

Environment Secretary sets out animal health and welfare support for livestock farmers

Farmers will be encouraged to keep healthier, higher welfare animals as part of the Government's flagship farming reforms, including fully-funded annual vet visits and grants to improve conditions for livestock.

During his speech at the National Farmers Union conference, the Environment Secretary George Eustice outlined his vision for internationally competitive livestock sectors. He set out plans for the [Animal Health and Welfare Pathway](#) – a programme of financial support for farmers in the pig, cattle, sheep and poultry sectors, based around key animal health and welfare priorities.

These include measures such as reducing mastitis and lameness in dairy cattle, improving biosecurity to control pig diseases endemic to the UK and improving the feather cover of laying hens. To help farming sectors make these improvements, Animal Health and Welfare Grants will be launched within the next year to fund investments such as equipment and technology or larger projects like upgrading housing for dairy cattle to deliver improvements in lameness, cow comfort and calf mortality.

As part of the [Pathway](#), the Government will initially offer cattle, sheep and pig farmers who are eligible for the Basic Payment Scheme funding for an annual visit from a vet of their choice to carry out diagnostic testing, review biosecurity and responsible use of medicines, and provide advice relating to the health and welfare of their animals. These visits will launch later this year (2022) and the offer will be further extended over time to other types of livestock farmers.

The [Animal Health and Welfare Pathway](#) will also include a disease eradication and control programme. This will allow farmers to apply for financial support to enable them to take measures to prevent and reduce endemic diseases affecting livestock such as veterinary advice, vaccination, or improvements to on-farm management.

We plan to trial a payment by results programme. This would mean rewarding farmers who can demonstrate high animal health and welfare outcomes, such as those such as those who provide their animals ample space and enrichment so they can better express their natural behaviours.

Environment Secretary, George Eustice said:

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway is for those farmers who are in pursuit of higher profitability through better health outcomes, and it starts with an annual vet visit.

Farmers will be able to have a vet of their choice, the family vet

that they trust, and the government will pay. That vet will be able to help the farmer put together a plan for improved animal health and improved profitability on their livestock holding.

Chief Vet, Christine Middlemiss said:

I hope to see wide-scale adoption of the Annual Health and Welfare Review as part of normal business practice, more farmers taking action to improve health and welfare, and improved outcomes when it comes to endemic diseases and conditions – which will improve animal health welfare and reduce waste, antibiotic use and financial losses.

Outside the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, the Government is designing a new, fairer farming system that works in the best interests of farmers. The Pathway is a critical part of the farming reforms set out in the [Agricultural Transition Plan](#) to promote the production of healthier, higher-welfare animals.

Farmers in England already achieve some of the highest welfare standards in the world and the new measures will support industry as they adapt to global health challenges like antimicrobial resistance, zoonotic disease outbreaks, the race to Net Zero, and biodiversity loss. The reforms will deliver benefits for animal health and welfare, farm productivity, food security, public health, UK trade and the environment.

Further information on how livestock farmers can apply for the first step of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, the Annual Health and Welfare Review, will be shared in the Spring. Farmers will have the opportunity to influence the items that are included within the Animal Health and Welfare grants equipment and technology list. Further information on how to take part will be disseminated through representative industry organisations.

Further information

The Pathway is about more than just financial assistance and consists of three mutually reinforcing strands which will:

- support livestock farmers financially by using public funds to pay for health and welfare enhancements that are valued by the public and not currently delivered sufficiently by the market or through existing regulatory standards.
- stimulate market demand for higher welfare products by making it easier for consumers to purchase food that aligns with their values, improving transparency, and providing the industry with a level playing field to promote such products. We are looking at potential market interventions – such as labelling (recent call for evidence) and mandatory public disclosure – that could improve the accessibility, availability, and affordability of higher welfare products for consumers, while driving positive procurement choices by retailers.

- strengthen the regulatory baseline over time, making sure we maintain our current high standards and continue to raise them where necessary, with details subject to consultation with all relevant sectors.

The Vet Visit

This will pay for 2-3 hours of farmer and vet time to: look at the health and welfare of their animals, including biosecurity and responsible use of medicines; receive a report from the vet, which will include some achievable actions the farmer can take to improve health and welfare – this will not be shared with the Government, and is between the farmer and vet; advice on action to take resulting from testing; and signposting to other support, including future grants and disease control schemes.

Each Review will be bespoke. The farmer and vet will decide how to prioritise their time. It will also involve testing:

- Cattle: BVD
- Sheep: Drench Test
- Pigs: PRRS

It will be a cash payment and farmers will be responsible for agreeing a rate with their vet – we do not expect to see their invoice from the vet or similar. The payments rates will be:

- pigs – £684
- sheep – £436
- beef cattle – £522
- dairy cattle – £372

Payment rates are fixed and have been refined in collaboration with industry, based upon priority testing required. Payments will go to the farmer, covering their commitment, vet time and diagnostic testing. Variation in payment rates between species is due to differences in priority disease testing costs.