

Meat Processors Roundtable Q&A

Industry stakeholders were asked to submit questions or raise concerns ahead of the roundtable call with Secretary of State George Eustice, held Friday 3 April 2020.

Many of the issues raised were similar in nature and the below questions and answers reflect the key themes coming from those industry representatives who made contact with Defra.

Where the Secretary of State (SoS) made comment on a particular issue during the teleconference, this is reflected in the answer provided.

Q&A

What is being done to support resilience and retention of key workers in the food supply chain?

Everyone working in the food and drink industry has rallied in an extraordinary way to respond to this unprecedented challenge. We need to strike the right balance between encouraging the general public to stay at home and acknowledging the important work being carried out by those in the processing sector to ensure that the food supply chain continues to operate.

[\[RS1\]](#)

When will Public Health England Guidance provide clarity on social distancing within food businesses?

- PHE to obtain further clarity and to update this on gov.uk urgently.

Will we continue to have access to key staff [as relates to implementing Official Controls]?

- Defra officials are aware of the importance of continued access to key staff. These concerns are shared across many parts of the food processing sectors.
- FSA report that they currently have adequate staff available to manage the demand and are updating industry on staffing levels on daily calls. If there are issues relating to access to staff, these will be escalated urgently.

What is being done to help address the carcass imbalance and the collapse of the hide and skins market?

- Defra officials, along with Devolved Administrations, are aware of this issue and will continue to monitor the market. The UK Agricultural Market Monitoring Group (UKAMMG) has increased the frequency of its meetings to weekly. Its aim is to monitor UK agricultural markets and provide forewarning of any

atypical market movements During the Covid-19 outbreak this is also allowing Defra and the devolved administrations to share the latest stakeholder info.

Please do continue to raise any sector-specific insight and issues with Defra policy officials.

What is being done to help large and medium processors to work together?

Employers could consider the following additional measures:

- Increase frequency of cleaning of areas with high human contact, e.g. work areas, common spaces, toilets, lifts, refuse bins and handrails etc.
- Provide additional guidance on symptoms of COVID-19, and what people should do if they feel unwell.
- Encourage employees to take temperature regularly and monitor for respiratory symptoms
- Encourage employees to observe good personal hygiene by reminding them to wash their hands regularly, cover mouth if coughing or sneezing and to avoid touching their faces^[RS2].

What is being done to ensure Local Authorities are acting similarly across the regions?

Answer to follow

Will there be Government intervention to keep this part of the food chain operating?

Answer to follow

If a greater lockdown is imposed, how much notice will there be to enable plants to get through stocks currently held in chilled storage?

Answer to follow

What is being done generally to ensure that exports continue to flow in the coming weeks and months?

- Defra is working closely with key stakeholders to identify issues and ensure facilitation of the flow of goods to EU trading partners.
- This has included ensuring that the UK's export health certification processes are resilient, with contingency planning taking account of current and future scenarios caused by COVID-19.
- We are also ensuring that aspects of our export health certification processes and assurances in the UK are suitably adapted to reflect government guidance on the need for social distancing while continuing to maintain the UK's global reputation for high standards.

- Examples of this include: interim amendments to the guidance on veterinary farm inspection procedures related to the pig health Assurance Scheme, recently agreed with the UK CVO; the decision to reduce the frequency of veterinary inspections of porcine semen collection centres from weekly to fortnightly, also with UK CVO approval. **These are solely temporary measures related to COVID-19.**

What is being done to seek allowance for email copies/electronic versions of vet certs and origin proofs by export markets?

- Defra is working with APHA and DAERA to identify priority third countries for UK exports of POAO based on the frequency with which we issue Export Health Certificates (EHC) for exports to those countries.
- We are preparing to approach Third Countries with proposals for easements to EHC arrangements, including digital transmission methods for EHCs where these countries are able to facilitate them.
- By securing agreements for such easements with these countries, we hope to ease the resource requirements for over 50% of UK EHCs that are issued across all animals and animal product commodities across the UK.
- This will result in more resource available to facilitate exports for all countries, including those who are noted as lesser priority countries, but still valuable trading partners.