

Small Farms Association Newsletter



SPRING 2013

Volume 16, Issue 2

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European badger (*Meles meles*)

Dear Members,

2012 will certainly be a year we will want to forget; and never forget. It has been reported that the extreme weather has cost the farming sector an estimated £1.3 billion. Please see the findings of Defra's Annual Report on page 6.

As I write, Mary Creagh MP, has tabled an Opposition Day Debate in Parliament on the Badger Cull. By the time you read this, you will know whether the motion was defeated or won; and whether this attempt to scupper the cull has succeeded or failed. Regardless of which measures are being taken to tackle Bovine Tb, as Geoffrey Lean wrote in *The Telegraph* of 1st June, "we are stuck between a brock and a hard place".

The dreaded Schmallenberg virus has now spread throughout Great Britain, with some 1,753 farms *voluntarily* (not a notifiable disease) having reported positive tests for the virus. There is hope on the horizon, however. At the end of May, Defra's Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer announced a vaccine to combat Schmallenberg will be available for use in UK flocks and herds this summer. The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), a Defra agency, has granted a licence to MSD

Animal Health to manufacture the new 'Bovilis SBV' vaccine. This means it will be possible to vaccinate sheep and cattle *before* most of them become pregnant, which is important, as exposure to the virus during pregnancy can cause damage to the foetus.

The horsemeat scandal was very worrying, as it seriously eroded confidence in the food sector. This scandal was not entirely a surprise, considering the price differential between beef and horse meat; and the squeeze retailers put on food processors to produce processed food to very tight margins. The fact of the matter is that if processors bought meat, that is fully traceable, there is less likelihood of such fraud occurring instead of using meat of a dubious provenance. It's a no-brainer, however, when one compares the cost of buying beef versus the cost of horse meat. Processors' margins are squeezed tight by the retailers; and, consequently, there is will always be a temptation to pad-out a recipes and increase the profit margins. Basically, it comes down to cost. If the public wish to eat beef products, they have to pay more than if a product is made with horse meat!

Philip L. Hosking

Statements and opinions expressed in articles, reviews and other material herein are those of the authors and not necessarily of the SFA.

While every care has been taken in the compilation of this information and every attempt made to present up-to-date and accurate information, we cannot guarantee that inaccuracies will not occur.

SFA News published by

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Recent news

Update on 'Connecting Devon and Somerset' to high-speed broadband

Connecting Devon and Somerset announced on 29th January that the partnership has signed a £94 million contract with BT to deliver high-speed fibre broadband across Somerset and Devon within the next three years.

The deal agreed with BT aims to deliver high-speed fibre broadband to around 90 per cent of premises by the end of 2016; and to ensure a minimum of 2Mbps broadband speeds for all, making this one of the best connected areas in the UK. In the coming months, residents and businesses across Devon and Somerset will begin to hear more about what this means for them.

What does this mean for the region?

The signing of this contract means that a major infrastructure project can now progress, which should provide a major boost to the local economy.

A £41 million contribution from BT will be added to the public sector investment, which includes £10 million from both Somerset and Devon County Councils, £32m Government funding from Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) and contributions from other public sector partners.

It is estimated that the programme will generate an additional £750m in GVA (Gross Value Added) by 2020, creating high tech jobs and attracting new businesses and investors to the area. GVA measures the value of all goods and services produced in the region.

What happens now?

Surveying work on the project has started and the first locations to be upgraded will be announced soon. Because of the geographical complexity of the region, there will be various engineering challenges; but the main technology to be installed will be fibre optic broadband.

At the moment, average broadband speeds are around 9 Mbps in Devon and around 8Mbps in Somerset. Approximately 14 per cent of premises across the two counties receive less than 2Mbps.

Under the Connecting Devon and Somerset programme, most of the area will receive Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC), where the fibre runs from the telephone exchange as far as the nearest BT street cabinet, which can deliver download speeds of up to 80Mbps and upload speeds of up to 20Mbps.

Fibre to the Premises (FTTP), where the fibre runs all the way to the home or business and, which can deliver the top current download speed of 330Mbps, will also be available in certain areas.

