

Small Farms Association Newsletter



SUMMER 2012

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Dear Members,

As I write, I think summer time is here at last after the coldest and wettest April and June on record. One cannot be sure of what type of weather is to come in the next month or so; but fingers crossed.

Normally, our main calving time for our suckler herd is mid April when most of the cows can calve outdoors, except for a few that need extra care and attention. It never ceases to amaze me how the cows look after their calves in inclement weather. They find the most sheltered part of the field and stand in a group with their calves in between them giving them shelter until the rain and storms pass over.

We hear there are proposed changes to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The EU Agricultural Committee is due to meet this month (June) to debate the reforms. We shall have to wait for further developments in the coming weeks and months. (See update in page 2).

The Small Farms Association's annual BBQ is scheduled for Saturday, 28th July; and is being hosted, once again, by David and Jane Johns at Hillhead Farm in Ugborough. It would be great to see many of you attend with family and friends. Everyone is welcome to come and join in the skittles competition and BBQ. Details on page 2. I hope to see you there.

The annual membership subscription is due on 1st July. We have kept the membership subscription the same price for the past 10 years to ensure everyone can renew without taking out a new mortgage! At £20 per year for a family membership it's very good value.

Your subscription ensures the SFA can continue to produce newsletters, keep its website updated and relevant, and represent the views of the smaller farmer to Government, local authorities and other decision-making bodies to help them to formulate policies that help and not hinder UK farmers.

Pippa Woods, who heads up another similar and like-minded farming organisation - the Family Farmers' Association - has written a stimulating and thought-provoking piece on page 3, which was also published in the 'Farming Supplement' of *The Western Morning News* on 20th June. It would be good to have your views on Pippa's opinions.

Lastly, it's interesting to watch the NFU pull back its public support for big farms. There has been so much criticism of the NFU's stance from so many quarters I guess it has had to rethink its position. On a positive note, however, we should congratulate the NFU for its latest suite of publications on the value of farming to the UK economy.

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.

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The latest on CAP Reform

20th June 2012, Brussels

MEPs unveil first draft plans

Ideas about how to make direct payments for farmers fairer across the EU and simplify checks on how they spend the money were tabled by Agriculture Committee MEPs on 20 June, as their contribution to the post-2014 farm policy reform package. MEPs also welcomed proposals to prolong wine planting rights and sugar quotas, but said that "greening" measures should be better tailored to the needs of each EU Member State.

We are getting into the delicate and complex stage of debate on CAP Reform. After several months of debate, the EU Parliament's proposals have been tabled for a modern and flexible Common Agricultural Policy to make farmers' lives easier and, amongst other proposals, cut red tape.

Direct payments

Plans to do more to reduce inequalities in direct payments to farmers in different parts of the EU were outlined at the meeting. Many MEPs thought the revised proposals were fair while others criticised them as going too far. Everyone agreed, however, that the process needed to be speeded up. Some French MEPs were anxious that any rapid reduction of support would lead to closure of farms.

The idea of reducing direct payments by a higher percentage than the Commission originally proposed for farms receiving more than €250,000 was vigorously rejected as "unfair" by some MEPs, including John Stuart Agnew (EFD, UK) and George Lyon (ALDE, UK). Spanish MEPs argued that cooperatives must be exempted from this proposal, which would otherwise discourage farmers from joining forces to boost their bargaining power.

The definition of "active farmer" was also debated with many arguing that the definition should be simplified to exclude entities not entitled to EU-funded direct payments. It was suggested that the list of such entities should be expanded to include airports, real estate companies, campsites, sport grounds, mining and transport companies.

Strict spending controls but less red tape

It was agreed the way in which EU money is spent must be stringently controlled; but today's system of checks and sanctions should be simplified so as "not to waste farmers' precious time" or "swamp them in paper".

Many MEPs welcomed a suggestion that farmers should not be obliged to resubmit their SFP applications each year unless there is a change in circumstances; and that they should be given early warnings to enable them to remedy any irregularities before being penalised.

More flexible greening

It was proposed that mandatory "greening measures" linked to the direct payments should be more flexible and include special arrangements for farms smaller than 20 hectares; while those below 5 hectares should be completely exempt. Several MEPs called for a "menu" of greening measures from which EU Member States could choose.

