

Food & Farming

Reducing methane from UK livestock

The UK government has launched a UK wide call for evidence into the use of new types of animal feed products that can reduce methane emissions from livestock. Feed products including seaweeds, essential oils, organic acids, probiotics and antimicrobials have shown potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, especially from housed cattle. The government wants to find out how to help their use become more widespread. In 2019, agriculture accounted for 10% of total UK greenhouse gas emissions, with methane accounting for approximately 54% of agricultural emissions. As of 2020, agricultural emissions have been cut by 16% compared to 1990 levels and it is hoped methane reducing feeds will help the sector move closer to its net zero target.

Increased BPS rates for Scottish farmers and the Sheep Support Scheme opens

Following a budget review, farmers and crofters will benefit from increased basic and greening payment rates for 2022. Payments have however only increased by a very small amount – 94p per hectare for region one, 12p for region two and 5p for region three. The 2022 Scottish Upland Sheep Support Scheme also opened for applications on 1 September. The scheme provides additional support to sheep producers who farm in Scotland's rough grazing areas, helping to maintain the social and environmental benefits sheep flocks bring. Eligible animals must be retained on applicants' holdings from 1 December 2022 to 31 March 2023. The application window for this scheme closes on 30 November 2022.

Sustainable Farming Incentive becomes easier to access

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) opened in England in June. Initially, farmers with land in Countryside Stewardship and Environmental Stewardship agreements could not apply online directly and were asked to get in touch with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) in order to access the service to make an application. These applicants can now apply online directly by signing into the Rural Payments service. It is currently taking the RPA approximately two weeks to process applications and issue agreements for acceptance. For more information on the SFI, see our most recent [briefing note](#).

Policy

What does the new PM mean for the rural sector?

Liz Truss won the Conservative Party leadership contest by a large majority and has become the UK's new Prime Minister. What are the implications of her victory for the rural sector? Liz Truss was environment secretary between July 2014 and July 2016, when she oversaw efficiency plans to significantly cut Environment Agency funding. She calls herself an environmentalist and has promised a 'doubling down' on reaching net zero but in a 'conservative way which helps households and businesses'. She wants to 'harness the full power of free enterprise as a clean, green jobs-creating machine'. However, Ms Truss has also been very clear she intends to suspend green energy levies in order to address the cost of living crisis and 'save families an average of £153 a year'. She has been vocal about her dislike of solar energy, saying 'our fields should be filled with our fantastic produce...they shouldn't be full of solar panels'.

Ms Truss is the MP for South West Norfolk and supports farmers but dislikes EU regulations. She has pledged to scrap all retained EU laws by the next election and wants to 'review all quangos'. Ms Truss has made headlines for wanting to remove Natural England's nutrient neutrality guidance in a bid to cut 'Brussels red tape' and increase house building in affected areas. However, she has promised to attend the Convention on Biological Diversity meeting, COP15, which is due to take place in Canada at the end of this year.

Speaking to NFU members on 1 September she committed to create an environment that would enable farmers to produce more food and export that food around the world. She's concerned about the current incentives influencing farmers' actions, including some elements of rewilding, saying that she would not support a domestic food production target and would review the merits of other targets including annual housebuilding and nature conservation goals. She said the next Defra secretary should take a pragmatic approach, working closely with the food and farming industry to make sure there is sufficient investment in the sector. Fundamentally her focus is

“restoring our food security and making sure that we have got an industry that is healthy and able to renew itself into the future”. The next big question is who will be the new secretary of state at Defra?

Detail announced on Scotland’s future agriculture bill

The Scottish government has launched a consultation on a new Agriculture Bill, which will underpin Scotland’s agricultural policy as the country moves away from EU based rural support systems whilst remaining broadly aligned with the CAP. Its [vision](#) is for Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. The legislation will help it tackle the climate and biodiversity crises, support thriving rural communities and ensure resilience against future food supply chain shocks. The detail of future schemes will be defined later in secondary legislation. The Agriculture Bill will create the powers the Scottish government needs to enact these, and it also describes what farmers may receive payments for, how those payments will be made and what will be required of farmers. Tenancy reform is also on the cards along with proposals for knowledge transfer, rural development, food security, and animal health and welfare initiatives. The consultation closes on 21 November 2022.

Environment & Natural Capital

More funding for tree planting in Wales

The Welsh government has announced £32 million of additional funding to encourage farmers and landowners to increase tree planting rates across Wales. The government wants to plant 86 million trees by the end of the decade and 43,000 hectares of new woodland by 2030 as part of its commitment to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. There are two new woodland creation support schemes; the Small Grants Woodland Creation scheme, which is available to those planting trees on up to two hectares of land which is agriculturally improved or of low environmental value. The second scheme is the Woodland Creation Grant, which offers funding for tree planting and fencing to farmers and land managers who have a Welsh government approved woodland creation plan in place. These schemes will help fund tree planting, fencing and 12 years of maintenance costs. If you would like to discuss woodland creation in Wales please contact [Mark Gordon](#).

£5 million funding to support paludiculture

Peatlands are the UK’s largest carbon store but only 13% of our peatlands are in a near natural state. Extraction, overgrazing, burning and drainage for agricultural use has caused severe peatland degradation. In order to reduce peat extraction, the sale of peat for use in the amateur gardening sector in England will be banned by 2024. As part of this announcement, the government also launched a new £5 million fund to promote the use of peatlands for sustainable farming. This money will support the uptake of paludiculture (the practice of farming on rewetted peatland), with the hope this will further safeguard food security and reduce the degradation of peatland carbon stores.

Property & Development

Lightning fast broadband boost for Dorset

Project Gigabit is the government’s £5 billion scheme to bring fast and reliable broadband to areas considered too difficult or expensive to connect under the broadband industry’s commercial plans. Government funding will complement industry investment to ensure these harder to reach areas benefit from the same gigabit broadband as the rest of the country. The first Project Gigabit contract has been awarded to Wessex Internet and is worth £6 million. It will connect more than 7,000 hard to reach premises across the region from Sherborne to Verwood and Shaftesbury to Blandford Forum. New data shows 7 in 10 UK properties can currently access lightning-fast gigabit broadband. Ensuring more remote rural areas have as much access as urban areas is a key aim of the levelling up agenda.

Business & Economy

How will Arla reach its net zero target?

Arla, the UK dairy industry’s largest milk cooperative, comprising 3,200 farmers, has published its plan for achieving its net zero carbon emissions by 2050 target. It explains how it will reduce its scope one and two carbon emissions by 63% and its scope three emissions by 30% by 2030. Key changes include helping farmers to adopt more sustainable feed practices, avoiding excessive fertiliser use and improving crop yields to reduce the amount of land being used to grow cow feed.

Arla also plans for 41% of its total vehicle fleet to be powered by biogas by 2030. As part of this strategy it is continuing to invest in generating biogas from slurry to expand its fleet of ‘poo powered’ trucks. Arla’s targets have

been reviewed by the Science-Based Target Initiative which has confirmed they are consistent with emissions reductions required to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees.

Other Rural News

And finally...

Women's shearing world record set by British shearer

The first Women's Eight Hour Strongwool Ewe World Record has been set by Kent-based shearer Marie Prebble, when she sheared 370 ewes at Trefranck Farm, Launceston, Cornwall on 25 September. Ms Prebble started the shearing at 7am, and worked in two hour runs, with the challenge ending at 5pm. Speaking after the event, she said 'I am proud to work in an industry where women are paid exactly the same rates as men, where men and women gain respect equally for the hard work they do'.

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