

Agri-Brexit Coalition Meeting

The Farmers Club
Cumber Room
3 Whitehall Court
London
SW1A 2EL

14 June 2019

Attendees

David Caffall (Meeting Chair) (AIC)	Sarah Mann (GAFTA)
Robert Sheasby (AIC)	Katie Doherty (IMTA)
Ruth Bailey (AEA)	Jill Hewitt (NAAC)
Penny Maplestone (BSPB)	Alison Glennon (NOAH)
Jeremy Moody (CAAV)	

Guests

Tom Hind (AHDB)	Paul Rooke (AIC)
Robin Manning (DEFRA)	Geoff Dodgson (AIC)
Chris Kearney (DEFRA)	Julia Corr (Minutes) (AIC)
Isabelle Proctor (DEFRA)	

1. Introductions

DC welcomed Sarah Mann and Isabelle Proctor to the meeting, and thanked everyone for coming. He also thanked Robin Manning for arranging for Tom Hind to attend to discuss the APWG report

2. Matters Arising

DC asked whether there were any Matters Arising. Robin asked to be included in the circulation list for the Minutes going forward and DC agreed

ACTION : JC

3. DEFRA update

RM commented that preparations are commencing again in Defra for a 'no deal' situation and what will happen if we are unable to reach a Brexit agreement. A lot of information was issued last time but not necessarily well packaged. RM asked the Coalition to think about what was missing the last time that could be done better this time. Defra is continuing, and keen, to engage in impacts and discussions with industry on 'what if', and asked Coalition members to continue to flag anything they felt should be on Defra's radar and that may have been overlooked previously.

Defra is rebuilding its 'no deal' teams which means less focus on other current issues. Also timescales are very short – particularly with the race for Prime Minister, Summer Recess and then conference season – time will slip away very quickly. RM reiterated that meetings with industry such as ours are important arenas to flag issues and for us to get answers. There are plenty of meetings underway with the ministers so great opportunities to ask questions.

DC commented that there could well be a new Minister and Secretary of State when the new Prime Minister starts. It would be a shame that ministers with no experience would start in the role just before recess and have very little time to get up to speed before 31st October date

DC asked the Coalition members to go around the table and comment on current issues their members are facing.

- BSPB Penny said they are receiving many calls on equivalence on seed and that the issue will be worse for October than it was for March, coming immediately post-harvest with a greater amount of seed still in the system.
- AIC Apathy from members; 'done this'. Also an issue of business and trust. The Feed sector spent a lot of money stockpiling feed in the spring for the initial Brexit date. The Crop Protection sector feel a June date would have been a better time to leave.
- Gafta Contracts had a lot of caveats included for March, and forward trade wasn't being made. Still getting demand from European customers for grain – how do they manage this?
- NOAH Speaking recently with VMD regarding the continuity of supply and believe it will become more difficult although this will vary from company to company and product to product.
- AEA Not really top of their members list – too early to comment on how no-deal preparations will be picked up again.
- CAAV General feeling is that autumn is the worse time to leave – stock will be going to market. A sense of decline in livestock numbers overall coming in, with many having sold up and reduced exposure. Certainly not the time to expand.
- NAAC Members don't want to discuss, or have little or no interest
- Defra Currently considering what needs to happen if the agricultural policy stalls
- IMTA Members aren't making any plans – did so for March and are not keen to do it again. Heading towards Christmas period at that time and warehouses are already fully booked up. Generally a feeling that beef and poultry requirements won't be enough.
ACTION: KD to arrange for RM to meet IMTA members to discuss further

RM said that businesses do have to plan going forward. Government can't help unless there is real difficulty \ hardship

IMTA met with Defra last week regarding the Healthmark. The European Commission have said that the UK is unable to use the existing EU mark going forward due to allocated ISO number. Ongoing discussions in EU and at a political level to find a solution. Currently no conclusion and many other sectors also are having the same issues. The process to change the ISO code altogether is very longwinded and not easily agreed by all relevant parties.

