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From David Heath CBE MP
Minister of State for Agriculture and Food

Thank you for your letter of 1 February to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituents about Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform and other farming issues. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

The EU budget has now been agreed and with it the EU wide figures that will be allocated to Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 of CAP. However, we do not yet know what the UK allocation will be for direct payments or rural development funding.

The current Rural Development Programme (RDP), part of the CAP, is due to finish at the end of 2013. The European Commission had planned that a new Programme would start from 1 January 2014. However, it has now acknowledged that this is unrealistic. Negotiations on the future shape and timing of a successor programme are currently underway, but it is too early to say what the final arrangements for 2014 and beyond will be. We are planning on the basis that the next Programme will not be ready until 2015, and are pressing the Commission to agree transition measures to secure continuity of environmental benefits with minimum disruption for our agreement holders.

For updates on the timetable around the closure of the current Programme, and any transition measures leading to the new programme as they become clearer, please see the Natural England website:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/farming/funding/developments.aspx>

With regard to requests from your constituents for historical features to be included in Higher Level Stewardship (HLS), options for protection of the historic environment are already available in both Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) and HLS. Work is now underway to design a new environmental land management scheme for the next Rural Development Programme. As part of this work we are reviewing all existing scheme options, but it is too early at present to be able to say what options will eventually feature in the new scheme.

Regarding abstraction licences, when the Environment Agency grant a licence for the first time, it is likely to be for between 6 and 18 years. When the Environment Agency re-grant a licence it will normally be for another 12 years. The reason a licence may be of differing lengths when it is first issued is so that it may fit into the Environment Agency's Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies (CAMS). CAMS provide a consistent and structured



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approach to local water resources management, recognising the reasonable needs of abstractors.

The Environment Agency usually apply abstraction licence conditions taking into consideration local flows. The Environment Agency's guide on these conditions can be read online:

[http://a0768b4a8a31e106d8b0-](http://a0768b4a8a31e106d8b0-50dc802554eb38a24458b98ff72d550b.r19.cf3.rackcdn.com/geho0812busi-e-e.pdf)

[50dc802554eb38a24458b98ff72d550b.r19.cf3.rackcdn.com/geho0812busi-e-e.pdf](http://a0768b4a8a31e106d8b0-50dc802554eb38a24458b98ff72d550b.r19.cf3.rackcdn.com/geho0812busi-e-e.pdf)

In terms of the amount of farm and veterinary inspections taking place, Defra is a deregulatory minded Department. Good progress is being made to reduce regulatory burdens on farmers through our response to the Farming Regulation Task Force where, amongst other initiatives, we are working to reduce the burden of on-farm inspections and paperwork. Costs to farmers of complying with regulations are falling; since 2011 for every £1 of new compliance costs, we are removing over £13 of inefficient compliance costs.

An increase in veterinary inspections in cattle is primarily due to the fact that TB testing, as part of the Bovine TB eradication programme, is now classed as inspection. The Government is committed to TB eradication and therefore testing for TB in cattle has increased.

Your constituents concerns about the closing of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) have been noted and the Government fully understands that the agriculture and horticulture industries need reliable sources of labour to cope with peak seasonal demands. We understand the important contribution that the SAWS currently makes to meeting those demands.

As Jim Paice said in the Westminster Hall debate of 20 June 2012, the Home Office has indicated that it intends to ask the Migration Advisory Committee to look at the impact of the closure of SAWS and we expect stakeholders will be able to provide evidence to the Committee.

Defra recognises the need to find a longer term solution to meet the labour needs of the farming sector but the Government has not yet come to any firm view as to whether any successor scheme should be put in place when the current SAWS comes to an end. It is important to note that once the current restrictions on Bulgarian and Romanian workers are lifted and SAWS comes to an end as a Home Office-sponsored scheme, there would be nothing to prevent SAWS operators from continuing to recruit in those countries, or for other labour suppliers or farmers to do so.

I can assure you that Defra officials are working closely with the Home Office to ensure that the seasonal labour needs of the farming sector are properly taken into account.

Finally, thank you for highlighting the interest of your constituents in contingency arrangements in the event of the UK leaving the EU. As you will understand, our main priority at this stage is to negotiate a good outcome on the next round of CAP Reform and ensuring that we have certainty for farmers and agricultural businesses about what these reforms entail.


DAVID HEATH CBE MP



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