

News story: Farm inspection review announced

The review, to be led by Dame Glenys Stacey, will look at opportunities for improving regulation and enforcement pre and post EU Exit, seek out ways to reduce duplication and allow farmers to concentrate on upholding key environmental and animal welfare standards as they produce fantastic British food.

For example, the current inspection regime can result in farmers being visited by as many as five different bodies – the Rural Payments Agency, Natural England, the Animal Plant and Health Agency, the Environment Agency or their local authority – all asking for similar information.

Each visit adds to the burden on farmers, and rigidity of the Common Agriculture Policy rules require inspections of precise criteria such as field margin dimensions and the specific placement of trees in fields. Equally, inspections over lapses such as slurry management and welfare standards are often haphazard.

The review comes as the government is preparing to publish an agriculture Command Paper that consults on future policy in this country after we leave the European Union.

Speaking at the NFU Conference today, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

The rules associated with current subsidy payments are unwieldy and, very often, counter-productive. They require farmers to spend long days ensuring conformity with bureaucratic processes which secure scarcely any environmental benefits and which, in turn, require a vast and inflexible bureaucracy to police.

As does the current farming inspection regime, which, despite several recent attempts at simplification, remains as unwieldy as ever. Every year, farmers are confronted by a barrage of inspections from different agencies, often duplicating costs in both time and money.

I am delighted to announce that Dame Glenys Stacey will be conducting a thorough and comprehensive review of this regime, seeing how these inspections can be removed, reduced or improved to reduce the burden on farmers, while maintaining and enhancing our animal and plant health standards.

This review is not only long-required but also very timely as we guide our future approach and maximise the opportunities of leaving the EU. It will provide answers to some key general questions to guide our future approach, subject to the outcome of our

negotiations with the EU.

Dame Glenys Stacey said:

I am delighted to be asked to lead the much needed review of the farm inspection regime. With farming at the heart of the quality and safety of the food on our plate as well, and central to the stewardship of our wildlife, land and rivers, this is an excellent time to be working with farmers and their representatives, and all those who inspect farms, so as to get to a sensible inspection regime, post Brexit.

Dame Glenys has over twenty years' experience in driving reform within public sector organisations. As a former Chief Executive of Animal health, a precursor to the current Animal and Plant Health Agency, she is well versed in the inspection challenge facing our farmers.

The Command Paper will provide further detail on government proposals to design agricultural support fit for the future after we leave the EU.

Notes

1. Dame Glenys is an experienced regulator, chief inspector and chief executive. A solicitor by profession, she has over twenty years' CEO experience, having led the start up or turnaround of a number of public sector organisations responsible for legal and/or regulatory services. As the former CEO of Defra's Animal Health Agency she has valuable experience of farm inspection regimes, and the nature and value of farming in the UK.
2. Dame Glenys brings regulation and inspection experience from other public services. She joined Ofqual, the exams regulator in 2011 as its CEO and Chief Regulator, leading the implementation of the government's planned reforms to qualifications in England and providing advice to government on how best to deliver government's policy aims for qualifications. In March 2016 Dame Glenys took up the post of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation. The inspectorate sets standards and drives improvement in probation services, with the joint aims of reducing reoffending and protecting the public.