitiveness of the European agri-food model adopted as an A item without any comments.

Commissioners Ciolos (Agriculture) and Dalli (Health and Consumer Protection) made presentations on simplification and better regulation. This responded to ongoing pressure from the Council to reduce burdens that affect the competitiveness of the sector, and recognising that these can originate from across the Commission. Attention was drawn to the work the

Commission had already completed to simplify existing CAP regulation, but noted too that

simplification would not halt there; they would adopt a further simplification package in October. The longer-term reform of the CAP would be a further opportunity for simplification. Eighteen member states, including the UK, had submitted a political memorandum on CAP simplification. This called for continued simplification now and in CAP reform post-2013, a more risk-based approach to financial controls, to dispense with the use of flat-rate financial corrections, and to proceed in cases of financial irregularity with an eye to the real risk to Community funds. The UK also outlined the newly established UK task force assessing the burden of farm regulation, while drawing particular attention to the complexity, cost and disproportional nature of the Commission's financial control regime.

Next, the presidency sought confirmation of member states' voting intentions on the Commission's proposals to approve the placing on the market for food and feed use (but not cultivation) of five new varieties of genetically modified maize and to renew one existing authorisation. The six draft decisions were referred to the Council under the comitology rules having failed to attract a qualified majority in support when first tabled at the Regulatory Committee earlier this year. Since there was neither a qualified majority in support nor against in the Council, it fell to the Commission to adopt the decisions under its own competence.

Ciolos then introduced the dairy quarterly report which, like its two predecessors, continued to show strongly positive trends for all dairy commodities. The Commission flagged its intention to adopt a dairy package later in the year responding to the final report of the High Level Group on the dairy sector. The incoming Belgian presidency said it would debate the High Level Group report at the July Council.

There were three points raised under any other business. Greece urged the Commission to take action in respect of Argentina's apparent breach of its WTO commitments in blocking imports of Greek canned peaches. The Netherlands encouraged Ministers to attend a conference it would be hosting on 31 October to 5 November in The Hague on food security and climate change. Poland drew attention to the floods that had recently inundated parts of the country.

HOUSE OF LORDS

Rural Communities

On Thursday 15th July the House of Lords held a debate on Rural Communities – for further information, please follow this link:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/100715-0002.htm#10071527000629>

Task Force on Farming Regulation



Lord Plumb: To ask Her Majesty's Government when the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' Task Force on Farming Regulation will make their recommendations.

Lord Plumb: My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper. In so doing, I declare my interest as a farmer.



The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Henley): My Lords, I, too, declare my interest as a farmer. The Task Force on Farming Regulation, to be chaired by Richard Macdonald, will identify ways of reducing the regulatory burden through a review of relevant regulations and their implementation, as well as advising on how best to achieve a risk-based system of regulation in future. It will produce its initial views in early 2011.

Lord Plumb: My Lords, I thank the Minister for his reply and I congratulate him and the Government on calling for a task force to consider this whole issue, which has got out of hand in the past year or two. Although the Rural Payments Agency has been making improvements, the way in which it has operated over the past couple of years or so has been a great shambles. Action is therefore needed to simplify the whole process. Is the Minister aware, therefore-I know that he is, of course-that all cattle reared on farms have to have a passport and that sheep have to be electronically tagged? Think of the difficulty of getting 5,000 sheep off a hill to electronically tag them. Livestock movements have to be recorded in quadruplicate. On the whole question of the movement of livestock, forms are supplied in second-class envelopes. The Minister is obviously aware-

Lord Plumb: Does the Minister accept that future procedure needs the application of a bit of common sense to reduce the regulatory burden on farming without compromising standards?

Lord Henley: My Lords, if I can answer briefly, we must move away from the idea that the only way of solving problems is to regulate. To take just one of my noble friend's examples, the EID for sheep, I can give him an assurance that, when Commissioner Dalli, who has responsibility for this in the EU, visits this country, we will certainly make him aware of the problems that electronic identification of sheep is creating.

