

**MINUTES OF THE BREXIT ARABLE GROUP MEETING, HELD ON MONDAY 13 MAY  
2019 AT 21 ARLINGTON STREET, LONDON, SW1A 1RN**

**Present:**

Alex Waugh (AW) - nabim	Robin Manning (RM) - Defra
Amanda Lyons (AL) - Defra	Gareth Evans (GE) - DIT
Angela Gibson (AG) - Glencore	Gordon Polson (GP) - FoB
Jeremy Moody (JM) - CAAV	Joe Brennan (JBr) - nabim
Dave Eudall (DE) - AHDB	Paul Rooke (PR) - AIC
Rosie Anfield (RA) - Defra	Jack Watts (JW) - NFU
Ian Mace (IM) - ABF	Jon Calland (JC) - Tilda / Rice Association
Rickesh Jethwa (RJ) - DIT	Philippa Beardmore (PB) - Defra
Rosie Anfield (RA) - Defra	Selina Matthews (SM) - Defra
Sarah Nicholas (SN) - Defra	Jenny Rowntree (JR) - Defra

**Joined remotely:**

Julian South (JS) - MAGB	Lucrecia Matteri (LM) - ACFM/BOBMA
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**Present for Item 1 only:**

Jonathan Birnie (JBi) - Birnie Consultancy

**Action summary**

Item	Description
3	AW to send out dates for the first meeting of the arable data working group - open to BAG member organisations.
6	BAG members to email AW topics for discussion at the 17 June BAG meeting.

**1) Welcome and introductions**

- AW opened the meeting at 14:30.

**2) Food and Drink Sector Council - Agricultural Productivity Working Group Update**

- JBi outlined the Food and Drink Sector Council and its objectives.
- JBi sat on the agricultural productivity working group, which had three workstreams:

**A) Getting industry to buy into and use numbers and data**

- The group had recognised a significant problem with data use in the industry. Not enough farmers were collecting, sharing or using data with the exception of some sectors, such as poultry.
- There were concerns that data was not transferrable across systems and also surrounding data ownership and usage, for example around pesticide use and animal welfare. It was agreed that a code of practice was needed.
- A question was whether a central data-sharing hub should exist, or if there be a common mechanism through which data is shared through systems.

**B) Driving continuous improvement through addressing structural failures**

- Structural failures particularly related to knowledge exchange and difficulties communicating best practice. In European countries, farmers were more aware of what was considered best practice.
- Lack of investment in training was another key issue.
- JM said a structural improvement would be to allow contestable access to the use and occupation of land, distinct from ownership. At early stages stage this would involve opening up the means for proficient businesses to compete.

**C) Transformative proposals (game changing propositions)**

- JBi outlined the wide reach of the council, with 150 different organisations having had the opportunity to input into the recommendations.
- The recommendations would not say that everything was broken and they identified there was a lot of good work in the industry at the moment, but a push was needed, for example to build on changes to research funding. Particularly a funding mechanism that would allow projects to take a longer-term focus.
- The industry had succeeded at identifying key research priorities and the committees making decisions had been disparate. Industry should give high level guidance of where funding should go.
- A world-leading knowledge exchange hub was needed, something that was a one-stop-shop for best practice. This should be farm-led. The most likely home for this would be the AHDB.
- There was a discussion on the potential recommendations (slide 6).
- Recommendation 4 aimed to create a modern, more professional sector, and ultimately was approaching a “license to farm” system. This would be approached slowly as an exodus from the sector was to be avoided. There would likely be a central register of training courses and a register of those who adopt them.
- Recommendation 5 was to implement rural enablers, such as 5g, to enable the use of robotics on farm.
- PR asked what incentives would be available for farmers. JBi said it was thought that funding would be available from the CAP reform. The final years of subsidy would be used to push people down a route where they would then survive its absence. There was an argument that CAP was acting as a disincentive for productivity and needed to be repurposed.
- PR said some of the recommendations for data felt too farmer-centric and asked whether there had been a consideration of where the value in data was, for example whether retailers were looking at environmental performance. JBi said in the future customers would be doing more parameter-based buying. AW said that often the buyers of goods from farmers have data that is useful to them and exchanges could be two-way.
- AG asked how environmental and sustainability targets were covered. JBi said an annex to the report showed that a focus on productivity resulted in a sustainability benefit. JM said there were no market measures for some environmental aspects. JBi agreed and said that whilst the best performing farms were also best in terms of carbon output, it was not known how they

performed on biodiversity, but this would be difficult to assess anyway as it was difficult to measure biodiversity.