Community and Business Support

Getting up to speed is a business and community support programme funded by Connecting Devon and Somerset and it is designed to equip businesses and communities across Devon and Somerset with the right knowledge and skills to fully harness the improved broadband service when it's up and running.

Superfast Skills

If you are interested in receiving one to one mentoring or advice, attending one of the events or getting some training, please sign up to receive more information. The sign up process will also provide you with the option of subscribing up to the e-newsletter, allowing you to keep up to date with Connecting Devon and Somerset's latest developments.

There are a number of road shows, skills workshops and events planned to help you to improve your ICT skills and enable you make the most of the improved broadband service when it becomes available.

To find out when the events will be coming to your locality and to book your place, please visit the 'Connecting Devon and Somerset' website at: ~

www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk and click on the events section. For those of you who do not have internet connection, please contact The Broadband Team at Devon County Council, County Hall, Topsham Rd, Exeter, EX2 4QD Tel: 0845 155 1015.

It is important that the farming community keeps abreast of developments, as increasingly sending data and annual returns to Defra, applying for SPS and registering for other services are moving online. Farming should be able to profit from broadband availability.

Changes to services at Rural Resource

From the end of May 2013 the Rural Business Support Service delivered by Peninsula Enterprise in Somerset, Devon, Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly will no longer be available because the Defra contract has finished.

The Resource Efficiency Service (R4F) will continue to be delivered by the Rural Focus. The Rural Focus Team remains committed to supporting rural businesses and communities across the South West through the following services: ~ Resource Efficiency for Farmers (R4F); Improving Your Resource Efficiency Service; UKTI and Export Cornwall; Superfast Business; iNETS and Social Enterprise Focus.

Peninsula Enterprise Rural IDB service has supported over 2,300 rural and farming businesses. More information is available on the website: www.peninsula-enterprise.co.uk If you have any queries please get in contact. **David Hynd** Direct line 0871 641 2119 ext 8417

New Business Bank Launched

Research published this spring by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) highlighted that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have been disproportionately affected in their ability to access finance as a result of the contraction in bank lending since 2008. Therefore, it is great to be able to report that since the last newsletter, the launch of the first phase of a new business bank, which will see £300 million invested alongside private investors to address long-standing gaps in the finance market, has been set up. The scheme has been operating for several months; but, to date, the uptake has not been as successful as anticipated.

Businesses struggling to raise finance have been handed a potential lifeline by the launch of this new initiative, which is intended to help the flow of cash to needy companies and businesses. The first phase of the new business bank, unveiled by business secretary Vince Cable, has seen £300 million invested alongside private investors to address long-standing gaps in the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) finance/lending market.

Applicants wishing to submit proposals can find more information about the application process, together with guidance, on the Government's website at www.gov.uk

Schmallenberg vaccine available this summer

UK farmers will be the first in the EU to use a vaccine to help protect sheep and cattle against the Schmallenberg Virus (SBV). The vaccine should be available in June from your vet.

Defra's Deputy Chief Veterinary Office Alick Simmons said:

"It is welcome news for British farmers to have the choice to vaccinate their animals. The vaccine will give extra assurance against this disease on top of the natural immunity we expect sheep and cattle to develop after initial exposure."

The availability of the vaccine at this time of year means it will be possible to vaccinate sheep and cattle before most of them become pregnant. This is important as it is during pregnancy when exposure to the virus can cause damage to the foetus.

Cattle can be vaccinated from two months old and will require two doses. Sheep can be treated from four months, and will require a single dose.

Whilst SBV is not a notifiable disease, farmers are advised to contact their veterinary surgeons if they encounter suspect cases of the disease in their herds or flocks. Vets should then contact their AHVLA/SAC laboratory if they suspect infection with the virus. Further information on SBV is available at: http://vla.defra.gov.uk/science/sci_schmallenberg.htm

CAP Update

The CAP negotiations have entered the back straight and the winning post is in sight. It would appear from many comments that I've read that Simon Coveney, the Irish Agriculture Minister, who pledged he would do all in his power to broker an agreement by the end of June when the Irish Presidency of the EU ends, has lived up to his promise. The end of protracted negotiations are in sight.

