

Press release: Environment Secretary streamlines support for farmers

Support for farmers will be simplified under plans announced by Environment Secretary Michael Gove today, with the country's decision to leave the EU providing a once in a lifetime opportunity to refocus how we support farmers and landowners.

Speaking at the Country Land and Business Association's (CLA) annual Rural Business Conference, the Secretary of State set out how Defra will make practical and pragmatic changes to existing farm support systems, streamlining the process to free up farmers to focus on what they do best.

Speaking after the conference, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Today I have set out plans to improve our current schemes, starting with simplifying support for farmers to protect and enhance our landscapes and countryside.

But these measures are just the beginning – the first steps towards a simplified system of support. Over the coming weeks and months, we'll be working closely with our farmers to make sure we listen to what they want as we design a new approach and realise our vision for the future of UK food and farming outside the EU.

Acknowledging the daily challenge farmers face within the EU's burdensome Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Secretary of State said the current system of farm support is inefficient, ineffective, inequitable, and environmentally harmful. He outlined the need to change the way we invest in our countryside so farmers can more readily access support to protect wildlife, enhance the environment and improve land use.

As a first step, the Environment Secretary announced simplifications to the Countryside Stewardship scheme through the creation of four new streamlined offers which will launch in January next year. These new offers will have a much simpler application process – half as much paperwork as before – so it will be easier for farmers and land managers to apply and deliver environmental benefits on their land. Further details on this will be shared later this week.

CLA President Tim Breitmeyer said:

Farmers and landowners want to continue providing the country with high quality, affordable food while protecting the environment and supporting wildlife. We welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to streamlining and focusing support into the areas most needed, and we look forward to working with him to drive up participation

in crucial schemes to protect and enhance landscapes and the environment.

Jenna Hegarty, Head of Land Use Policy at RSPB said:

We welcome the Secretary of State's ambition to make Countryside Stewardship more effective, which will allow more farmers to help wildlife on their land. This is a crucial step towards realising his aim to refocus agriculture policy to provide clear benefits for people, nature and the future of farming.

The Secretary of State also spoke about the opportunities for UK farmers and food producers to take advantage of changing consumer tastes and reap the rewards of quality and provenance in production. He celebrated measures set out in the government's Industrial Strategy to work towards a food and drink sector deal and announced further support including a further £45 million top up to the RDPE Growth Programme to help rural business development, food processing and rural infrastructure projects.

The government will look to publish an Agriculture Bill in 2018 and will consult with all those who have an interest in the success of the UK food and farming industry in the New Year.

We have already pledged to match the support farmers currently receive from the CAP until the end of this parliament and set out the intention to go on supporting farmers where the environmental benefits of that spending are clear.