

# BVA response to Delivering our Vision for Scottish Agriculture Proposals for a new Agriculture Bill

## Who we are

- 1) The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the UK with over 19,000 members. BVA represents, supports and champions the interests of vets in this country.
- 2) BVA Scottish Branch brings together representatives of local veterinary associations, BVA's specialist divisions, government, and research organisations in Scotland. The Branch advises BVA on the consensus view of Scottish members on local and United Kingdom issues.
- 3) We are grateful for the opportunity to submit a response to this consultation on delivering the Vision for Scottish Agriculture.

## Introduction

- 4) The future of agricultural support is of great interest to the veterinary profession because veterinary surgeons play an integral part in the agricultural and food sectors.
- 5) Veterinary surgeons provide preventive healthcare and treatment for livestock. They also carry out surveillance, boost productivity and promote good biosecurity and high animal health and welfare.
- 6) In their role as Official Veterinary Surgeons (OVs), they also ensure food safety and enable trade in animals and animal products, thereby providing an important public service throughout the food chain from disease control to safeguarding animal health and welfare.

## Animal health and welfare

- 7) In 2017, BVA set out a veterinary vision for what agricultural policy should look like after the EU membership referendum.<sup>1</sup> That document called for the concept of public goods to be at the heart of a new post Brexit agricultural policy to benefit producers, consumers, and wider society. Specifically, we urged for the use of public money to incentivise and support animal health and welfare outcomes as public goods.
- 8) In our response to *Agricultural Transition in Scotland: first steps towards our national policy*<sup>2</sup> we noted our disappointment at the insufficient weight being given to animal health and welfare. It is therefore welcome to see animal health and welfare given greater emphasis now.
- 9) We strongly support proposals contained within the legislation that would grant the following:
  - Powers to establish standards for animal health, welfare and biosecurity as a condition for receiving payments.
  - Powers to make payments to support improvements in animal health, welfare and biosecurity beyond legal minimum standards.
  - Powers to collect and share livestock health, welfare and biosecurity data.
- 10) The inclusion of powers to support animal health and welfare will support the wider aims of the government's vision. The interconnections between human wellbeing, animal wellbeing and environmental wellbeing are more pronounced than ever.<sup>3</sup> A 'One Health' approach is therefore

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bva.co.uk/media/1179/bva-veterinary-vision-for-post-brex-it-agricultural-support.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bva.co.uk/media/4379/bva-response-to-scottish-government-agricultural-transition-first-steps-towards-our-national-policy-consultation.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.bva.co.uk/media/3145/bva\\_one\\_health\\_in\\_action\\_report\\_nov\\_2019.pdf](https://www.bva.co.uk/media/3145/bva_one_health_in_action_report_nov_2019.pdf)

critical in addressing health threats in the animal, human and environment interface.<sup>4</sup>

- 11) Animal health and welfare is interwoven with many social, economic, and environmental outcomes. It is welcome that animal health and welfare are considered alongside efforts to increase economic or environmental sustainability. Agriculture cannot be considered sustainable if it is achieved at an unacceptable cost to animal welfare. With increasing recognition that animal agriculture can be a contributor to environmental degradation, climate change, habitat loss and waste, changes in UK animal production and farming practices are necessary to increase efficiency of agriculture and mitigate environmental impact.
- 12) The economic contribution of improved animal health has been noted by the Scottish Government. A Government report published in 2020 estimates that veterinary interventions save the economy between £100m and £154m per annum by controlling endemic disease, £135m per annum by preventing exotic disease incursions, and £96m per annum on maintaining food safety by controlling and minimising outbreaks of BSE, salmonella, campylobacter and E.coli O157.<sup>5</sup>
- 13) Furthermore, FAO research<sup>6</sup> based on Global Livestock Environmental Assessment Model (GLEAM) has found that with feasible and affordable changes, including animal health interventions, livestock farmers can increase production efficiency and so reduce carbon emissions by nearly a third highlighting a further benefit of veterinary involvement.
- 14) There would be benefits with aligning the ambitions of the agricultural transition with the vision that is delineated in the Scottish Government's Animal health and welfare in the livestock industry strategy.<sup>7</sup> We support the holistic approach of the strategy which states:  
*"To achieve that strategic objective the Scottish Government has a vision of an agriculture industry that is dynamic, competitive and renowned for good quality, sustainable produce. It will strive to achieve that vision by promoting high welfare, healthy livestock produced by resilient systems with minimal environmental impact."*<sup>8</sup>
- 15) The strategy is coming to the end of its life cycle. It will be vital to engage the veterinary profession in the development of a successor strategy that is aligned to the wider ambitions of agricultural policy in Scotland and the need to meet our carbon footprint targets.

### Veterinary engagement

- 16) Veterinary surgeons are uniquely placed to advise and influence sustainable animal husbandry practices at whole-system levels, safeguarding animal health and welfare and influencing future sustainable efficient livestock and food production. Furthermore, no cross-border trade in live animals and animal products can take place without veterinary certification and veterinary surgeons are crucial in protecting public health (including food safety).
- 17) The relationship between a farmer and their vet is paramount when it comes to any effort to improve animal health and welfare outcomes. A new agricultural policy offers an opportunity to harness the power of this relationship and empower farmers and vets to collaborate to see positive outcomes on farm.
- 18) As the legislation will give powers to support animal health and welfare, it will be imperative to engage veterinary expertise. Engagement with the veterinary profession in the development of the policy has been limited to date. We would seek for this to be redressed. A first step would be ensuring appropriate veterinary participation on the Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB).
- 19) Further research should also be carried out to inform the meaningful setting of targets to benchmark health and welfare.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-policy/one-health>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/preliminary-economic-assessment-veterinary-professions-value-scotland/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/197608/icode/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/animal-health-welfare-livestock-industry-strategy-2016-2021/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/animal-health-welfare-livestock-industry-strategy-2016-2021/pages/4/>

## Conclusion

- 20) Scotland has an exciting opportunity to develop an innovative agriculture policy which supports an ambitious set of aims. We welcome that more recognition has been given to animal health and welfare as increased focus on this area would underpin the wider aims of the vision provided in the document.
- 21) The involvement of the veterinary profession within any future agricultural policy will be vital to all aspects of policy development, review, and implementation. BVA and BVA Scottish Branch are well placed to support the Scottish Government in the development and implementation of a new agricultural policy and would welcome further engagement.