

Information Further to Ministerial Answers

Information further to OAQ39055, issued by Carwyn Jones, the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside, on 16 November 2004

To Glyn Davies:

I am writing in response to concerns you raised with the First Minister during Plenary on 9 November 2004 about the environmental impact of genetically modified crop cultivation.

I assure you that I have made continual representations to my English colleagues about maintenance of the Assembly's restrictive approach to the growing of GM crops and as a consequence my officials are working with other UK administrations to develop common UK-wide co-existence measures, which will cover issues such as separation distances.

Information further to the debate on the Single Payment Scheme and Miscellaneous Direct Support Schemes (Appeals) (Wales) Regulations 2004 on 9 November, issued by Carwyn Jones, the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside, on 29 November 2004

To Mick Bates:

I refer to the questions that you asked in Plenary on 9 November 2004 in respect of the above. You asked why was there no consultation with the industry regarding the appeals process. The industry was formally consulted on the integrated administration and control system appeal process in 2001. While there was no formal consultation for the single payment scheme appeals process, stakeholder groups, which were attended by representatives of the industry, were consulted on the proposals for the new single payment appeals process.

You asked who is responsible for the formation of the appeals panel. The single payment scheme appeals panel will consist of the 15 members of the current IACS appeals panel and will be supplemented with an additional 16 members who I have invited to accept appointment to the panel.

You asked whether the panel will include somebody who is familiar with and has knowledge of the industry, such as a farming union representative. Over 70 per cent of the current IACS appeals panel are farmers and includes a number of farming union representatives. Sixteen additional panel members have now been appointed, all of whom have an agricultural background. A total of 31 per cent of the new members currently hold or have previously held positions in the farming unions—the National Farmers' Union and the Farmers Union of Wales.

You asked who will hear cross-border holding appeal. This is currently under discussion between officials.

You said that in the event of an appeal being successful and extra funding being provided the document simply states that the money comes from European funding and asked if that actually comes from a common agricultural policy budget or from some other European funding. The single payment scheme is fully funded by Europe. Each member state/region will be subject to a single payment financial ceiling, which will be based on CAP payments between 2000 and 2002. There will be no additional funding for successful appeals. All single payments will have to be made within the financial ceiling allocated to each member state or region. If payments due exceed the financial ceiling all farmers payments will be scaled back until the financial ceiling is met.

To Helen Mary Jones:

I refer to the questions you raised in Plenary held on 9 November 2004 in respect of the above. You asked when farmers will be informed of their pay entitlement. In December, we aim to issue an entitlement statement detailing the provisional number of entitlements farmers will be allocated, excluding any they may receive from the national reserve. The statement will not include any monetary information. Provisional entitlements values will be issued with the 2005 IACS forms in March 2005.

You asked when I will know what the average payment calculated will be, that is, relevant to those seeking entitlement through the national reserve. The regional average for national reserve purposes will be calculated once the number of historic entitlements has been established over next summer.

You asked if I could assure you that those who feel the need to appeal will not experience any prolonged delay in receiving payments. It will not be possible to calculate the value of any entitlements until the majority of appeals have been completed. Officials are monitoring the workload and will do everything they can to enable single payment scheme payments to be calculated and issued from 1 December 2005.

You asked when farm inspections will begin. The new cross compliance requirements commence on 1 January 2005. The closing date for single payment scheme applications is 15 May and inspections will commence soon after that. However, other inspections will be ongoing throughout the year and any anomalies found will impact on the single payment.

You asked how failed inspections will affect the payment of entitlement to all farmers. Farmers receiving single payments are required to comply with statutory management requirements, which already exist, and the requirements to keep the land in good agricultural and environmental condition. The reduction in farmers' payment will depend on the nature, extent, severity and permanence of the breach. Where they are as a result of negligence, the percentage reduction is the single payment shall not exceed 5 per cent, and in cases of repeated non-compliance, 1 per cent. In cases of international non-compliance, the percentage reduction shall not in principle be less than 20 per cent and may go as far as total exclusion for one or more calendar years.

You asked if I would say what discussions I have had with colleagues in Westminster on the effect of differing cross-compliance measures in England and Wales on those farms that straddle the border. Essentially, the cross-compliance measures set for each country will apply to the land that lies in each country. Officials will be firming up arrangements for inspections over the coming months.

To Brynle Williams:

I refer to the question you raised in Plenary held on 9 November 2004 in respect of the above. You asked whether I have grave concerns about the handling of cross-border holding under the single payment scheme and what is being done. As you know I am not in a position to clarify the exact position presently. However, a press notice was issued on 16 November confirming how entitlements will be apportioned between each country, which is based on where the land lies. Some issues still need to be resolved on a UK basis but officials will be writing to farmers setting out as much as they can at this stage and inviting them to meetings in early December to discuss their concerns.