RM once again stressed the importance of raising any queries, issues or questions with him as soon as we are aware of them rather waiting to our next meeting.

RS commented that AIC would be communicating with its members prior to the summer holidays, ready for the end of October. However similar communication does also need to come from government. RM said that Defra and other agencies are limited in what they can do until the new PM \ government starts – as well as a new European parliament

RM mentioned that the UK has now commenced its own membership of the WTO. The UK formally opened the Article 28 process in December and the deadline is now closed. Several countries have submitted claims against the UK and discussions are now taking place to discuss their validity. Many concerns appear to be around TRQs. If we leave tomorrow we do have a workable schedule in place?

EU has developed proposals for greater market transparency and want to start collecting buying prices as well as selling prices on certain commodities, eg. flour. Defra view is that it will be a complicated process to administer and run and there are questions over the value and usefulness of some of the data to be collected in terms of giving useful information to producers.

4. Agricultural Productivity Working Group report: Tom Hind – AHDB

DC introduced Tom Hind to the meeting and gave an overview of the APWG – which was set up under the Chairmanship of Sir Peter Kendall. Membership of the group was by selection only. DC felt that there needed to be greater consultation on the report (particularly noting that Dawn H and Sarah M's organisations have had no input). DC and PR have tried to include coalition feedback

Tom asked if Jonathan Birnie had attended the coalition as previously suggested however it was noted this had not been the case. Tom then went on to give a brief explanation as to how and why the APWG came about. He suggested that the work streams haven't moved forward much due to Brexit and also not receiving particularly wide visibility, although Defra is hoping this will be increased.

The APWG has been working together for the past 12 months and has produced several recommendations:

Recommendation 1 focuses on the fundamental need for **UK agriculture to become data driven**, allowing performance measurement and the sharing of data to compare between farms. The recommendation highlights the need for simple, entry-point KPIs to be established and for policy incentives to require data capture and sharing in a standardised way. It also acknowledges the need for culture change across the industry through a cohesive industry campaign to communicate the benefits of data collection and use for management. The recommendation also addresses the necessary structural change.

Recommendation 2 advocates the need to develop the **Evidence for Farming Initiative (EFI)** to address the fragmentation and confusion that surround the UK's (especially England's) knowledge exchange landscape. This is characterised by a wide range of delivery bodies, limited co-ordination of effort, variable messaging and no central point where quality assured advice can be obtained.

EFI is based on principles underpinning the What Works network, which currently identifies and shares best practice across a range of public organisations in the UK. Secure sharing of farm data via EFI will enhance impact, allow monitoring of progress, both individually and as a wider industry.

The recommendation also identifies the opportunity to better co-ordinate existing activities to demonstrate best practice via demonstration farms as well as the potential to grow the network to provide more opportunities for farmers to learn from other farmers. This is seen as an important and proven means of facilitating engagement and uptake.

Paul Rooke 20/6/2019 14:11

Comment [1]: Just changed this as Birnie has now finished his contracted period and is no longer involved in the project

Recommendation 3 addresses the need to **align innovation funding and strategy** to the needs of the industry in a 'missions-based' approach. Innovation drives the frontier of technical efficiency forward and is seen as the most important long-term driver of productivity growth in the sector. However, in the UK, much of the completed research does not reach commercial practice. This report identifies key actions to address the innovation and implementation requirements

Recommendation 4 deals with the low uptake of **agricultural skills and training in UK**. In 2013, only 18% of farm managers in England had full agricultural training, with 61% having only practical experience. This needs to change urgently. Agricultural training in the UK is provided by a wide range of organisations, across a wide range of topics. There is no single register of training organisations, nor a central record of qualifications awarded. This fragmentation contributes to the low training uptake, as does the absence of a link to policy incentives to encourage the uptake of training.