We are now in the trilogue phase when the European Parliament, the Member States and the Commission need to thrash out compromises and, finally, an agreement, which will be the new CAP agreement. And all by the end of June! There are still major concerns, however, which why on 30 May Peter Kendall, NFU President joined a group of influential farming leaders from across the EU to lobby the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee and the President of the Agriculture Council on CAP reform.

The event took place in Brussels; and brought together the Presidents of the leading Italian, French, German and Irish Farming Unions to present a common voice on the outstanding CAP reform concerns as talks enter their final few weeks, particularly, to remind the key negotiators of what EU farmers want to see achieved in the final agreement.

According to commentators and reports in the farming media, nothing of substance has been agreed yet on the key points of the reform package, such as: voluntary modulation, greening options, the definition of an 'active farmer', capping, coupled payments and agri-environment schemes. Allegedly, we can expect a flurry of compromises before the summer recess of the European Parliament!

It is a question 'watch this space'. It is very important, not only for agriculture but also for rural development, that the new CAP is in place to commence in January 2015 for so much is dependent upon a timely agreement.

All dogs in England to be Microchipped

Legal powers for the police to tackle irresponsible dog owners and improve public safety were among legislative changes published in the draft Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill on 9 May. In April, the Government announced it was introducing compulsory microchipping for all dogs from 6 April 2016 to help reunite owners with lost or stolen pets, relieve the burden on animal charities and local authorities and promote responsible dog ownership by improving the traceability of dog and owner.

Under Government plans, dog owners will no longer be immune from prosecution if their dog attacks a person in the home. This change in the law will give protection to the healthcare, postal and utility professionals who visit private properties for work. More information on www.gov.uk/defra

Members' Comments

Come Back Mc Sharry, all is forgiven!

The following two comments were made originally by our SFA member, Pippa Woods of the Family Farmers' Association's newsletter of December 2012, of which she is Chair. The Cult of the Badger - was also published in the Western Morning News in January 2013.

Reform of the CAP is concentrating our minds, and I suggest it behoves us to look again at what the EU Agricultural Commissioner Ray McSharry proposed at the start of the CAP reform debate in 1987. He stated that the CAP should only give monetary support to small farmers. The rest would have no subsidies or area payments. The larger farmers would have to get their living from the market and from caring for the environment.

He made this pronouncement at a meeting of small farmers at Cookstown, Ireland. I should know -I was there.

When the McSharry proposals made the news, Agriculture Minister Gummer and the NFU went ballistic and then went to work on a demolition job; they were successful. The rest is history, and very costly to the EU taxpayers. Although it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good and many did very well, including a few dukes!

In the light of new reforms I think the capping of area payments is justified. First define what should be considered a small farm and also a medium farm. Then pay small farmers according to their land area. Medium sized farmers would receive the maximum payment allowed to a small farm, and no more, reducing the CAP cost considerably. One has to include medium sized farmers or there would be anomalies at the edge.

I think that retaining small and medium is good for social reasons and good for the land. Looking at unemployment, and the social problems we have, we need better answers. We just might get them. If not, le deluge!

The Cult of the Badger

Why should a wild animal which is causing so many people, and other animals, so much misery suddenly become almost sacred? The delightful and highly astute MP, Sarah Wollaston, dubbed badgers "celebrity mammals" when she came to talk to some farmers the day after parliament had voted not to cull. Nothing must be done to hurt badgers, no matter how much harm they do. We cull both deer and foxes to control numbers. Pheasants, and even snipe and woodcock are shot for fun! But badgers must be allowed to cause mayhem throughout the countryside.

Nothing predates badgers. In fact they are the top predator.

They are busy multiplying, uncontrolled as they are. They are a nuisance in crops, eating strawberries, and maize in gardens and fields. They dig pits in fields so deep that lambs fall in, and a new born calf was nearly lost in one. They are murder in Devon hedgebanks, and are a serious nuisance in many physical ways. Strangely, nobody has studied just how much damage badgers are doing to other wildlife. But it is known that they are the only creature that can kill and eat hedgehogs. These have disappeared from badger country, surviving only in gardens. Young hares, and all ground nesting birds are getting rarer – but don't blame badgers!

