A Significant Step Forward for UK Agriculture and the Agri-Supply Industry

Today (20 November), the Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC) welcomes the negotiated outcome of the UK–EU reset and the agreement to establish a new common Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) zone. This represents a significant step towards reducing trade barriers, improving business certainty and strengthening the competitiveness of UK agriculture and its supply chains.

For the past five years, businesses across the agri-supply industry have faced additional costs, administrative burdens and regulatory uncertainty arising from the UK's departure from the EU. The agreement offers an opportunity to address many of these challenges, while providing a more predictable trading environment for businesses operating across Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the EU.

AIC appreciates the considerable work undertaken by UK Government ministers and civil servants over the past two years. Throughout this period, AIC has worked closely and constructively with civil servants, helping to identify practical challenges, assess the implications of dynamic alignment and develop workable solutions for industry.

Central to this engagement has been the evidence provided by AIC Members.

Through extensive consultation with our Members, committees and businesses across all four nations of the UK, AIC has been able to demonstrate the real-world implications of different policy options. This evidence has been essential in explaining to both UK and EU policymakers not only the benefits of closer alignment, but also the importance of appropriate transition arrangements.

AIC has worked with other UK industry bodies and the four UK Governments, and particularly closely with its four European trade associations. This collaborative approach has helped ensure that the practical needs of agricultural businesses and supply chains have been understood throughout the negotiations.

What the Agreement Means for AIC's Five Sectors

Animal Feed

The removal of Export Health Certificates (EHCs) represents an important benefit for animal feed businesses, reducing the costs and administrative requirements associated with trade. AIC also welcomes the opportunity to resolve longstanding challenges arising from non-harmonised requirements affecting exports to the EU of premixtures and compound feeds containing animal by-products. It is also welcome that pragmatic transitional arrangements appear to have been considered for goods placed on the market before the entry-into-force date.

Alignment on regulated products, including genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and feed additives, will also provide much-needed certainty. Regulatory divergence between Great Britain and the EU has become increasingly difficult for businesses to manage, particularly where different authorisations affect product availability, formulation and trade. A more consistent regulatory framework should reduce these complexities and support the efficient operation of feed supply chains.

Crop Protection and Agronomy

Crop protection has been one of AIC's greatest areas of concern throughout the negotiations. AIC has focused on the implications of aligning with EU Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) and decisions on plant protection products (PPPs), where active substances are approved in Great Britain but not in the EU.

AIC acknowledges that there is still uncertainty around the regulatory environment and how the UK will be involved in shaping decisions, given that the UK will not have a vote at the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCoPAFF). However, it is positive that the EU has agreed, at the UK's request, to involve UK regulatory experts in decision-shaping procedures.

A core AIC ask was the need for realistic and pragmatic transition arrangements for PPPs. It is therefore particularly welcome that the UK Government has recognised this need and negotiated accordingly. Extended transition periods running to the end of 2028 and into 2029 provide at least three harvest years for agronomists, growers and the wider supply chain to adjust and, where necessary, adapt crop management programmes. This represents a significant improvement on

earlier scenarios that risked creating a regulatory cliff edge, with potentially serious consequences for crop production.

AIC also welcomes the longer transition provided for alignment on conditions of use for active substances. These arrangements demonstrate the importance of evidence-led policymaking and constructive engagement between Government and industry. The focus from Government must now be on ensuring that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and its agencies represent UK agricultural interests in Brussels, work with EU Member States with similar climates and contribute up-to-date data to inform decisions.

Combinable Crops

Differences between Great Britain and the EU on Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs), contaminants and mycotoxins have created additional costs, uncertainty and trading barriers for cereals, oilseeds and pulses over the past five years. Alignment should provide greater consistency and predictability for businesses operating in domestic and international markets.

Importantly, the longer transition arrangements for plant protection products (PPPs) also provide the combinable crops supply chain with greater certainty to plan ahead. AIC particularly welcomes the provisions ensuring that existing goods on the market and crops already in the ground are not treated differently from the current position, avoiding any need for segregation. These crops can continue to be marketed in Great Britain following entry into force and traded with the EU, provided they meet applicable EU requirements on MRLs and contaminants.

