

To: balanceofcompetences@bis.gsi.gov.uk

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The NFU represents more than 55,000 farming and growing members in England and Wales. In addition it represents some 40,000 'Countryside' members with an interest in the countryside and rural affairs.

Government review of the balance of competences between the United Kingdom and the European Union

Research and Development

The NFU has significant interest in R&D, specifically that relating to agricultural and horticultural production. The practices, technologies, tools and services that farmers use are grounded in science and research. Innovation and technological development play a key part in enabling farm businesses to become more productive, resilient and competitive. For the farming industry to fully contribute to food security, economic growth and UK competitiveness, there must be a strong science base engaged in highly-relevant and impactful research; a clear pipeline to commercialisation; widespread knowledge-exchange activity; and effective skills and training provision. This can only deliver to its full potential if agricultural policy and regulation is working towards the same goals. EU action in all these areas ultimately has a significant impact on the UK farming industry.

We will answer the questions of most relevance to the agriculture industry.

Impact on national interest

- 1. Positive impact:** The research funding available through the EU framework programmes boosts considerably the money UK scientists and the private sector can access. This can have considerable positive impact on areas that may be out-competed within core strategic themes of UK funders or involve niche subjects. Scientists may work within relatively small groups within the UK but, by joining EU consortia, can win significant grants for their organisations. This could then help build expertise, establish strong relationships and strengthen the UK science base. An example of where this appears to be happening with increasing success is in horticultural science at East Malling Research. There will also be many examples of scientists working in EU-wide consortia and securing EU funding in the other key research centres for agriculture (e.g. Rothamsted Research, John Innes Centre, NIAB, IBERS).

For farm businesses, consultants, advisers and others working in the wider agriculture industries, EU action on R&D gives them the opportunity to work with their counterparts across Europe. This allows sharing of best practice and can lead to some valuable working relationships that persist beyond the life of the project. An example is the European Cattle Innovation Partnership established in June 2010 and using UK Technology Strategy Board and Biosciences Knowledge Transfer Network support. Many of the UK levy organisations, under the AHDB, make use of EU contacts, collaborations and funding streams to work with their counterparts in other EU countries. British farmers can learn a great deal from exposure to farming systems and businesses in other countries. It is hoped that the European Innovation Partnership on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability will facilitate more of these activities. However, to allow the UK to extract full value

from this mechanism, Defra must ensure the design of the rural development programme is conducive to using funds in this way.

2. **Negative impact:** The EU legislative process for key agricultural technologies and innovations is broken. Current examples of most concern to UK agriculture are GMOs and crop protection products. There are also problems with livestock cloning and nanotechnology. The emotive nature of these technologies makes them subject to political involvement that reflects personal views and national politics. The resulting decision making and interventions in the regulatory process are not based on sound scientific evidence. Specific examples are the restrictions on neonicotinoids and Fipronil; the commissioning of a GM feeding study to repeat research already discredited by EFSA (Seralini 2012) and related increases in data requirements for GMO dossiers; and the extremely lengthy GMO approvals process, including no-votes with no basis in science, completely out of step with that in third countries. Ultimately, this means that companies are discouraged from investing in the EU, exemplified by BASF Plant Science moving its headquarters to the US in January 2012 and Monsanto ceasing to seek approvals for new biotech crops in Europe in July 2013.

This is completely contradictory to the goals of a knowledge economy and the desire to achieve a globally competitive European Union.

5. **Coordination of EU policy instruments**

For agriculture- and health-related policy, there is little evidence that the EU has sought to coordinate policy across different areas to encourage research and innovation. Indeed, the examples of GMOs, pesticides and cloning specifically demonstrate the creation of a disabling environment. Both public and private sector scientists are discouraged from investing in new products and techniques in these subjects. The hostile policy and legislative environment means that commercialisation for a European market is highly unlikely in any reasonable time-frame. This is very damaging for competitiveness. Indeed, if the basic science **is** done in the UK where there are particular strengths, it is likely to be commercialised in third countries so the economic impact of taxpayer funds is lost.

Future opportunities and challenges

6. **Future promotion of scientific and technological progress**

The political problems described above re. GMOs, crop protection and cloning must be tackled for there to be any improvement at all in these particular areas of agricultural science.

In terms of the EU's scientific institutions and research funding mechanisms, the economic and productivity impact of the money spent would be strengthened if there was more involvement of agricultural SMEs, including farmers and growers. Ideally this should begin right at the start of the process, including setting strategic themes for funding. For research intended to ultimately lead to behaviour change there should also be knowledge exchange activities built in to the project.

Existing EU activities could be made more effective and efficient if the associated regulatory processes required to exploit the science commercially worked properly. We believe that there is a worrying absence of an overarching EU strategy for encouraging innovation that proactively and robustly deals with the conflicting actions between institutions. The influence of EFSA, the Joint Research Centre, the Science and Technology Advisory Council and the Commission's Chief Scientific Adviser must be boosted significantly. To the industry and science communities it appears that these bodies are having no impact whatsoever in tackling the extremely poor policy making in key areas of agricultural technology.

If you would like to discuss anything in our response, please contact Dr Helen Ferrier, NFU Chief Science and Regulatory Affairs Adviser