It is no longer denied that badgers can, and do, transmit TB to cattle. TB has become endemic in parts of England and Wales – in both cattle and badgers. When cattle get it they are killed, no matter how precious to their owners, or to their young calves if they are suckler cows. But the badgers remain on the farm to keep the infection alive.

The situation is desperate. TB is costing vast amounts of public and private money, and is spreading inexorably. All the *mycobacterium bovis* that badgers are harbouring in the countryside will never spontaneously disappear. It will continue to multiply. All mammals are at risk of infection, including man. Every country which has been troubled with TB has had to clear it from whatever wildlife was carrying it. This has been successful abroad.

The quality of debate in parliament when the subject was recently considered was most unfortunate. As Jim Paice said, many were "misinformed", and that was putting it politely. The people who have been encouraging the pro badger emotion have a lot to answer for. Why are they doing it? What are they gaining? Continued misery for farmers, cattle, and sick badgers.

Defra's Parliamentary Select Committee is going to study vaccination, for both badgers and cows. Perhaps they will decide that it could be useful, who knows what the scientists may think? Vaccination does not cure diseases, it just reduces the incidence. Will we be told how effective the human BCG vaccine is with badgers and cattle? Who knows for sure?

For now there is no light at the end of the tunnel for farmers or their cattle. There will not be until an effective method of discovering which badger setts are infected is brought into use. When these setts, and these only, can be removed legally, the problem can be solved. The tragedy is that there are cases where this action has been taken with great success. But it remains illegal and therefore is only carried out by the boldest and most desperate. If it were made legal, we could have healthy cattle and healthy badgers. Farmers' health would be improved too, if this dreadful scourge could be removed. But who cares for farmers, or cows and calves? Badgers are sacred.

Defra News roundup

Changes to testing requirements in non-grazing Approved Finishing Units (AFUs) in England

Bovine TB Information Note 02/13

Will the changes affect you?

Approved Finishing Units (AFUs) are licensed by the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratory Agency (AHVLA) to provide an outlet for the fattening and/or finishing of cattle that have recently been tested for TB with negative results from farms which lack such facilities. This includes clear TB tested cattle from farms under TB restrictions. Feedback has demonstrated that AFUs are an important trade outlet for TB affected businesses.

As cattle kept in AFUs can only go to slaughter, there are increased levels and frequency of slaughterhouse TB surveillance in these units compared to the majority of cattle herds. AFU licensing and operating rules are tightly prescribed, including high biosecurity standards and permanent movement restrictions in place. Compliance with operating rules is closely monitored. There are two types of AFUs:

'Grazing' AFUs, which include double-fenced grazing land and can only be established in high TB incidence areas where infected wildlife is a known problem;

'Non-grazing' AFUs, where cattle are always held indoors in wildlife-proofed housing.

The changes set out below affect non-grazing AFU operators and those operators who move cattle between AFUs.

In line with Defra's commitment to monitor the testing burden on farm businesses, from 1 June 2013 they will:

- **Cease mandatory, and Defra funded, routine testing for TB within non-grazing AFUs in England.**
- **Cease government funded breakdown testing in non-grazing AFUs in England, except in exceptional circumstances** (e.g. if evidence of an extensive TB problem is identified in groups of cattle sent to slaughter).

If you are thinking of setting up an AFU you will need to consider the implications of these changes. Options:

If you are in a High Risk Area (in an annual TB testing area), you may apply to set up a grazing or non-grazing AFU.

If you are in a Low Risk Area (in a four-yearly TB testing area), you can apply to set up a non-grazing AFU only.

You can check your testing intervals by entering the CPH numbers on the AHVLA website: <http://ahvla.defra.gov.uk/tb-test/index.asp>.

Defra News roundup

If you require further advice or guidance and/or if you are thinking of setting up a new AFU please contact your local AHVLA office.

Why make changes?

The Government is committed to striking a balance between ensuring robust disease controls and helping to support a viable cattle farming industry. It believes that reducing the TB testing burden within non-grazing AFUs should help rural businesses and reduce government costs without compromising the TB control and eradication framework. Furthermore, Defra veterinary risk assessment indicates that as the units are bio-secure and the cattle go directly to slaughter there is no increased disease risk by removing such testing.