Recommendation 5 emphasises the need for **infrastructure and policy** (or rural enablers) to enable productivity gains. Productivity enablers are components (such as infrastructure, taxation changes, farm support policy) which enable or encourage the uptake of best practice. They are not in, themselves, the end goal, but they facilitate the implementation of new ideas or technology. Appropriate rural infrastructure is also critical to the delivery of agricultural productivity. Several of the preceding recommendations in this report are either completely or partially dependent on the provision of this infrastructure.

High capacity data flow is fundamental to artificial intelligence, an essential component of future high productivity farming & growing. 4G is currently adequate for the control and management of current equipment but will not meet future needs. Farming and growing require 5G coverage across all geographical areas of the UK.

If the net zero carbon challenge for agriculture is to be achieved, electrification of heavy farm machinery must be facilitated. Nationwide rural electricity grids must be able to deliver the required electrical flow to charge multiple high capacity batteries at times of peak activity in the farming calendar.

Land mobility is low in many parts of the UK, and access to long-term land lets is restricted. This restricts the expansion capacity of many farms and often means that land remains under the control of those towards the end of their career including many without formal agricultural qualifications. This negatively impacts productivity growth. Facilitating the management of land by those who can take up new technologies and practice with subsequent productivity.

The following actions are required:

1. Invest in **5G infrastructure** to enable required future data flow.
2. **Upgrade the rural electricity network** to enable electrification of farm equipment.
3. Facilitate the **active management of land** by trained and equipped farmers.
4. Encourage **business focused investment** in primary agriculture.

The APWG is very keen that the agricultural industry has buy in to the report and that we all speak with one voice.

RB asked how we retain the agri perspective and not get diluted or subsumed into a wider end to end. TH suggested that we need to remain cohesive and take ownership – agriculture on its own doesn't have a say but as part of the overall Food and Drink industry we represent 12%.

Do we risk becoming less diverse? The shape of food productivity in 20 years will look very different.

JH commented that a lot of the ideas in the report aren't necessarily new. However, they have all been put together. We all need to be open to making these things possible; i.e. training \ certification. We need to support and back this and communicate this collectively.

Tom was asked what the next steps would be and how this would be driven forward. The Group need to see if there is government interest but there is a danger that it may get left on the shelf unless industry push and drive it forward with Defra \ BEIS.

Discussion followed that we need to mobilise and motivate individuals to encourage conscious, proactive decisions in order to increase productivity, rather than relying on CAP. Skills and training in UK agricultural industry lag way behind in comparison to other industries and agriculture in Europe. Businesses are improved by CPD but it still isn't meaningful enough to many who will make the least possible effort in order to gain their points\stamp. The industry does now need to reposition itself to make itself more attractive and appealing, in order to bring new people in.

Tom was asked whether he had a sense that government is willing to accept changes and issues. He feels there is a window of opportunity during the current hiatus on Brexit and with the existing Secretary of State in situ and we should capitalise on that

DC then thanked Tom for coming to the meeting and explaining the report to the Group, and Tom then left.

DC commented that he remains frustrated that the Coalition hadn't had much input to the report but we need to work together to push this through. If we don't do anything, we will get left behind and overlooked and not given any opportunities in the future. He feels that perhaps only 1 or 2 of the recommendations will go forward: 5G and upgrading the rural electricity network will be an easy get out clause for the government to implement and so satisfy many industries, not just agriculture.

5. Coalition Update

Whilst mired in Brexit we aren't giving much thought to post-Brexit and what we will do going forward. Agreed that we add item to next meeting agenda to discuss, and also to agree the date of relaunch and finalise the new name.

ACTION: JC

6. AOB

RB asked whether we could invite a Chair or President of a coalition member to a meeting, once per quarter, in order to maintain their understanding and buy-in to the Coalition. Everyone agreed that this would be a very good idea and we will arrange for a rota if there is enough interest. Alternatively, allocation will be on a first-come, first served basis.

ACTION: Let JC know if your Chair would like to attend the next meeting

The meeting closed at 12.30