

Food & Farming

Flockdown announced with bird flu cases on the rise

On 29 November 2021 it became a legal requirement for all farmers and poultry keepers across the UK to keep their birds indoors and follow strict biosecurity measures. This is mandated by the UK's four Chief Veterinary Officers in response to numerous confirmed cases of highly-pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in captive and wild birds in recent weeks. Housing measures have been in place for parts of North Yorkshire since 21 November. These new UK housing rules mean that all poultry and captive birds across the country must be housed in order to keep them separate from wild birds. Keepers must also regularly clean and disinfect equipment, clothing and vehicles and must limit access to non-essential workers or visitors.

Rise in milk prices announced

Medina Dairy and Arla have both announced an increase in their milk prices in response to the rising costs and additional inflation pressures that farmers are currently experiencing. As of 1 December 2021, Arla has increased its milk price by 3.16 pence per litre (ppl), which takes the standard manufacturing litre price for conventional and organic milk to 36.68ppl and 44.13ppl respectively. Medina intends to increase its core Watsons milk price by 3ppl from 1 January 2022, taking its liquid standard litre price to 32.8ppl.

Policy

Precision slurry spreading to be required in Scotland

The Scottish government has announced new controls on the storage and application of slurry and digestate, which will come into force from 1 January 2022. It is amending the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011, to improve controls on the storage of slurry and digestate to reduce leakage, and more targeted spreading to maximise the nutrient benefit and reduce emissions. A key element of the new regulations is the phasing out of splash plates for slurry spreading and a requirement for larger farms and contractors to use low-emission, precision spreading equipment for applications. From 1 January 2027 all farms will need to use precision spreading equipment. The [new regulations](#) are being made following a 12 week public consultation and engagement with the agricultural sector and the National Farmers Union Scotland. The government says they will lead to a significant reduction in ammonia emissions.

Consultation opens on changes to the AHDB

The UK government and the devolved administrations have set out proposals to reform the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB). The consultation takes forward priorities identified through the 'Request for Views on the future of the AHDB' exercise, and also the outcome of the recent ballots in the horticulture and potato sectors across Great Britain. It is proposed that the statutory levy in the horticulture and potato sectors is removed from the beginning of the next financial year. Instead, the governments are clear that any group of growers will be able to pay a voluntary levy to fund applied research or other relevant activities that the statutory levy previously funded.

Dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the AHDB and an inability to influence its activities led to growers in the horticulture and potato sectors voting to discontinue their levy. In response to this it is proposed that all levy payers will be given the opportunity to vote on proposals for how any levy will be spent in their sector at least once every five years. Giving the AHDB flexibility to deliver services on a commercial or voluntary basis to other agricultural sectors where there is no levy, for example the poultry sector, is also planned. The [consultation](#) will close on 10 January 2022.

Environment & Natural Capital

Nature and climate pact covering 10.5 million acres signed

The National Trust has brought together some of England's largest landowners and managers to sign up to a range of commitments to help the government meet its net zero ambitions and reverse environmental damage. The

organisations include the RSPB, the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Church Commissioners for England, the Duchy of Cornwall, National Parks England, Soil Association, The Wildlife Trusts and Woodland Trust. Collectively they influence the management of 10.5 million acres of land, which is approximately a third of England's area. The six climate and nature-based solutions that organisations have signed up to include:

1. Take meaningful action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change to ensure a net gain in carbon sequestration
2. Create or restore homes for wildlife that support nature's recovery and provide long term biodiversity increases
3. Be designed, implemented and managed in consultation with local communities, taking into account past, present and future landscape character
4. Facilitate opportunities to deliver benefits for people at a local and a national level, such as access to nature and green job generation
5. Consider the location, ecology and surrounding landscape to ensure multiple benefits, such as carbon sequestration and flood management
6. Be future-proofed and adaptively managed so they are climate resilient for generations to come.

These commitments will inform their approaches to land management, however much of their reach via their roles as landlords and landscape bodies, so in many cases delivery will depend upon collaboration with the farmers occupying the land.

Co-operation agreement bolsters support for Wales-wide NVZ

The Welsh Labour party and Plaid Cymru have struck a co-operation agreement in the Senedd that is set to last for the next three years. The agreement includes a plan to receive independent advice on changing the net zero target date from 2050 to 2035. They have also agreed to introduce a transition period as the system of farm payments is reformed. This means stability payments will continue to be a feature of the Sustainable Farming Scheme during and beyond this Senedd term. Together they will agree the longer-term arrangements for Welsh agriculture whilst recognising the particular needs of family farms and acknowledging ecologically sustainable local food production. Importantly, the deal also affects the Water Resources Regulations 2021, which made the whole of Wales a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) and are subject to a legal challenge. Plaid Cymru had previously opposed the new NVZ ruling, but will now support it as part of the co-operation agreement; the government has however committed to work with farmers and to focus on activities known to cause pollution.