Young farmers

To bring fresh blood into the farming community, it was proposed that rural development funds should finance bank guarantees to help young farmers into long-term lease contracts. It was also suggested that farmers over 65 years old who have been farming for at least 10 years should be entitled to a payment of up to €35,000 if they retire and transfer their holding and corresponding payment entitlements to another farmer. Many MEPs considered the retirement scheme could "incentivise land mobility" and "encourage young and new entrants to engage in farming activities". However, many MEPs objected and considered that this could create an incentive to quit farming, when just the opposite is needed.

Next Steps

The deadline for tabling amendments to the draft reports is 9 July (direct payments, financing management and monitoring) and 10 July (rural development, common market organisation). The committee vote is anticipated in late autumn, depending on progress in negotiations on the future multi-annual financial framework (MFF) 2014-2020. The final shape of the new EU farm policy will be co-decided by the Parliament and the Council. The reformed CAP is due to enter into force on 1 January 2014.

SFA Summer Barbeque & Skittles

Saturday, 28th July 2012, starting at 7 p.m.

Hillhead Farm, Ugborough, PL21 OHQ

kindly hosted by David and Jane Johns

Tickets: £10.00 per adult, £5.00 per child (under 12)

Food and drink are included in the ticket price

Food to include meat as well as sausages and burgers

TICKETS ARE AVAILABLE BY PHONE OR POST - TEL: 01548 830302

Cover available if weather is inclement

Members' Notices

Food for thought on lack of research by Pippa Woods

At a recent Devon Farming & Food Board Meeting, Pippa Woods circulated a paper in advance for discussion. Subsequently, Pippa's paper was published in the Western Morning News Farming Supplement of 20th June, which some of you may have read. Pippa is Chair of the Family Farmers' Association and an honorary member of the SFA.

County Councils are selling off their farms. Land is getting more expensive, and big farms are getting bigger by the day, because only big farmers can afford to buy land. Land is now considered one of the best investments. Young people are being advised to take up farming as a career; but buying is only for millionaires and tenancies are few and far between. If available, they are expensive and often very short term, giving no security.

Problems are widespread. A friend has just had his Farm Business Tenancy terminated. Where is he to take his family and livestock? As he is not a big farmer, he cannot compete with established, large farmers when bidding for another tenancy. Landowners can, and do, generate much more income by breaking up farms and selling or renting them out in separate pieces, the land often to grow food for sometimes distant large herds.

This modern situation raises some basic questions:

- a. Will the country – landscapes, animals and people – fare just as well when all food production is organised on a large scale by companies and corporations farming intensively in the most technically and economically efficient way?
- b. Or is the countryside happier when cared for by a multitude of small and medium sized farms worked by individual, independent families? Does quality of life matter?
- c. Do big farms really produce more food per acre, as large farmers claim?

These questions are never now researched. Until, and during, the 80s they were much thought about. A government commissioned group studied land ownership, the NFU studied the problem of small farms, and economists studied both efficiency of production, and labour use, in relation to size of farm. The general conclusion seemed to be that there was at least some virtue in small farms; that they probably produced more food per acre and a more varied landscape, and they certainly employed more people per acre. One study at that time showed that increasing farm size above 600 acres did not necessarily increase efficiency.

Since then technical progress has made it much easier to farm on a big scale. Those who grabbed an opportunity to invest – and were ambitious – found that farming by the thousand acres, sheep by thousands too, cattle by many hundred at a time and poultry by many thousand, could be satisfyingly profitable. They spread the word that they are the ones to feed the hungry world.

Now more questions need to be answered. Is large scale farming really the most productive? When unemployment is a serious human problem, and many people enjoy farm work (if only the hours were reasonable!) is it sensible to invent bigger and bigger machines to take the place of people (and to destroy country lanes)? Is highly efficient farming on a large scale compatible with sympathy and care for workers, animals, landscapes, and wildlife? Should large farms have subsidies for unlimited hectares, or should government help be concentrated on small or new farmers and farms with natural disadvantages?

So please let us have some research into what this agglomeration of farms is doing to Britain. Does it produce more food? Is there a difference in the quality of life between parishes which still contain many farms, and those where a consortium manages all the land plus that of several more parishes? In short, does the farmer with a thousand hectares (2500 acres) deserve ten times as much help as one with a hundred (250 acres)?

