

The notes presented below summarise the UK Farming and the Environment post-Brexit (Policy-UK Forum) attended by David Caffall on the 22nd November 2017

There were some 75 attendees at this meeting in London on Tuesday November 21st. Delegates included a number of our senior Members, Stakeholders, etc.

The following are a few notes from Key Speakers.

Guy Smith: NFU

- Agriculture is the most impacted industry in the Brexit process.
- Fewer raw materials from UK Farms would mean the relocation of food manufacturers – with commensurate loss of employment and revenue.
- Re-wilding will mean more imports of food produced to standards lower than our own and possibly where environmental stewardship is significantly less robust.
- We need a policy which covers trade/labour/regulation/domestic Ag Policy.

Christopher Price: CLA

- Even if Michael Gove leaves Defra in the near future, it will be too late to change many of his policies which appear to be that of a free-market Tory, inclined against intervention.
- We need to switch from a Farmer/State debate to a Farmer/Consumer debate.
- CLA does not predict support against volatility e.g. low prices.
- On productivity - R&D applicable at farm level and skills training is vital.

Vicki Hird: Farming Coordinator, Sustain

- Sustain now numbers over 100 NGOs as within their Membership.
- Public money must be spent on the public good.

Guy Horsington: Deputy Director, Defra

- Guy's presentation was almost identical to the one at the AIC Agribusiness 2018.

Professor Erik Millstone: University of Sussex

- A stable Food and Agriculture Market is indeed a 'Public Good' which is deserving of Government money.
- A high-welfare/high-standards Agriculture is unrealistic in a fully liberalised Trade regime.
- It is only the Vatican State, Monaco and Malta have fewer trees than the UK (I assume this is per acre/square mile?).

Amy Mount: Head of Greener UK (Green Alliance)

- A totally predictable presentation.
- UK ranks 180th out of 289 major States in terms of biodiversity.
- Greener UK has been formed as Brexit is considered to be the biggest challenge to nature in the UK, ever!
- She described Michael Gove's attitude to Greener UK as "promising".
- The environment could be significantly impacted due to loss of protection in the EU Withdrawal Bill. Greener UK is therefore looking for statutory protection not just worthy Bodies.

Helen Browning: Chief Executive, Soil Association

- Helen gave a very lucid but totally predictable pitch for Environment and Farming working together.
- There was no mention of the forthcoming Commission in her presentation.
- Health should be regarded as the third pillar of policy along with Agriculture and Environment.
- Soil Association have big goals such as landscape/water catchment/policy. Also a zero carbon farming system, the prospect of which is challenging and therefore requires money.
- Monitoring needs to be results driven but needing time too for changes to take effect e.g. soil organic matter content will take years to achieve. Options such as land management contracts should therefore be considered.

BREXIT update



- Soil should be at the heart of our 25-year plan. We need to monitor soils – not only NPK but earthworms, micro-organisms etc.
- Why are we continuing to burn straw for power stations when it could be returned to the soil?
- Other concerns include the loss of peat and the damage caused by late-harvested maize.
- There ought to be a nitrogen tax, also linkage to the use of legumes.
- There is a need to incentivise Agro-forestry.

Jonnie Hall: Director of Policy & Members Services, NFU Scotland

- Jonnie Hall gave a brief lucid presentation based on the recent NFUS Brexit document.

Once again NFUS seem to be much more coordinated and “together” than any of the other Farming Unions.