An explanatory leaflet entitled: Changes to testing requirements in non-grazing Approved Finishing Units (AFUs) in England *Bovine TB Information Note 02/13* can be downloaded from the Defra website at: www.gov.uk/defra

International Development Committee publishes report on Global Food Security - 4 June 2013

MPs on the International Development Committee are calling for concerted action to curb food wastage in the UK and for expansion of DFID's bilateral nutrition programmes as part of wider efforts to improve global food security.

Sir Malcolm Bruce, Committee Chair said: "*We have seen two notable 'shocks' or 'spikes' in global food prices over recent years, with price peaks in June 2008 and February 2011. These crises - driven by rising demand for food and by the impact of biofuels produced through agriculture - hurt many parts of the UK food industry and strongly undermined the global fight against hunger.*"

A number of tangible measures set out in the report could, if implemented, have a significant impact on global food security and directly benefit UK consumers. One of the report's recommendations was the reduction of meat consumption, which didn't go down well with farmers, particularly in the West Country, a major centre for cattle farming in the UK.

The rationale for this recommendation was that the UK is never more than a few days away from a significant food shortage, and that UK consumers should also be encouraged over time to reduce how often they eat meat. Meanwhile, as a nation, it was suggested that we should place a stronger focus on more sustainable extensive systems of meat production such as pasture-fed cattle, rather than on highly intensive grain-fed livestock units. Hopefully this shift to what the SFA members have been doing all of their lives might please some farmers!

The report is available from the Government website at: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/



The voice of the small farmer

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We're on the Web!
www.small-farms-association.org

Annual Family Membership £20.00

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

The Small Farms Association was formed in October 1997 because of the reluctance of major farming organisations to support the needs of small farmers. Since its inception, the SFA has addressed the concerns and needs of small farms by the action it takes.

- * *Lobbying MPs and other public representatives*
- * *Communicating the views of small farms to DEFRA*
- * *Working in partnership with other farm organisations*
- * *Contributing to policy, with a small farms' slant*
- * *Working to our own Constitution and Code of Practice*
- * *Advice and support available to members*
- * *Opportunities to socialise*
- * *Training opportunities*
- * *Free quarterly newsletter, including members' adverts*
- * *A website, including opportunities to advertise*

Please help us to continue the work on your behalf by providing feedback on topical farming issues and recruiting new members.

Agriculture in the UK 2012

Defra's annual review of the state of UK agriculture (*Agriculture in the UK 2012*) was published on 4th June. It makes for very interesting reading; and, in some instances, confirms our worst suspicions. Here is a snapshot of its contents. The full report can be obtained from the Defra website: www.gov.uk/defra

Total Income from Farming

In 2012, total income from farming fell to £4.70 billion, a 14% fall in real terms from 2011 after adjusting for inflation. Similarly, the total income from farming per agricultural unit also fell by 14 per cent in real terms to £25,175 in 2012. A key factor in the fall of total income was the weather conditions experienced in 2012.

Weather

2012 was a year of dramatic contrast. The year began with on-going concerns over long-term drought, heightened by a relatively dry January to March. This was followed by an abrupt shift in weather patterns bringing an exceptionally wet period for most of the country from April lasting through much of the summer. Rainfall totals for autumn and December remained well above average, and a succession of rain events in late November and late December, contributed to extensive disruption from flooding. The wet weather affected both the harvest of the 2012 crops and the planting and establishment of the 2013 crops.

Summary

2012 compared with 2011 as follows: ~

- The Utilised Agricultural Area was stable at 17.2 million hectares, accounting for 70% of land in the UK. Increases in crop areas and temporary grass have offset decreases in the areas of un-cropped arable land and permanent grassland.
- The area of oilseed rape planted increased by 7.3 per cent to 756 thousand hectares.
- The cereal crops area increased by 2.2 per cent to 3.1 million hectares.
- Dairy herd numbers remained almost unchanged at 1.8 million.
- Pig numbers saw a small increase of 0.9% from 2011, now standing at almost 4.5 million.
- The United Kingdom's sheep and lamb flock rose by 1.8% to 32 million animals, largely due to a 2.4% increase in the female breeding flock to 15 million.
- The number of people working on UK farms increased by 1.2% to 481,000.



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