

July 2012

Farming Regulation Task Force Implementation Paperwork plan - Update

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Introduction

1. This document sets out progress made since December 2011 on the Government's plan for reducing the burden of paperwork on farmers and food processors, which was published in response to a recommendation from the independent Farming Regulation Task Force¹. This plan covers activities in Defra, the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), the Environment Agency (EA), Natural England (NE) and the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA). The Food Standards Agency (FSA) produced its own response to the Farming Regulation Task Force in February 2012.
2. We published our initial plan in December 2011. At that time we acknowledged that we needed more information on the paperwork and process burdens on farmers before we could identify every area where we can reduce paperwork, and promised to review and update the plan every six months, to ensure we are taking every opportunity to reduce burdens, as we gather more information and as progress is made. This document fulfils that commitment.
3. This plan sets out what we have done to meet the commitments made in the initial plan, and reiterates our ongoing programme of actions to reduce this burden further. It gives examples of some of the work Defra and its agencies are already doing to reduce and rationalise the paperwork burden on farming and food-processing businesses. The Farming Regulation Task Force Implementation Group, chaired by Richard Macdonald, will hold us to account on delivering these and the other commitments from the Task Force Report. More detail on many of the actions in this plan is provided in the full Government Response to the Task Force, which was published in February 2012 and is available on the Defra website².

Context

4. Paperwork exists for good reasons: it can be used to record important data, track progress, and ensure accountability. Where farmers and food processors are receiving public money for the activities they carry out or protecting public health, it is important that these are monitored against outcomes. Without a proper audit trail we cannot demonstrate to Parliament and ultimately taxpayers that, according to the rules set down for the various schemes, the correct amount of money is reaching the correct people.
5. The Farming Regulation Task Force report explained that the farming and food processing industry feels mired in paperwork. We know that when time is spent on paperwork, less time is spent on farming, producing food products and managing the land.

¹ The report of the independent Farming Regulation Task Force. Striking a balance: reducing burdens; increasing responsibility; earning recognition. A report on better regulation in farming and food businesses. May 2011. Available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/05/17/pb13527farming-reg-report/>

6. Paperwork can also be reassuring to farmers and food processors, as it can help demonstrate that they have done the right thing. We want to ensure that paperwork is valued where it contributes to outcomes, and that the right balance is found, keeping important records without being onerous.

7. The Government is commitment to reducing burdens and reforming regulation. Rationalising the paperwork and processes surrounding farming and food businesses will contribute to this. But this is not about removing all paperwork from our lives; this plan aims to streamline processes; make paperwork easier; make more use of digital routes; and do things differently where this would make things better.

Part I – Existing and ongoing work

8. Across Defra and the agencies we have been reducing the burden of paperwork as far as possible. Examples of the activities we have already done, and the work we are currently doing are set out below.

Table 1: What we've achieved so far

This table shows what we have done since December 2011. Previously completed work was cited in the original plan.

Table 1: What we've done since December 2011		
Topic	Action	Status
<p>Making paperwork shorter, clearer and easier to understand We are working to keep any new paperwork, particularly guidance, concise, targeted and actively helpful. This should minimise the time it takes businesses to read, interpret and implement any regulatory or guidance updates.</p>		
All Defra guidance	<p>We will review and update the principles and templates we use for producing guidance on regulations in Defra. This review will take into account the recommendations of the Anderson Review. This will include a commitment to new "Principles for Guidance" which will align with the Task Force's recommended Principles for Paperwork, and will involve engaging with the industry and producing and drafting guidance; and making guidance available online as the default. We will also recommend that guidance should have a "Quick-Start Guide" in response to the Task Force's recommendations and the Anderson Review. All new guidance should follow the new templates and principles from this point. We will be seeking commitments from policy teams as to when they will be reviewing existing guidance.</p>	Complete
SPS handbook	<p>The RPA will provide an "update only" Single Payment Scheme information booklet (supplement) to farmers, showing key regulatory changes instead of issuing a comprehensive guidance handbook.</p>	Complete Issued to farmers in March 2012.
<p>Moving paperwork online Digital technology can drive better services and lower costs. We are committed to delivering services digitally "by default" and encouraging online paperwork. However, we understand that rural businesses are in a range of circumstances with respect to internet access, and we will take that into account in the manner and timescale in which we move to digital services.</p>		
Cross compliance guidance	<p>The Industry/Government Group Digital by Default has been set up to cover a wide range of issues including cross compliance and will meet for the second time in July 2012. The guidance has been produced as an e-publication, as a pilot for future years. Testing will begin soon and continue over the next few months.</p>	Complete Further work ongoing (see below).

