

ARD COMMITTEE – WEDNESDAY 11 DECEMBER 2002

REPORT OF THE MINISTER FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Payment of CAP subsidies

1. Following on from my last report on payments under the Sheep Annual Premium Scheme (SAPS), as at 5 December, some 11,300 payments (91%) have been processed to the value of £62 million.
2. Looking ahead to other payments in the pipeline, we expect to start processing SAPS LFA Payments this week (w/c 9 December) along with Beef Special Premium Scheme advances.
3. Arable claims are presently being validated and we expect these payments will be released early in the New Year, as previously stated.
4. I can assure the Committee that my officials will continue to do everything they can over the next few weeks to get payments processed as quickly as possible.

Proposed new meat body

5. Partners are continuing to meet and are working hard to establish the new body and to address the remaining concerns of Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Limited (WLBP). We are confident that we have now resolved two of the three issues tabled by WLBP namely: ensuring producer control and appropriate funding. The third issue, relating to the future of WLBP is continuing to be discussed.
6. Good progress is being made to enable the new company to be registered in early January. The post of Chair has been advertised and the partners have been asked to identify their nomination to the shadow Board. WLBP will consider their nomination and will notify their choice when their members have been consulted and if they agree that they join the new body.

Livestock movement – Welsh stakeholders meeting

7. I met with a broadly based group of Welsh Stakeholders on 4 December to discuss the future arrangements for animal movements. The meeting which embraced members of the farming unions, hauliers, auctioneers, the veterinary profession and local authorities discussed what key ingredients might be included in any permanent movement arrangements. Discussions which were constructive and helpful - centred around the 20 Day rule and the need for any future regime to be practicable, workable, avoid duplication and be compliant with bio-security codes of practice.

8. I expect to meet the stakeholders again before Christmas at which time I shall report on my recent visit to Scotland where I saw at first hand the ingredients of the current Scottish model and discussed its operation with my Ministerial counterpart and officials.

2001 Farm Incomes

9. The Government Statistical Service is expected to release information on farm incomes data for 2001 for Wales early next week (i.e week commencing 9 December). I will arrange for the relevant press release to be distributed to the Committee.

Intervention meat

10. At the last meeting, I was asked to provide further information on the new European legislation relating to substandard meat containing Specified Risk Material (SRM). I was also asked to include information on the extent to which public procurement policies could be used to prevent infected meat from intervention stocks entering the food chain.

11. As outlined in my report to the Committee on 13 November, the European

Commission has made a Regulation (1967/2002) which requires Member States to take all necessary measures to ensure that bone-in intervention beef is fully compliant with SRM rules. Despite the Food Standard Agency's

request to the Commission, the Beef Management Committee did not consider the issue of SRM in intervention beef at its most recent meetings. The Food Standards Agency is pressing for the Beef Management Committee to consider the issue at its next meeting on 13 December, and will provide details of the outcome as soon as possible.

12. On the issue of procurement policies, it is important to recognise that clauses to ensure the legality and safety of produce are already common place in procurement contracts. Indeed in many instances (most notably the health service) steps are also taken to ensure full traceability of meat supplied to the service and suppliers are subjected to regular visits by Meat Hygiene Inspectors.

Hunting Bill

13. Following extensive consultation, the Minister for Rural Affairs at DEFRA, Alun Michael MP, has introduced a Hunting Bill in the House of Commons. The Bill covers England and Wales. The purpose of the Bill is to make provision about hunting wild mammals, to prohibit hare coursing and stag hunting and to license hunting of other wild mammals in certain circumstances.

14. The legislation is designed to recognise utility and prevent cruelty. The Bill provides for a system of

registration. To be registered an application will have to meet both the utility and cruelty tests. There will be provision for an appeals Tribunal.

15. Rattling and rabbiting will not be banned. Angling, shooting and falconry will be exempted.

16. We are considering whether to seek devolution of the regulatory powers to the National Assembly.

Forestry

17. On December 17, I will be visiting the Forestry Commission Christmas Tree Sales Centre at Wentwood in Monmouthshire. The Forestry Commission sells around 100,000 trees a year and also use Christmas as an educational opportunity. I will be accompanying a party of schoolchildren into the forest to see a tree being felled and hear a talk about Christmas tree planting and harvesting.