Farming and Countryside Public Consultations and new Regulations

Improvements to the policy and legal framework for public rights of way

New proposals to modernise the process of recording rights of way were unveiled by Defra on 14 May 2012. A consultation is available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/consult/2012/05/14/improve-rights-of-way/>

The consultation closes on **6 August 2012**.

Coastal access – new regulations in force

New regulations came into force on 1 October 2011 and 15 February 2012. The regulations are available as follows:

- Access to the Countryside (Appeals against Works Notices) (England) Regulations 2011
- Access to the Countryside (Dedication of Land) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2011
- Access to the Countryside (Exclusions and Restrictions) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2011
- Access to the Countryside (Appeals against Works Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations

Defra will be publishing revised guidance in due course to reflect the changes brought into force by these Regulations.

News roundup

Rural Payments Agency – non compliance statistics

In a paper published in March this year, Alan Spedding of RuSource reported issues surrounding non-compliance found during cross-compliance inspections in 2011.

Farmers had more than £2.5 million deducted from their single farm payments for infringements. 62% of the non-compliances found during 2011 were failures to report deaths and movements of cattle.

The total value of cross compliance reductions made under the Single Payment Scheme in 2011 was £2.7 million; and the average reduction was £1383.

The following figures are listed separately for the Statutory Management Requirement (SMR) and Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC). The most common failures in each category are also listed.

Statutory Management Requirement

Cattle identification and registration

1273 failures – these made up 62% of all the failures found. They included: ~

- Failures in reporting deaths and movements of cattle
- Problems also found with movements not being correctly recorded in the on-farm records or not recorded at all.
- Animals found with no passport or passports present with no animals.

Sheep and goats identification

170 failures were found, which included: ~

- Failure to enter all or some movements of sheep in the on-farm records
- Failure to enter all the correct information about movements of sheep.
- Failure to record information on births of animals
- Failure to record an annual inventory of the animals in the farm records.
- Sheep or goats found with incorrect tags or have never been tagged.

Animal welfare

120 failures were found, the most common being:~

- Failure to keep any records or adequate records of the medicinal treatments given to their animals.
- Failure also to complete accurate and complete records of any deaths
- There were also problems found where some sick animals had not received the necessary care or attention to treat their illness including not seeking veterinary advice soon enough.
- Problems also found where animals kept outside were not

protected from risks to their health, such as sharp objects outside which may cause harm.

- Also animals were located in accommodation where there were sharp edges or objects sticking out which may harm or injure the animals.
- Animals were being fed either too infrequently or inappropriate feed.
- Staff did not have the necessary skills and competence to provide adequate livestock care.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs)

There were 72 failures found including:

- Adherence to the requirements for keeping records of applications of Nitrogen
- Failure to provide enough information for inspectors to make a full assessment of the use of Nitrogen on the farm with no records produced at all in some cases.
- Failure to produce records of manure storage calculation, nutrient management plan and/or risk map

Food and feed law

- 40 failures were found, of which the common ones were:~
- Failure to keep any records for the use of pesticides on the farm and to keep records of veterinary medicinal products given to animals
- Key pieces of information were missing or not kept at all relating to inputs and outputs from the farm meaning full traceability wasn't possible.

Restrictions on the use of plant protection products

32 failures found

- Failure to adhere to all approval conditions such as maximum dose levels exceeded, applied using a non-approved method of application or permitted number of applications exceeded.
- Farmers were not using pesticides in accordance with the principles of good plant protection practice, such as not having the necessary certificate of competence to use pesticides or applying pesticides outside of the target area such as too close to watercourses.

Pig identification and registration

24 failures found including:

- Failure to keep all records of movements of pigs on and off the holding or provide full information on the movement
- Failure to make sure that all movement documents that accompany pigs during movements have all the correct information.

Welfare of calves

17 failures found, for example:

- Failure to properly clean and disinfect housing and equipment used for calves
- Failure to ensure that all calves have appropriate bedding.

News roundup

Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) Soil Protection Review

88 failures were found

- Failure to complete or produce for the inspector a Soil Protection Review 2010 which identified the broad soil types on the farm, any soil management issues and the measures being taken to rectify any issues found.
- Failure to update the Soil Protection Review 2010 when land has been transferred in, when soil conditions change or where management systems or cropping practices change.

