

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY TASK FORCE – MINUTES & ACTONS

15.00 03 September 2020

TEAMS online meeting

Present:

Tim Mordan (TM), Tom Bradshaw (TB), Angela Christison (AC), Andy Cureton (AC), Susan Twining (ST), Andy Richardson (AR), Jack Ward (JW), Phil Stocker (PS), Phil Bicknell (PB), Susannah Bolton (SB), Nick Whelan (NW), Peter Dawson (PD), Alex Waugh (AW), Liz Quigley (LQ), Sarah Palmer (SP), Sarah Evered (SE), Dave Ross (DR), Jill Hewitt (JH), Andrea Graham (AG), Sarah Williams (SW), Helen Ferrier (HF), Judith Batchelor (JB), Jack Watts (JW), Tess Howe (TH), Calum Murray (CM)

Kate Saunders (KS) - Minute taker

1. Co-Chairs introductions

TM welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance.

Wesley Aston CEO from Ulster Farmers Union, Northern Ireland introduced himself.

TB informed the group that in between the main APTF meetings contact with all the work streams is taking place to keep the momentum and ensure progression.

2. Defra Update

SE updated the group on the key Defra headlines:

- The Agriculture bill is coming to a close in Parliament and should be passed over the next few weeks.
- Henry Dimbleby's 'Food Strategy' report has been published and Defra are starting to consider the response. A second report should be produced next year.
- The spending review to agree the next 3 years budget is now underway. This process will run through to late October early November 2020.
- Work continues on the Future Farming Programme – announcements around the elements will be made when the spending review is complete.
- A consultation is being run on the Dairy Supply chain. This is open now on www.Gov.uk
- TM gave a brief update on the Transforming Food Production Programme. It has been looked at more thoroughly and is now well in to the roll out process. There are now more farmer lead research initiatives taking place within the programme.

ACTION: KS/AC to add 'Innovation' as an agenda item for 09 November meeting or one of the interim meetings

3. KPIs/Data workstream progress (slides distributed with minutes)

PB presented on 'Developing Farm Indicators'.

PB went through the potential timelines and requested for suitable volunteers.

Volunteers so far are Jack Watts, Helen Browning and Phil Stocker. There has been input previously from Anderson Center and Rural Research.

Any other individuals keen to get involved and support the plan to get in touch with PB.

ACTION: NW and PB to take offline 'How do we bring the learnings of the plan into Northern Ireland'

Points raised:

- Do not underestimate how we can use the socializing of KPIs to build momentum going forward. Many farmers have been meeting online for virtual strategic farms since Covid-19.
- Look into how to get other peoples to support when it comes to launching it. Advocates needed.
- Ensure the scope around productivity (particularly around the financial KPIs) is maintained.
- There may be a need to have a live list over sub sectors as industries evolve.
- A dashboard approach (rather than a single indicator looking at different sub sectors) would be of benefit.
- Need to see how this piece of work sits with the sustainable farming incentive and the early development of ELMS scheme and how they can intertwine. .

LB volunteered the Soil Association.

ACTION: TM/TB/PB to discuss how to link up with ELMS off line

In Summary:

- The group agreed that although the timetable is ambitious to still go ahead with it. There is a need to be pragmatic and use the correct language relatable to farmer (may need to revise the timeline over the different sectors to manage expectations around input over sectors giving more specific dates).
- Ensure the indicators are aligned. Be flexible and agile, tweak where necessary.
- A solution on how we incentivize is still needed. To be picked up offline.
- Anyone to volunteer to join in to do so.

PB will have a meeting of the sub group and feedback to keep everyone informed prior to the next meeting in November to keep momentum.

ACTION: KS/AC to ensure on the agenda 9 November – first action is 'volunteers to help add to the list of indicators'.

ACTION: Once PB has the list of KPIs to produce to farmers for their feedback

4. APTF Communications

It was apparent at the last meeting that there is uncertainty to who is the audience, what and how we want to communicate it and what is the desired outcome from the communications.

Points raised:

- There is a need to engage a wide range of stakeholders as well as the supply industry
- There is great support already from the FDSC but it is more important to target Farmers and farmer representative organisations (there is regular feed into the FDSC - AC updates a dashboard regularly for them and they get copies of the minutes.)
- A simple non complicated Comms plan should be used that says this is the social media we are going to use, this is the wider audience and the opportunities. There is a need to know how we take this forward and have a lead for this with Comms experience
- Outcomes need to be clear.
- Take final KPIs back to the AIC Board to start opening up in the key areas.

Anyone in the group who would like to commit and lead the Communication Strategy to come forward.

5. Rural Infrastructure

ST outlined the early stage thinking around the Rural Infrastructure work. Since the last meeting there has been some progress and promise of more to come. There has been some initial thinking and ST has met with TB and TM. A meeting is also planned with the core group.

Progress has been made on the 4 main themes of the group with some Government commitment.

- Rural Connectivity
- Electric networks
- Restructuring of the industry
- Rural Investment

Areas of most value for the working group are some sort of publication or ideas/inspiration and business arrangements, funding models or investing and buildings equipment.

ST will report back at the November meeting from the core group discussions.

TM expressed he would be happy to join a sub group if there was an appetite for a separate group to be formed to develop this further.

JH volunteered to be part of the core group.

ACTION: ST to forward the meeting invite to JH

Evidence for Farming Initiative

SB gave a brief update on the Evidence for Farming initiative.

The initiative is making progress building the evidence store. Work has come in that has been contracted with NIAB to build the evidence around the potential changes farmers can make with crop systems.

There is work ongoing by CL and Livestock systems with further work where taken on Promar. This will be presented in a tool kit that will be scored in relation to the scale of the change likely to achieve. This will be available for the net zero pilot by the end of November and will be road tested with farmers carefully looking at the language and approach and generate some ambassadors and advocates.

This will enable us to start to refine it and see whether some of the changes on farm and achieving the impact the evidence.

There is a keenness to link this in to new technologies and innovations and build farmer confidence in new technologies.

Skills

TH gave an update on the Skills group. The Senior Leadership group will end in September and is now moving towards implementation of the institute. This will be Chaired by David Thursdon.

A Consultative group has been brought in for a business case with true collaboration. This is a high level group with interested parties. Work has been done with Defra on the funding and Economists have looked at the business case where there was minimal changes fed back.

TM thanked TH for the hard work and supportive and right behind the work even though funding is limited.

Research and Innovation Group

DR presented the latest participant list of the Research and Innovation group members, the additions being Andy Richardson and Duncan Rawson. Joyce Tait has stepped down and joined the better regulation executive as a council member.

The first meeting was held in August and DR presented what was discussed at the meeting and future plans. There is a meeting next week to break down key points.

A full recommendation set will take about 4 to 6 months to pull together. The APTF group will be regularly updated.

6. AOB

Key actions points and minutes to be circulated in due course.

It was agreed that to avoid the group expanding information can be taken back to devolved governments and there is nothing confidential.