



Letter sent to:

George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands
Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd
Edwin Poots MLA, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Copied to: CVOs

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COP 26 – Pledge to reduce Methane emissions by 30% by 2030

The COP26 methane reduction pledge is one of the Glasgow summit's hard-edged agreements in contrast to the final declaration which eased back on the ambition to end the coal energy era. The conference however did raise the profile of the extreme impacts of climate change across the globe and the responsibilities of both industry and Governments to act and invest in change. A partnership approach is going to be vital to progress.

Despite the unbalanced emission reduction agenda, Ruminant Health & Welfare recognises the strategic value of achieving the 30% methane reduction target. A worldwide focus on methane, a short-term greenhouse gas, can deplete the envelope of atmospheric methane to the extent that there is a downward pressure on warming to counter continued emissions from fossil fuels.

Although the strategy places a significant weight on livestock producers, in particular those in the ruminant sector; we believe that as an industry we can and should deliver that 30% methane reduction and clearly a menu of approved options to fit with a range of systems is a key component of any emission reduction strategy.

However, a key part of this is the need for good baseline data. For most farmers, this is at best incomplete. Monitoring tools and calculators have not been validated or standardised and are often challenging to load. There are no agreed emission reduction plans and the ability of the national inventory to capture new science-based interventions is uncertain. This means that while farmers are very aware of climate change, its impact, and the challenge of moving to net zero highlighted by the carbon foot-printing of production systems and businesses, they are extremely disadvantaged by lack of reliable, consistent tools.

The four nations have taken different approaches to climate change, which is reflected in the variable development of infrastructure at both a national and farm level. However, it is imperative that across the UK, we all adopt the practices of the best and that the energy required to implement the quality assurance of farm level carbon calculators by an independent body is made a priority. A robust and consistent farm level baseline is essential.

Carbon calculators must build on core standards and values to deliver at both business and enterprise level; quantify the specific gas emissions [CO₂, N₂O, CH₄] and the carbon intensity of production. Identifying the impact of a range of sequestration assets is also important as we move towards net zero.

Carbon calculators must not only deliver a robust baseline but will also act as a monitoring tool and with a more user-friendly interface can act as planning tool to test potential management scenarios before implementation.

Calculators will have to evolve to reflect new science and interventions and that process should be overseen by the independent assurance body or regulator. Regulatory standards however should not constrain the introduction of new functions or even the use of new metrics such as GWP* but these should be bolt on extras and be coded as such with core standard functions which fit with the national inventory being the clear official recognised output.

Some methane reduction interventions which modify production strategies or through health initiatives improve growth rates, food conversion efficiency or increase the longevity of breeding stock will be captured by the national inventory through basic population data.

Specific validated interventions that reduce enteric emissions through the use of precision nutrition, feed additives, or genetics will however require an upgrade of the inventory to capture their impact; perhaps through an agreed coefficient. That upgrade is an essential ongoing component of any methane reduction programme which must keep up with developing science.

Government now has an urgent role to ensure that baseline work can move forward on farm and that an agreed portfolio of methane reduction interventions will be captured by the national inventory. Ten years, in ruminant production terms, is a short period; early action to kick start progress is an important component of delivering on the reduction target.

The proactive intervention by government I hope can be supported by an independent implementation group which can bring science and industry together to pilot a target driven change agenda. An independent group that can create a positive partnership with those on farm.

Ruminant Health & Welfare therefore urge collaboration across the four nations to optimise progress and outcomes.

Yours sincerely,



Nigel Miller

Chair | Ruminant Health & Welfare

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