I am sure that my honourable friend in another place, Mr Paice, will make a point of encouraging him to visit one of the big sheep sales to see what the problems are.



Lord Grantchester: My Lords, does the Minister agree that one of the least necessary aspects of regulation is the multiplicity of visits and inspections under each protocol? Will the task force look at the cost to the farmer of compliance with each regulation?

Lord Henley: The task force will certainly look at that. As has been made clear, it will look not only at regulation but at the multiplicity of inspections, because inspections take up time.



Lord Greaves: My Lords, the task force is very welcome, and there is a lot to be done, but it consists entirely of people from the farming and food industries. There will be no representation of expertise on the environment

and conservation or of agricultural workers and other people who live in the countryside and are affected by farms. In those circumstances, does the Minister agree that it is essential that, when the task force reports, its conclusions are thoroughly debated and there is time and opportunity for the country to debate them, including a debate in your Lordships' House?

Lord Henley: My Lords, debates in your Lordships' House are a matter for people other than me, but I can assure my noble friend that the membership of the task force is not drawn just from the farming industry. It includes Judith Donovan, who is a board director of HSE, and Dr Stephen Tapper, who comes from the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, so it covers other aspects.



Lord Pearson of Rannoch: My Lords, what happens if the recommendations of the task force do not find favour with our lords and masters in Brussels and their infamous common agricultural policy? Which prevails?

Lord Henley: My Lords, I had a suspicion that the noble Lord or his noble friend might raise that subject. It might be that we would want to seek to renegotiate a certain number of regulations that come from Europe. If that is the case, we will try to do so. I accept that there are no quick fixes, but we are more likely to be successful if we go to Brussels with a positive attitude rather than a negative one.



Baroness Quin: My Lords, given the concern expressed yesterday in this House, will the Minister rule out transferring to Defra any regulatory role of the Food Standards Agency? Does he agree with me that the independence of the agency from Ministers and from the food and farming industries was strongly supported by his party and, indeed, was very strongly supported by the Liberal Democrats when the FSA was introduced under the previous Government?

Lord Henley: My Lords, the noble Baroness should not necessarily believe everything that she reads in the papers, tempting though that might be. All I can say to her at the moment is that no decision has been taken on the Food Standards Agency and that all arm's-length bodies in all departments will be subject to review.



Lord Harrison: My Lords, given the deaths in the agricultural industry that were revealed by the most recent HSE report, will the Minister ensure that any change in regulations will not dilute the regulations concerned with the safety of workers in farming?

Lord Henley: My Lords, I can give that assurance to the noble Lord and I can tell him that a further review of health and safety is being carried out by my noble friend Lord Young of Graffham. Those two reviews will not overlap in any way, so my noble friend Lord Young will review that issue, but obviously the health and safety of farm workers must remain paramount.

Injuries and Fatalities

Lord Harrison: To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their response to the report of the Health and Safety Executive about the rise in deaths and injuries associated with agriculture.



The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Lord Freud): Agriculture remains by far the most dangerous of all the major industries in Great Britain. The incidence rate for fatal injuries to workers in 2009-10 was four times higher in agriculture than in construction. The toll of deaths from largely well known and preventable causes is unacceptable and is recognised as such by the industry.

HSE will continue its risk-based approach to health and safety in agriculture, targeting those activities which present the highest risk of injury. In view of the nature of these businesses, which are often small or micro in size, HSE uses a range of approaches to engage with the industry. Work activity includes a "Make the Promise" communications campaign; an increased number and type of safety and health awareness days; training and education (through vocational qualifications); working with manufacturers and suppliers of farming equipment; and partnership work with farming organisations.

Monday 12th July

EU: Food Labelling



Lord Stoddart of Swindon: To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their stance on the European Union proposal on the standardising of food labels reported to ban the sale of eggs by number.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Earl Howe): Current rules allow a number of foods, including eggs, to be sold by number. I am advised that it is not entirely clear in the Commission proposal for a food information regulation how the quantity of pre-packed food items is to be declared. The United Kingdom will continue to seek amendments to the text which will allow selling by number to continue.

Ends