SPS forms	Over 42,000 farmers submitted electronic Single Payment Scheme (SPS) applications in 2012, more than a two-fold increase from the 16,000 or so who did so in 2010. Some used third party suppliers but the majority used the SPS online system through which users can access their data, track claims, check and mend errors and receive an instant on-screen acknowledgement that RPA has received the application. Feedback on this system has been very positive and we are working to further streamline the process and increase use further.	Ongoing
<p>Asking for paperwork in a better way We will aim to reduce the amount of paperwork we ask farmers and food processors for, and we will work to join up better, only ask for information once, and asking for that information in a better way.</p>		
Environmental permitting	The Environment Agency simplified the process of applying for Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR) permits by providing fact-sheets, templates and examples of what is needed to satisfy permit conditions. These were developed with EA's EPR intensive pig and poultry industry liaison group .	Complete
June Survey	In direct response to requests made by farmers at our data sharing workshops, we amended the covering email for the electronic version of this year's June survey to give an explanation of why we need the information and what it is used for. We will also provide this information in the covering letter for paper copies from next year onwards.	Complete
<p>Gathering evidence We need to understand the scale and specifics of the problems caused by paperwork in more detail to address them in the best way. We will run a number of research and evidence collection projects.</p>		
Data sharing	We piloted increased data sharing between Defra agencies . This project looked at barriers to sharing more information between Defra agencies and examined how these can be overcome. The work produced a step by step summary on how perceived legal barriers to data sharing can be overcome. The summary was circulated to Defra agencies in June 2012 and is helping to increase understanding of the legal landscape surrounding what information can and cannot be shared. By increasing understanding of the legal landscape we will help eliminate incorrect refusals to share information between Defra agencies, and the duplicated information requests to businesses they can cause. Sharing information will also help agencies carry out their responsibilities more effectively. For example, the EA gaining access to CLAD data (showing the location of all farm businesses with name, address and geographic land boundaries), has allowed them to target helpful communications to farmers in a particular geographic area.	Complete Pilot project reported June 2012.

Part II – What we will do

9. The section below sets out specific actions that we will do to further reduce and rationalise paperwork burdens on farming and food processing businesses.

Table 2: What we will do

Table 2: What we will do		
Topic	Action	Timescale
Making paperwork shorter, clearer and easier to understand		
Uplands Transitional Payment	We will not revise or re-issue the current Uplands Transitional Payment booklet prior to the scheme ending in 2013.	No revisions for 2011 and 2012.
Environmental stewardship	<p>The 4th edition of the Environmental Stewardship (ES) handbooks, which now includes the new MESME options and integrated advice icons, and simplified 'How to Apply' section, has gone out to stakeholders for consultation with all comments and feedback being considered.</p> <p>The first in a series of sector specific guidance leaflets - "Funding and Support for Lowland beef and sheep farmers" - has been developed in consultation with National Beef Association, National Sheep Association and NFU. It signposts farmers to a range of support available including ES, CSF and range of other Defra led schemes and can be accessed from the following link: http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/1583208?category=45001.</p>	<p>New version of the handbooks available in mid October 2012.</p> <p>Leaflet launched at National Sheep show on 4th July 2012.</p> <p>Second series "Funding and Support for Dairy farmers" is due to be launched early September 2012.</p>
Moving paperwork online		
Cross compliance guidance	We will move "The Guide to Cross Compliance in England" online from 2013 onwards to reduce the amount of paperwork sent to farmers. From 2013, the full guidance document will be available online as a default, and that farmers will receive a brief document highlighting changes since last year, and directing farmers to the online edition. This will reduce the number of copies of the whole handbook posted out will reduce from 100,000 to 30,000 by 2015.	Guidance online from 2013 onwards.

Asking for paperwork in a better way

We will aim to reduce the amount of paperwork we ask farmers and food processors for, and we will work to join up better, only ask for information once, and asking for that information in a better way.

Environmental permitting	<p>The EA will tailor environmental permitting application forms to the agricultural sector; and will revise the forms it uses to provide a “farmer-specific” application form.</p> <p>A farming-specific permit application form for intensive pig and poultry businesses is currently being produced. Consultation with trade associations and customers will be carried out through summer with the new application form, and associated checklist and charging note, launching in September 2012.</p>	<p>Consultation in summer 2012.</p> <p>New application form launch in September 2012.</p>
Regulatory data	<p>The Environment Agency will review the regulatory data it asks for across regimes, sectors and permits. This will aim to simplifying and reduce data requirements, and will specifically review the amount of data it asks for in the food and drink manufacturing industries (alongside some other key sectors).</p>	<p>Simplification of and reduction in data requirements 2012-14 (with food and drink manufacturers targeted in 2012-13).</p>
All Defra forms	<p>We will review the principles and templates we use for producing new and revised forms. We will commit to working with farmers and other stakeholders to design forms wherever appropriate, and making forms available online as a default, as well as explaining the rationale for collecting the information we are asking for. All new forms should follow the new templates and principles from this point. We will be seeking commitments from policy teams as to when they will be reviewing existing forms.</p>	<p>Review taking place throughout summer 2012.</p>

Part III – Next steps

10. We will not stop at the immediate actions set out in Part II; we will keep working to reduce the burden of paperwork. Examples of the long-term work we will do are set out below.