Property & Development

Number of undeveloped brownfield sites hits new high

The CPRE has released its annual State of Brownfield report, which shows a continued increase in the amount of brownfield land suitable for housing across England. However, despite the large area of brownfield land available for housing, the analysis showed that planning permission for housing units on brownfield sites has stagnated. The proportion of brownfield housing capacity with planning permission is at its lowest since records began, down to 44% in 2021 from 53% in 2020, and the actual number of units is the lowest it has been for four years. Development on greenfield sites however is on the rise. In reaction to these numbers, CPRE is calling for a new national planning policy to prioritise brownfield development in local plans. Analysis shows that the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, and the West Midlands in total have space for more than 375,000 homes on previously used land and in London and the South East, just over 500,000 homes could be built on brownfield sites.

Scotland: Licensing short term lets

New legislation has been laid before the Scottish parliament which would give councils powers to ensure that short-term lets are safe and meet the needs of their local communities. Under the legislation, all local authorities will be required to establish a short-term lets licensing scheme by October 2022. Existing hosts and operators will have until 1 April 2023 to apply for a licence for each property that they operate as a short-term let. All short-term lets in Scotland will have to be licensed by 1 July 2024.

This legislation has been created due to residents' concerns about the impact of short term lets on their communities, causing for example an increase in antisocial behaviour or reduction in housing supply. The intention is that a licensing scheme will ensure that the needs and concerns of communities are balanced with wider economic and tourism interests. The new legislation is subject to approval by MSPs. Separate legislation allowing councils to establish short-term let control areas and manage numbers of short-term lets came into force in April 2021.

Business & Economy

Funding for UK distilleries to fuel a greener future

The UK government has awarded £11.3 million to help UK distilleries 'go green' by cutting emissions and supporting jobs within the green economy. This is the next phase of funding in the government's Green Distilleries Competition. The intention is that hydrogen and biogas will replace fossil fuels to make production processes greener and more efficient. The funding will support four projects:

- Protium Green Solutions Limited, which is working with Bruichladdich distillery to create an onsite fuel switching process that will replace a medium fuel oil boiler with a hydrogen boiler.
- Locogen Ltd which plans to develop green hydrogen through creating infrastructure to provide Arbikie Highland Estate distillery with hydrogen fuel for raising steam in the distillation process.
- Supercritical Solutions Ltd which is advancing its novel high pressure ultraefficient electrolysis technology to build a demonstrator, whilst delivering hydrogen direct-fired whisky.
- Colorado Construction and Engineering Ltd which will design, implement and rollout a batch gasification proposal, using a biofuel gasifier and associated reactive fuel burner - this technology could enable distilleries to retrofit existing boilers.

According to the government, the distilleries sector has the potential to cut its annual carbon emissions by half a million tonnes, which is equivalent to powering more than 60,000 homes or taking 100,000 cars off the road. Funding for the Green Distilleries Competition is part of the £1 billion Net Zero Innovation Portfolio which aims to accelerate the commercialisation of innovative low-carbon technologies, systems and processes in the power, buildings and industrial sectors.

Other Rural News

Enquiry into rural mental health launched

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has opened an enquiry into rural mental health. The committee has highlighted that farmers and other agricultural related professions are known to face particular mental health challenges, with higher than average rates of depression and suicide. The Farm Safety Foundation has reported that one farmer a week in the UK dies by suicide and research from Edinburgh University has shown that the rate of suicide in the veterinary profession is at least three times that of the general population. According to the Farm Safety Foundation, 81% of farmers under 40 believe that mental health is the biggest hidden problem facing farmers today and 92% believe that promoting good mental health is 'crucial' if lives are to be saved and farmers kept safe. The Committee is [calling for evidence](#) for this enquiry and wants to know more about the specific mental health challenges facing rural communities, service provision, causes, support and current perspectives on government support.

And finally...

Morrisons Christmas advert celebrates 'Farmer Christmas'

Morrisons Christmas advert celebrates the magic of the food grown, harvested and cooked by 'Farmer Christmas'. It tells the Christmas farm to fork story as seen through the eyes of two children, who go on a magical tour to learn about Farmer Christmas' sleigh (his combine), his reindeer (HGV delivery trucks) and his magic helpers (the food processors and chefs). The advert marks the end of a year in which Morrisons has pledged to be the first supermarket to be completely supplied by net zero carbon British farms by 2030. This year the supermarket has also partnered with McDonalds, NFU and Harper Adams University to launch the UK's 'first' sustainable farming school.

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