- JBi said the target was to move more farmers into the top 10% of productivity, but setting targets was difficult as productivity data within the sector was not robust.
- AW asked whether it would be better to separate improved environmental performance from productivity, so that the most productive farms could continue to deliver food/feed goods and others would deliver environmental goods. JM said there would be a large set of pressures for structural change and the markets would respond in diverse ways. He was wary about setting a model that people would be forced to follow.
- AW asked what system would be put in place to enable data collection. JBi said there should be a campaign to show the importance of data, part of which would encourage collection. It was also the aim that data collection would not be onerous and would start with the data that was already there, before translating to more granular key performance indicators. The most valuable KPIs would be identified for each sector.
- PR asked what the timetable for the report was. JBi said the report was largely complete and government had asked for something before the summer recess.
- JBi said he was happy to take any queries.

### **3) Arable sector data**

- AW asked whether the group could begin to think about what information would be useful within the arable sector and to what purpose the data could be used. This tied in to UK trade policy.
- JW said that data and agricultural productivity improvement was a large area and a single solution would not be found. The sector should look to develop a data ecosystem, where data is able to flow and businesses are in control of their data. He added that there was a view among some that the market was not large enough to warrant investment and commercialisation in this area.
- JW said that in a data ecosystem there needed to be clear governance so that individuals knew where their data was going and how they could control it. It was critical to think about the interface at farm level. Whilst data was being generated, it seemed difficult to capture it, for example it was hard to even know how much nitrogen had been used to produce a tonne of wheat.
- IM said that a granular view was needed, breaking the components of production down. It could be envisaged that in the future customers will demand production data for food and it would be efficient for the industry to develop a system in advance of this.
- PR said a starting point would be to look at what was driving data collection and then map out what was achievable. If agricultural policy goes down the route of public money for public goods, consumers would want information on this.
- RM asked whether there were any models Defra could look at. AW said the US used a field to market system measuring around 12 performance qualities. This was producer-driven and measured performance over time.

- JW asked if there needed to be an understanding as to what barriers there were to generating a data environment.
- AW said a policy was needed that allowed businesses to meet their objectives whilst maintaining profitability. Data was an area that was moving quickly and needed to be addressed.
  - It was agreed that a sub-group would be established to deal with data. Some dates would be sent out and any members were welcome to participate. It would be useful to have a Defra representative attend.
  - RM said Tim Mordan could potentially get involved, as well as someone dealing with ELM.
  - DE said AHDB could present to the group on the data they had been collecting.

**Action: AW to send out dates for the first meeting of the arable data working group - open to BAG member organisations.**

- AG said there had been no update from Defra on the disparity between the crop production survey crop area data and the BPS data. RM said that colleagues in the Defra statistics team had narrowed down the difference and would be putting a note together soon.

#### **4) UK trade policy in food and agricultural products**

- AW outlined the conflicting views from Government on what the UK aimed to achieve in terms of food and agricultural products trade policy, with Defra aiming for high quality and DIT aiming for cheap production. There seemed to be little account taken of the cheapness of food in the UK (relative to income).
- JW said the NFU were working on something along these lines.
- RM said the Government was trying to preserve existing agreements through the continuity process. If the UK agreed a deal that would provide freedom to strike trade deals with other countries, the government would focus on the three closest non-EU trading partners. It is intended that this group would be consulted as this process moves forward.
- RM said the no-deal tariffs were due to apply for 12 months and during that time there would be a process to determine what would happen afterwards.

#### **5) Other business**

##### **5.1) EU US trade issue**

- The EU consultation on potential retaliatory tariffs on US products was running until the end of May. Any comments should be fed back to the European Commission and it would assist if Defra were informed of industry positions.

#### **6) Next meeting**

- The next meeting would be held on 17 June, commencing at 14:00. Defra Minister, Robert Goodwill, would be attending the next meeting. Members should email any topics for discussion to [AlexWaugh@nabim.org.uk](mailto:AlexWaugh@nabim.org.uk).

**Action: BAG members to email topics for discussion at next meeting to AW.**