

NFU Presentation – Richard Wordsworth

Thank you Martin and good morning all. It is good to see so many of you attending this early morning session on the delivery of BPS.

We want to take a look at the challenges that lie ahead in the run up to the first Basic Payment Scheme applications being submitted – there are now just 11 ½ weeks to go to 15th May and a lot to do.

The NFU continues to work tirelessly to ensure member's concerns are taken into account. In recent months this has included:

- rollout of the new BPS application process
- lobbying on the content of the recent CAP leaflets and BPS Handbook, which has just been published (24th February).
- we have also challenged in the background the rules as they develop.

Our work will continue beyond the preparation of BPS claims to ensure that timely payments are made later this year.

Addressing the Challenges

We have set out here the key issues we see with BPS delivery this year:

- There are **two elements of CAP reform now coming together** – the need for farmers to understand the new BPS / greening / active farmer rules at the same time as building up their first claim via the new online process.
- Whilst there has been **significant progress with registration for the new rural payments service**, those with the greatest challenges to an online only application process will need the most support and time and have perhaps yet to come forward. Communication and contact with this group is vital in the coming weeks. Many may have little or no IT or associated skills, poor or no broadband.
- With **online capability increasing in stages** allowing greater management of land, entitlements, greening and active farmer requirements, this means there is no stop online visit to make your claim this year. Together with the added

complexity of the schemes being delivered this also means the time spent per field and claim is going to be greater than in recent years, even for those with the skills and broadband.

- Timely payments are critical. There are **considerable financial challenges faced by the industry** at the moment, these pressures have come about through depressed commodity prices and input costs, which feed through to pressures on cash flows – the lifeblood of any business. The need for BPS payment performance akin to SPS from 1st December 2015 is a must.

What Needs to Happen

We see the following elements key to a successful delivery of BPS claims in the coming weeks:

- **Engagement with those not on the system** - Support is required for those who have yet to engage – we are doing our bit, but the hardest to reach are the biggest concern. Are the RPA considering every way to ensure the industry applies this year, such as farm visits?
- **Help with questions** - To date the support from BPS helpline has been well received. This needs to continue as we move from handling the registration process to more BPS specific issues where clarity is required. It cannot be underestimated the low level of new scheme knowledge that exists.
- **Hands on assistance** – The NFU supported the development of the RPA's digital support centres set up across England. Whilst take up is currently low; this will increase as farmers engage. We are really keen the RPA offers as many helpline callers the opportunity to use these centres to access the help on offer. This is vital in the run up to 15th May if those that support the industry do not have the capacity to help farmers.
- **User Guidance** – There needs to be additional guidance on what to do online and how to do it. This is needed as unfortunately the IT is not as intuitive as some would think.
- **React to emerging issues** – These will happen and so we need timely and universal dissemination of critical information to all, such as planned and unplanned IT downtime.

- **Timetable** – We have already seen slippage in rollout. What we have asked for a number of times and not yet seen is a clear timeline of what is happening week by week in the run up to the 15th May. What can be done when and critically when a claim can be actually submitted? This is critical to allow farmers and those that help them plan their increased workload.
- **What's the back up if things go wrong?** – Given we have new online only IT solution there needs to be a contingency plans put in place. For example what happens if there are problems with Gov.uk access or online functionality does not work in the run up to 15th May? Prepare for the unexpected.
- **Claim Validation** – Finally looking forward beyond 15th May there needs to be trained resource to deal with new processes, such as the active farmer and greening to ensure timely payments are made.

Finally

In summary, we want RPA DEFRA to rollout a fit for purpose IT system as soon as possible and the industry to be given as much support as it needs, phone and paper guidance and a clear timetable going forward – thank you.