Protection of hedgerows and watercourses

77 failures were found, including:

- Cultivation such as ploughing and drilling took place within the protection zone with on many occasions a crop having been planted and ongoing management taking place.
- Applications of pesticides also found in the protection zones.
- Protection zones were often in existence but not to the required width.

Control of weeds

The significant breaches were

- Infestations of weeds such as ragwort and creeping thistle have been allowed to spread without all reasonable efforts taken to control these.
- Increasing problems with the spread of Himalayan balsam

Water abstraction

37 failures were found and related to failure to submit a record of the volumes of water abstracted under the licence or failure to submit annual abstraction returns.

Public rights of way

Public rights of way were found blocked, usually by a standing crop, so walkers would be unable to use them as intended.

©Alan Spedding, 20 March 2012

RuSource briefings provide concise information on current farming and rural issues for rural professionals. They are circulated weekly by email and produced by Alan Spedding in association with the Arthur Rank Centre, the national focus for the rural church.

News roundup

Are you a farmer, forester, farming contractor, woodland owner or horticultural business?

If so, grants are currently available to help address one or more of the following issues: ~

- Improving animal health and welfare
- Reducing energy usage
- The management of manures/ farm nutrients
- Improving water resource management
- Improving the use of forestry resources

Funding is available for many other items, including slurry separators, GPS equipment, heat recovery systems, variable speed vacuum pumps, rainwater harvesting systems including storage ponds, roofing of silage clamps and manure stores, horticultural water recycling, sheep weigh crates, EID readers, cattle foot trimming facilities, computer software for monitoring animal health, heat detection systems, grooving of concrete floors, cow mattresses, forestry grabs, trailers, chippers, winches, firewood processors and many other items.

Fiona Edwards, Farms and Environment Consultant at the DR Company, has recently visited several farms and found a great deal of interest in resource efficiency especially where this helps to cut costs, improves farming practice and helps the environment into the bargain!

As part of this free visit she offers advice on the FFIS grant scheme and is currently helping many farmers put together their application forms.

Do hurry, as the free visit and advice will not be around forever and the grant closes on the 17th July. Why not make the most of it whilst it is available?

If you are, or know anyone else who might be interested in applying please contact Fiona on 01837 658643 or email fiona@DRCompany.co.uk.

Don't forget to order your BBQ tickets

Small Farms Association Summer BBQ

Saturday, 28th July 2012 at Hillhead Farm, Ugborough

Tickets £10 for adults and £5 for children (under 12 yrs)

Tel: 01548-830302 or email: philhosking01@btinternet.net.



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.

Succession issues in farming

New research reveals UK farmers' lack of succession planning

Research just published by Barclays has revealed that nearly half (44 per cent) of UK farmers have no formal succession plan in place for when they retire, potentially putting the future success of their business at risk.

The research also reveals that a quarter of those without a plan admit that it was because they simply had not thought about it. A further one in four (27 per cent) claim they do not have anybody to leave their farm to and 16 per cent believe they do not need a plan.

This lack of formal succession planning could add considerable risk to the agricultural sector, which contributes £85 billion to the UK economy each year and employs approximately 3.5 million people.

An added concern highlighted by the research is that 38 per cent of farmers who do have a succession plan in place do not involve their successors in the actual running of the farm or the business on a day to day level. This lack of involvement could impact negatively in both the short and long term, losing the farm valuable time and money. Interestingly, 24 per cent of farmers who plan to hand over to a family member, which in the majority of cases is a son (75 per cent), admit that the successor should be more hands on.

Food for thought. Perhaps the newly published book 'Keeping it in the family' could provide some ideas.

Just Published

Keeping it in the family: International Perspectives on Succession and Retirement on Family Farms

Edited by Matt Lobley, University of Exeter, UK, John Baker, Iowa State University, USA and Ian Whitehead, University of Plymouth, UK

As we face major questions about how we use land and the impact of our land use on the global environment, farming once again faces a challenging and uncertain future. This book draws on the experiences of farmers in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, North America and the EU to examine the special features of family farms and, in particular, the tradition of succession, which has enabled them to continue to have such a strong presence in the world today.

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