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## Autumn 2009 Prior Notification Trial Summary

### Executive Summary

- Following on from discussion with the Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Affairs in 2009 the NFU has been investigating the possibility of further developing a voluntary approach for prior notification of spraying in order to avoid a legal requirement. A survey of members in summer 2009 supported this approach.
- Hence this trial was conducted from September-December 2009, with farmers who volunteered from across England.
- The aim of the trial was to gain further information on how a voluntary system for prior notification might work in practice and to see if such a scheme might raise additional concerns amongst neighbours.
- The identification measures used in the trial were; direct letter, public notice (sign) and personal contact.
- The notification methods used in the trial were; text/phone, direct e-mail, visual aid (flag) and third party e-mail.
- Due to the timescale and particularly the season the number of participants was limited. However no additional concerns appeared to have been raised by neighbours as a result of neighbours being asked if they wanted to be notified with 0.68% of those asked requesting notification.
- This overall low level of concern backs up the member's survey and previous work in the UK and other schemes elsewhere in the world.
- No feedback was received from neighbours.
- Letters were the preferred identification method (67%).
- The most popular method of notification was text or telephone (74%).
- Costs were estimated for various methods of notification but the cost to the farmer would very much depend on the number of notifications required as time is by far the biggest cost.
- It is anticipated that commercial web based services would be set up for those that wish to use them to provide a notification service.
- Case studies documenting successful voluntary approaches are included in the full report.

### Recommendations

- Any measures introduced should be in proportion to the low level of concern seen on this issue. A legal requirement for prior notification on a large scale would be expensive and impractical for farmers to conduct and would be difficult to police.
- Many farmers are already either voluntarily providing notification or taking other measures to give reassurance and this should be supported. However no accurate figures exist on the level of these activities.
- In light of these findings, the NFU therefore recommends if any approach is needed, that it should be a voluntary approach. This should be produced as an extension of existing activities like the Good Neighbour Initiative. This is best suited to give the important adaptability and flexibility needed in these situations and the overall low level of concern.
- Flexibility is required and no one method is suitable for all.
- A much larger and more detailed trial would be required if any attempt was made to introduce a legal requirement to notify. This would have to be Government funded.

### Summary of Current Proposals for a Voluntary Approach

- Notification would be given to those that request it only.
- The farmer is in the best position to select the most suitable notification method for his/her particular situation but it must also be suitable for the neighbour.
- Non-notification methods e.g. buffers or spray timing can be used if acceptable to both parties.

- The notification would indicate only when the field was planned to be sprayed. It would be up to the farmer and neighbour to agree the best time to provide this notification depending on the method used but would either be the evening before or day of spraying.
- No details would be given of the products used unless specific medical advice indicated this was necessary.
- A neighbour would be defined as somebody whose residential land immediately borders the sprayed field.
- Spraying needs to take place in suitable weather windows and as this may change at short notice the farmer would not be able to guarantee notification.
- Notification would only be given for pesticides applied by boom sprayers and would not cover liquid fertilisers, non-pesticides e.g trace elements or soil applied granules.
- Abuse of the system by the neighbour e.g. request for irrelevant additional information or false claims could lead to refusal to continue to notify.