**NPA BRIEFING: Agriculture Bill**

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The Agriculture Bill (2020) – what it means for the UK’s pig farmers

**Who we are**

The National Pig Association (NPA) is the representative trade association for British commercial pig producers, is affiliated to the National Farmers Union (NFU) and represents the interests of its members that produce pigs and the pig industry interests of NPA Allied Industry members. We have highlighted areas of the Bill that we welcome and support, and areas of the Bill that we feel need to be changed or included.

**The UK pig industry**

The UK pig industry is worth £1.6 billion at farm-gate and over £8.6 billion in total including exports, retail and food service. Our blossoming export market is worth £490 million a year and is a vital component of our profitability. Our pig industry is unique in comparison to other countries, in that a significant proportion of the sector operates outdoor pig production (40% of the national sow herd), whilst the remainder is produced indoors on a range of straw based and high hygiene slatted systems.

**1. Part 1, Ch 1: Financial Support**

1.1 The NPA welcomes provisions for financial assistance to protect or improve the health or welfare of livestock. It is vital that both health and welfare are seen as interrelated, and we are pleased that the Bill reflects this. Collaboration and strong industry leadership is required to tackle endemic disease and improve the overall health of pigs. Improved pig health will contribute to increased productivity and, more importantly, reduced risk to public health from antimicrobial resistance and zoonotic pathogens.

British pig farmers have already reduced antibiotic use by 60% over four years but we will need support to continue to drive responsible use in a way that does not jeopardise pig health or welfare. We feel this should be made more explicit within the scope of support for livestock producers.
1.2 We welcome the Bill’s aim to help farmers manage livestock in a way that mitigates or adapts to climate change. Newer buildings are also far more environmentally efficient, requiring less energy, whilst minimising ammonia and other emissions. Assistance to help farmers improve the quality of their pig accommodation would improve animal health and welfare and therefore reduce the use of antibiotics. The Bill should be more explicit in assisting farmers to improve manure and slurry storage and invest in better management and handling facilities.

1.3 We welcome provisions for financial assistance in new land management schemes. We would like to see them take account of and be more accommodating to outdoor pig production; to date there have been no specific pig options available to producers under stewardship schemes. We believe this is a good chance to change this missed opportunity.

1.4 The Bill makes specific mention of protecting our soils and measures to improve them. Pigs can be part of the solution. Both outdoor pigs, as part of a crop rotation, and indoor pigs, via muck for straw agreements or the value of slurry, greatly improve soil health and fertility. Government encouragement to help collaboration between landowners and pig producers will allow better soil outcomes such as high organic matter, improved yields and lower disease burdens.

Part 2, Ch 1: Food Security

2.1 The NPA strongly applaud the Government’s intent to include food security within the scope of the Bill, with a duty to report on it every five years. Food production was unbelievably absent from the previous Bill presented in 2019, and we are pleased that this vital issue can be formalised at last. Of the pork consumed in the UK, only 40% of it comes from UK farms. If sensible food security measures are met, we can ensure that this ratio is improved, to potentially comparable levels of self-sufficiency of the 1990s.

2.2 The Government will be mandated to report on food security every five years, looking at supply sources for food, resilience of the supply chain for food, household food security on food, food safety and consumer confidence in food. The NPA believe that five year terms are too long to report on food security given parliamentary cycles, and how much can change in that time. As a result the NPA feels this reporting should take place every year.

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1 In 1995, UK self-sufficiency in pork was 73%
Part 2, Ch 2: Intervention in markets

3.1 The NPA welcomes the Bill’s provisions to intervene in markets under exceptional conditions. The UK pig sector has painful memories of disease outbreaks in the UK, most notably the 2001 Foot and Mouth disease outbreak that cost the public sector over £8 billion. The Government must recognise the cost of adequately dealing with disease incursion from a producer and taxpayer point of view, and measures to prevent disease incursion in the first place must be more explicit.

3.2 With African swine fever (ASF) spreading throughout Europe, it is imperative that Government makes more explicit mention of biosecurity policy in the Bill, linking it to the loss of income to producers as a result of lost export markets. UK pork exports to China, worth over £80m a year to the British industry, would be lost overnight if an ASF outbreak occurred in the UK and could take several years to regain.

Part 3, Ch 1: Transparency and the supply chain

4.1 The NPA is encouraged that the Bill will allow the Secretary of State to collect data from the supply chain. We agree with the Government that: ‘Primary agricultural producers in the UK tend to be small, individual businesses operating without strong links between them. By contrast, operators further up the supply chain – processors, distributors and retailers – tend to be highly consolidated businesses that command substantial shares of the relevant market. This disparity makes primary producers vulnerable to unfair trading practices’.2

4.2 An effective, transparent and fully operational supply chain is a must to ensure the long term viability of the pig sector. If farmers were able to understand how prices are set, have access to well designed, responsive longer term contracts and better insight of future pricing, they would have far more confidence in the future and be able to plan ahead, reinvest and improve the efficiency of their businesses.

4.3 Mandatory codes of conduct similar to the existing Grocery Supply Code of Practice, devised in conjunction with industry would ensure that processors and retailers are acting as they should and provide producers with information on what is or is not acceptable behaviour. It is not currently possible for farmers or marketing groups to achieve this without compromising supply chain relationships, therefore the Bill should be more specific in addressing this.

2 Bill explanatory notes
5.1 The Bill must make it clearer that our food standards will be maintained and protected. The UK pig industry is at risk of a bad trade deal with another country that could seek to export pig products to the UK, produced to standards that fall far below those expected within the UK and even the EU. The United States, Canada and Mexico, all permit the use of sow stalls (banned in the UK in 1999), have far fewer controls over how antibiotics are sold and administered and allow the use of the β-agonist growth promoter ractopamine, as a feed additive, also banned in the EU. Such production systems represent a much lower cost of production model, and could seriously affect the UK market if permitted as imports. The Bill must be clearer that such food products will never reach UK shelves.

5.2 There is no mention in the Bill or accompanying documents on improving procurement, despite public pronouncements from government ministers supporting it as a policy priority. Defra must ensure that government procurement standards for food should at the very least meet minimum UK legislative standards of animal welfare, environmental protection and food safety. The Balanced Scorecard must be revised to remove the caveat that allows lower standard product to be procured when UK product is found to be too expensive.

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