This is an important outcome for growers, merchants, processors and exporters, helping to avoid unnecessary disruption to established cropping and marketing decisions.

Fertilisers

Although fertiliser largely sits outside the SPS agreement, AIC welcomes the wider commitment towards linking the UK and EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) arrangements. Greater consistency between the two systems should help provide a more predictable trading environment for fertiliser businesses operating across both markets.

AIC also welcomes the removal of Export Health Certificate requirements for fertilisers derived from animal by-products, reducing unnecessary administrative burdens and facilitating trade.

Seed

AIC welcomes the removal of phytosanitary certification requirements and unnecessary duplication in seed certification, variety testing and registration, including alignment on Plant Breeders' Rights

(PBR), Distinctness, Uniformity and Stability (DUS) testing, seed certification and Value for Cultivation and Use (VCU). These changes should significantly reduce administrative burdens and support the movement of seed between Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the EU, largely reflecting arrangements the UK had in place while it was an EU Member State.

The agreement also provides greater clarity on precision breeding. While alignment with the EU's New Genomic Techniques (NGT) framework will require adjustments to the UK's approach, noting that the Precision Breeding Act only applies in England, it offers greater regulatory predictability across UK and EU markets. This is particularly important for commodity crops, where seed production, cultivation and subsequent marketing frequently involve cross-border supply chains. The priority now is to ensure that applications made in England can be transposed into the equivalent EU legislation in due course.

The Next Challenge: Making the Agreement Work

While AIC welcomes the agreement and the progress achieved, the work does not end here. While this chapter has closed, a more important one is about to open.

The UK and EU are entering an unusual regulatory relationship, one in which the UK will align dynamically with significant areas of EU legislation without the same formal decision-making rights as an EU Member State. This will require a strategic approach from Government, regulators and industry if the UK is to protect its interests and maintain meaningful influence over future policy.

AIC believes several priorities will be essential:

- **A properly resourced UK presence in Brussels.** The UK Government must ensure it has sufficient technical and policy expertise, including dedicated Defra officials, to monitor developments, engage early and represent UK agricultural interests effectively.
- **Early engagement on emerging EU legislation.** UK businesses must have visibility of proposed regulatory changes before decisions are finalised. Government should work closely with AIC and its European counterparts to identify potential impacts at the earliest opportunity.
- **A genuinely UK-wide approach.** The implications of future regulatory changes must be considered across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, recognising differences in agricultural production, regulatory responsibilities and supply chains.

Evidence-led influence. The UK must maintain and strengthen its capacity to collect scientific, technical and commercial evidence to inform EU regulatory discussions. Without data, there can be no meaningful influence. This will require continued investment in regulatory expertise, monitoring and industry engagement.

Robust impact assessments. Future EU regulatory changes should be assessed for their implications for UK agriculture, including competitiveness, food security, productivity and the availability of essential agricultural inputs. Industry must have sufficient warning and time to respond.

Making full use of European industry networks. The UK Government should actively draw upon the expertise and relationships of trade associations that retain a direct presence in European policymaking. AIC's continued membership of European associations, including COCERAL, the European Feed Manufacturers' Federation (FEFAC), Euroseeds and the European Fertiliser Blenders Association (EFBA), provides an important route for sharing evidence, understanding emerging proposals and contributing to policy discussions.

The agreement creates a new framework for cooperation, but its long-term success will depend on how effectively it is managed. The UK cannot afford to become a passive recipient of regulatory decisions taken elsewhere.

A bespoke agreement requires a bespoke approach. Government and industry will need to work together more closely than ever, combining technical expertise, commercial evidence and established European relationships to ensure UK interests continue to be understood and represented.

AIC looks forward to continuing its constructive engagement with the UK Government, devolved administrations, European institutions and industry partners to ensure the agreement delivers practical benefits for businesses, farmers and the wider UK food and agricultural supply chain.



For more information, please contact

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