

BVA response to Scottish Government Agricultural transition - first steps towards our national policy: consultation

Who we are

- 1) The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the UK with over 18,000 members. BVA represents, supports and champions the interests of the veterinary profession in this country, and we therefore take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession.
- 2) BVA Scottish Branch brings together representatives of local veterinary associations, BVA's specialist divisions, government, and research organisations in Scotland. The Branch advises BVA on the consensus view of Scottish members on local and United Kingdom issues.
- 3) We are grateful for the opportunity submit a response to this consultation on the agricultural transition.

Introduction

- 4) The future of agricultural support is of great interest to the veterinary profession because veterinary surgeons play an integral part of the agricultural and food sectors.
- 5) Veterinary surgeons provide preventive healthcare and treatment for livestock, as well as carry out surveillance, promote good biosecurity, promote high animal health and welfare and boost productivity. Official Veterinary Surgeons (OVs) ensure food safety and enable trade in animals and animal products. Veterinary Surgeons working in Government provide an important public service throughout the food chain from disease control to safeguarding animal health and welfare.

Animal health and welfare

- 6) In 2017, BVA set out a veterinary vision for what agricultural policy should look like after the EU membership referendum.¹ That document called for the concept of public goods to be at the heart of a new post Brexit agricultural policy to benefit producers, consumers, and wider society. Specifically, we urged for the use of public money to incentivise and support animal health and welfare outcomes as public goods.
- 7) In our response to *Stability and Simplicity: proposals for a rural funding transition period*, we called on the Scottish Government to develop an agricultural policy which would “support animal health and welfare which underpins the reputation of UK and Scottish agricultural produce”.
- 8) The stated goal of the current consultation is to “support farmers and crofters to ensure their economic sustainability as we deal with the twin global emergencies of climate change and biodiversity whilst also continuing to produce high quality food.” It is disappointing to see insufficient weight being given to animal health and welfare within this aim. With increasing recognition that animal agriculture can be a contributor to environmental degradation, climate change, habitat loss and waste, changes in UK animal production and farming practices are necessary to increase efficiency of agriculture and mitigate environmental impact.
- 9) The interconnections between human wellbeing, animal wellbeing and environmental

Greenhouse gases

- 27) When collecting baseline data to achieve a Just Transition in Scottish agriculture, it is important to accurately assess the global warming potential (GWP) of different greenhouse gases produced by animal agriculture and develop policies to mitigate these emissions accordingly. Research by International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) scientists from Oxford Martin School, Oxford University has demonstrated that rather than treating all greenhouse gases with a 'one-size fits all approach', there are two distinct types of emissions, and they should be treated differently by using an adapted Global Warming Potential metric.
- 28) For example, carbon dioxide (from farm vehicles, buildings, equipment, imported feed) and nitrous oxide (primarily from artificial fertilisers) are long-living pollutants that persist in the atmosphere. Whereas methane (produced from livestock) is a short-living pollutant that reduces over time (over an approximate 10-year cycle), meaning that methane emissions will replace old emissions and have a neutral warming impact (as long as the number of UK livestock remains at the same level).
- 29) Climate change and agricultural policies should therefore be designed to reflect this difference. To affect the largest change, efforts should initially be focussed on reducing the long-living emissions that are produced by animal agriculture eg. carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide. However, the UK's agricultural community must not lose sight of the fact that for methane to continue having a neutral impact, emissions must still fall, but only by 0.3% each year.

Capital grants

- 30) We would not support the limiting of grant support solely to the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Specifically, we would support the provision of grant support for animal health and welfare outcomes. Good animal health and welfare is paramount from farm-to-fork. Therefore, grants should support animal health and welfare as goals in and of themselves.
- 31) However, as noted above there are clear links between animal health improvement and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, if grants are limited to the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions this should allow for animal health and welfare focused interventions.
- 32) We are aware that

Incentivi sing health and welfare

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*and beyond.*¹⁵

- 56) A report commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) found that in 2012/13 research and development income for veterinary science totaled £55m. Agriculture, forestry and veterinary science research is singularly adept at leveraging public sector funding to attract additional private sector financ-3(ep)h595.00008871 0 595.32 841.92 reW*ndW*ndW*n65595.00(

- 60) Equally as important as commissioning innovative research, is the dissemination of research and new learning from researchers into innovative practice on farm. Encouraging early adoption and a culture of evaluation will allow Scotland to be a testbed for new technologies. The role of the private vet will be essential to advise any farmer involved in early adoption, to collect data and ensure animal health and welfare are maintained.
- 61) Vets are the trusted advisors to farmers and uniquely positioned to offer the advice that supports the uptake of innovative approaches. There should be greater utilisation of behavioural

is given to animal health and welfare. As noted throughout this response, improved animal health and welfare would underpin the stated aims of the consultation document.

- 70) The involvement of the veterinary profession within any future agricultural policy will be vital to all aspects of policy development, review, and implementation. BVA and BVA Scottish Branch are well placed to support the Scottish Government in the development and implementation of a new agricultural policy and would welcome further engagement.