



National Trust



Protecting wildlife for the future



Industry calls for ‘Gove guarantee’ on agri-environment schemes

Farming and green organisations have come together to seek a guarantee from Michael Gove that farmers and land managers who sign up to agri-environment schemes before the UK leaves the EU are not penalised post-Brexit.

The CLA, NFU, TFA, CAAV, FWAG, GWCT, The Wildlife Trusts, RSPB and the National Trust have jointly written to the Environment Secretary calling for a commitment to ensure those in England with a Countryside Stewardship agreement are not at a disadvantage when the Government launches a new and improved system of environmental land management payments after EU exit.

Defra Ministers have suggested that post-Brexit, there will still be support for achieving environmental outcomes which will be simpler and more effective. Due to this expectation, the organisations argue that some farmers and land managers do not want to limit their ability to access improved schemes in the future by committing to five-year agreements under the current Countryside Stewardship.

The organisations ask for a guarantee from Mr Gove to provide confidence to the sector and to ensure farmers and land managers continue to engage in schemes which deliver positive environmental results.

CLA President Tim Breitmeyer said: “Some potential applicants for Countryside Stewardship are already questioning whether they should apply now or hold off until a better scheme is available. This reduces the level of environmental management and increases the chance of less funding being made available by Defra in the European Rural Development Fund, at just the time that we should be encouraging greater uptake.

“We urge the Secretary of State to give his guarantee that he will not take this risk by ensuring that farmers and land managers are not disadvantaged by future policy or during any transitional period once the UK leaves the EU in 2019.”

Steve Trotter, Director England and Living Landscapes at the Wildlife Trusts, said: “The uncertainty facing farmers and land managers about whether they’re better off in or out of Countryside Stewardship risks reversing the fortunes of wildlife which has benefitted from this and previous agri-environment schemes. The time to act is now, and we urge Mr Gove to make this simple guarantee.”

NFU President Meurig Raymond said: “Farmers are voluntarily committing to agri-environment contracts with Government now but they must not find themselves disadvantaged as Brexit bites. So it’s vital that Government offers them the necessary confidence to enter into an agreement.”

Alastair Leake, Director of Policy at the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust’s Allerton Project, said: “The recent improvements in Countryside Stewardship have been really welcome. In these uncertain times, it would be fantastic if Defra could guarantee some certainty for future agreement holders.”

TFA Chief Executive George Dunn said: “Tenant farmers are keen to deliver high quality environmental outputs through participation in agri-environment schemes but recognise that doing so is a huge commitment, potentially with implications for relationships with their landlords and the outcome of future rent reviews. Without an assurance that over the course of their agreements they will not be disadvantaged, many could be put off from participating in schemes.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. [Click here to read the letter to Michael Gove in full.](#)
2. The organisations supporting this call are the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), National Farmers Union (NFU), Tenant Farmers Association (TFA), RSPB England, The Wildlife Trusts, Central Association of Agricultural Valuers (CAAV), Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), National Trust and Farm Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG).

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