Table 3: Next steps

Table 3: Next steps		
Topic	Action	Timescale
Principles		
All Defra paperwork	We will adopt the Principles for Paperwork proposed by the Task Force , through the activities in this plan, and further work that will be announced in the final Government Response to the Task Force.	Ongoing
Reviewing this plan		
Reviewing	We will review this plan every 6 months , to ensure that we take every opportunity to reduce the burden of paperwork.	Review and report every 6 months.
Gathering evidence We need to understand the scale and specifics of the problems caused by paperwork in more detail to address them in the best way. We will run a number of research and evidence collection projects.		
Information collection	We will run a research project to look at processes, paperwork and data provision from a farmer’s perspective . This project will establish an evidence base of what farmers across different sectors are asked to do in order to meet both regulatory and non-regulatory requirements. This project will help us define a clear “baseline” of what information is requested so that we can assess it and look to reduce burdens.	Research project will report by summer 2012.
All Defra advice and incentives	We will review how we use advice and incentives for farmers and land managers , to create a more streamlined approach that is clearer for farmers and land managers and yields better environmental results. (This responds to the commitment made in the Natural Environment White Paper ²).	Report on streamlining advice by summer 2012.
Moving paperwork online		

² The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature. 2011. Available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/>

<p>“Digital by default”</p>	<p>The Government is committed to delivering services digitally “by default”, and is developing a single Government website, which will include simplifying guidance and online transactions and providing shared facilities (such as e-forms). The single Government website will be the location for new and improved government forms and guidance on a wide range of farming-related activity.</p> <p>To help communities gain access to digital services the Government has invested £530m which, together with local match funding, aims to deliver standard (i.e. 2Mbps minimum) broadband to all rural premises and superfast broadband to at least 90% of premises in each county by 2015.</p> <p>The Government’s Rural Community Broadband Fund complements the wider funding and has received a positive response with 46 expressions of Interest submitted under the second round which closed on 6th July 2012.</p>	<p>Long-term</p>
<p>RPA documents</p>	<p>The RPA is considering moving to electronic only format for online customers in the run up to CAP reform, which would allow the number of SPS and Cross-Compliance documents sent out in hard copy to reduce by up to 36%. This is part of our drive to reduce the number of hard copy documents sent to farmers between 2011 and 2014: British Cattle Movement Scheme documents will reduce by 37%; and some other documentation, including PIN letter packs (which help give farmers secure access to RPA’s digital services) will reduce by 57%.</p>	<p>Move to electronic format, if confirmed, by 2014.</p>
<p>Sheep, goats and deer movements</p>	<p>We are looking at introducing an e-reporting system for sheep, goats and deer, as we did recently for pig keepers. We are currently running a procurement exercise and the deadline for bids was 25 June. Bids are currently being evaluated and, subject to a robust business case, we anticipate that a contractor will be appointed later this year.</p>	<p>If confirmed, industry service supplier by November 2012, system operational by 2013/14.</p>
<p>Export health certification</p>	<p>AHVLA will work towards a single online application to request for multiple border control clearances (e.g. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and Export Health Certificates).</p> <p>Some initial capital funding has been secured for the first phase of the IT project (COLIN) to replace Centaur and Unicorn. Similar export/import systems used in Europe are being researched and options considered.</p>	<p>Options due to be presented for the Board to make a decision on how to proceed in July 2012.</p>

Interactive tools	The EA will pilot an interactive “pre-application tool” on their website, allowing customers to tailor advice and guidance to their sector and specific requirements. This pilot is currently running for waste carriers; if it is successful, the tool will be rolled out to the agriculture sector elements of the EA website.	Format of the tool is being finalised and we are moving into the user testing phase. Go live date will depend on outcome of the user testing.
Asking for paperwork in a better way		
All Defra forms	We will consider how to make greater use of pre-populated forms , where these can alleviate burdens. But there are data sharing and technological issues involved in the pre-population of data, and revising IT systems to pre-populate forms could be costly. We want to make sure that any changes have proportionate costs to the benefits they will deliver. We will therefore consider how to use pre-populated forms more once we have completed our research projects and have more information on the burden of paperwork from a farmer’s perspective, and a better understanding of where data sharing could improve paperwork processes.	Long-term
All Defra paperwork	We will explain why we need information more clearly when we cannot reduce the paperwork we need from farmers and other businesses.	Ongoing
Food and drink performance reporting	The Environment Agency will review data reporting by food and drink operators . It will working with the trade associations to look for an agreed common approach to performance reporting that reduces the burden of reporting	Ongoing
Customer segmentation	We will look at “customer segmentation” to make sure that we provide the right paperwork to the right people , and do not overload businesses with information that they do not need. The RPA will look at providing more tailored, personalised and concise guidance for farmers. They will divide customers into groups by business characteristics and customer preferences, which will help ensure that only the specific information required by a farmer is presented to them. AHVLA has established a Customer Insight group, which meets quarterly, with the aim of updating the customer insight forward plan every six months. The group have already undertaken some high level segmenting of customers and has commissioned a market research company to provide customer insight about the way AHVLA do business/interact with different groups.	Ongoing RPA guidance review likely to happen from 2013 onwards.

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