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# DEFRA Ignores Animal Welfare in New Farm Proposals

The RSPCA is shocked by the proposed position announced today by DEFRA on the English Rural Development Plan (ERDP), the template for promoting sustainable farming. Despite having the ideal opportunity to clearly promote improving animal welfare standards in English farming, their proposal misses that target spectacularly.

DEFRA has ignored seven out of the eight possible opportunities agreed by European farm ministers last year to promote animal welfare measures. The ERDP only contains one such measure which, even then, only has animal welfare as a partial goal.

“Incredibly, even the single measure that DEFRA has chosen was in the existing plan so, effectively, they’re doing nothing new,” says David Bowles, RSPCA Head of External Affairs. “They’ve simply gone for the easiest but least effective and least innovative option.”

Consider that Scotland already incorporates three important animal welfare measures in its RDP and you can see why the Society is so frustrated at this missed opportunity.

“DEFRA is also open to accusations of double standards,” confirms David. “This country is one of the foremost advocates of promoting subsidies to animal welfare within international trade negotiations - but they are simply not prepared to put their money down to show their own commitment. The claim often made by DEFRA that it promotes the best welfare standards appears to be a hollow boast.”

The RSPCA also feels that if the programme goes ahead as planned, it will leave English farmers at a competitive disadvantage compared to others in the UK and Europe.

DEFRA still has the opportunity to make the right choice. The RSPCA is calling on the Government to recognise that animal welfare is at least equally important as environmental issues in promoting sustainable farming, by placing more emphasis on animal welfare in the ERDP.

“Only then will we start to get the balance right,” concludes David. “Taking the easy, ineffective option is unacceptable. This is an opportunity for DEFRA to clearly mark the way forward for animal welfare in England – and one not to be missed.”