



Alyn Smith

Agriculture Winter 2012

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the winter edition of my newsletter for Scotland's agriculture and rural economy sector. I hope you'll find this useful in keeping you in touch with how I've been representing your interests.

As a member of the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee, I have a particular interest in ensuring that our farmers get a fair deal from Brussels.

Our rural industries are vital to the whole Scottish economy, providing our food and protecting our unique habitats and landscapes. They are an integral part of who and what we are - which is why I am committed to fighting for them.

In Europe, CAP reform is currently underway, though as is so often the case in Brussels, change isn't happening quickly - the timetable on decisions is almost certain to slip by another three months, largely because of the much-publicised problems in agreeing the EU budget.

Our farmers want certainty above all else, and they want it as quickly as possible. But the hold-up could actually work in Scotland's favour. It pushes the date for final approval in the parliament back until March 2013, by which point the EU presidency will be held by Ireland.

The delay gives us more time to ensure that things are done properly, and having the Irish in the chair won't do us any harm at all as their issues and problems are similar to ours. I'm confident that we'll have an agreement by June.

Scotland's rural economy doesn't get a good deal out of our being a member of the UK. There's no doubt that having our own Scottish Parliament since 1999 has made a big difference, but we'd be in a much better position again with independence.

“ Scotland's rural economy doesn't get a good deal out of our being a member of the UK. ”

At the moment, for instance, we don't have a direct say in the intergovernmental CAP negotiations. Only the UK minister has the automatic right to represent us, and Scottish interests aren't their most important consideration. The Scottish Government has to deliver the outcomes of the talks, but it can't currently influence them.

This can potentially be disastrous. DEFRA's official position is that farming has to move away from subsidy, leaving only support for public goods delivered.

That would mean the end of Pillar One money and direct payments, though it's the only thing keeping tens of thousands of Scottish businesses afloat and hundreds of thousands in our wider rural economy in a job.

On Pillar Two, the returns Scotland already gets are dreadful - an average of €9 per hectare, compared to a UK average of €15 and an EU average of an astonishing €115. That's the lowest allocation right across the European Union.

The simple fact is that the UK government just doesn't represent the interests of Scotland's rural communities.

So there's plenty to think about in the run up to the referendum in 2014. In the meantime, I'm keen to help you as much as I can. You can register for future issues of this newsletter on my web site at www.alynsmith.eu - and if you'd like me to pay a visit to your business, institute or community, then please do get in touch.

In the meantime, I wish you all the best and look forward to meeting with you soon.

Yours for Scotland

Alyn Smith MEP



The Greens | European Free Alliance
in the European Parliament

Design and typesetting by Patrick Robertshaw, Edinburgh: splateagle.com



Top EU Officials Briefed on Alyn's Sheep Survey

Alyn has made another attempt to reverse the damage which EID continues to inflict on Scotland's sheep industry. He has been fighting the regulation for years and earlier this year carried out a survey of farmers in Shetland to get hard data on the impact of the rules.

Along with Norman Leask from the Scottish Crofters' Federation, Alyn met officials from the European Commission who are responsible for the scheme. Alyn presented the survey results and pressed home criticisms from the industry over fears about cross-compliance penalties and the reliability of the technology.

"The meeting with the Commission was enlightening, if not as productive as I would have liked," Alyn said. "The survey results were read with interest, but with scepticism that what we are seeing in Shetland is replicable across the EU."

He said he had pushed for a key change to the regulation - not tagging the beast until it leaves the holding of birth. "This would be a workable change to the regulation and would go a long way to winning back the goodwill of Scotland's farmers.

"There was no mood for talk of derogations - that was clear - but I have no intention of letting this drop. When a review comes along - which at some point it will - I want this idea front and centre."



Alyn gets to grips with sheep tagging

- Alyn's survey went out over the summer to all livestock farmers in Shetland. It asked them about the repercussions of the EID regulation and the impact it has had on their flocks and their businesses.

Of the 293 responses received, 91 per cent reported problems with sheep losing tags, while 87 per cent said their sheep had damaged ears. A total of 89 per cent complained about the additional costs of the electronic tags and associated equipment.

The most worrying finding of all was that 68 per cent of respondents said EID had made them consider giving up sheep farming altogether.

Alyn Warns About Eight Hour Transport Limit

Alyn Smith has expressed his disappointment at the European Parliament's decision to approve a resolution seeking to reconsider limiting animal transport journey times to eight hours.

The Wojciechowski Report was approved by the full Parliament, with Alyn voting against. An alternative resolution calling for a blanket ban on journeys over eight hours was soundly defeated by 421 votes to 226, but the final report still calls for reconsideration by the Commission.

The text undermines an otherwise sensible conclusion that the problems facing animal transport are largely down to patchy and occasionally poor enforcement of the current rules by the Member States, and calls for a greater focus on these issues by countries which are falling short.

Alyn said: "I'm proud of Scotland's high animal welfare standards, and while I'm always up for them being better, we need laws that work in the real world. Scotland's farmers will be disappointed to hear that the attempt to put in place an eight hour limit has still not been entirely killed off.

"I also took some exception to suggestions from some MEPs that this was about putting money before welfare. That's twaddle. An eight hour limit is unscientific and bears no relation to the actual stress animals are under.

"It would put big chunks of Scotland effectively off limits for livestock production - an outcome nobody wants. I'm confident that the new Commissioner will bear that in mind as we try to take forward the real and serious issues about enforcement of the current rules."

Farmers Get Euro Payments Quickly

There's good news on Single Farm Payments - Scottish farmers have received their money even more quickly than last year, with around 14,200 producers having it paid into their accounts on the first day permitted.

The payments are vital for our rural economy, amounting to over £300 million in total - and there is even more need of it this year as a result of the awful weather we've seen over the last few months.

Well done to Scottish Agriculture and Rural Affairs Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead and his staff in the Scottish Government for making sure that the money came through as smoothly as possible.

Farmers should also remember that they can get access to payment information by signing up for Rural Payments Online. This allows them to apply via the web with 24 hour access, instant receipts and dedicated helpdesk support. Even if you didn't submit your application online, this option is still open to you.

Anyone seeking further guidance on the Single Farm Payment Scheme or requiring access to forms should visit the Scottish Government's web site at bit.ly/AlynSmith-SFPSGuidance.

Alyn Calls For Trade Ban on Sow Stalls

Pigmeat exports from countries which do not meet tough new welfare rules should be banned from the EU single market from January 1, Alyn has said.

He now intends to press the case and wants Scottish farmer groups to show their support for a block at a meeting he has scheduled with Tonio Borg, Europe's new Health and Consumer Affairs commissioner, in the new year.

The new rules, which outlaw sow stalls, have been on the statute books for 13 years, with Scots farmers complying with them since 1999. But at least nine of the EU's 27 member states are still unlikely to meet the 2013 deadline.

Alyn, who held a meeting with pig farmers in Aberdeenshire to discuss the issue, said afterwards: "I'm up for organising an MEP and farmer delegation in January to put pressure on the commissioner to impose an intra-community trade ban. If the farmers can get their partner organisations in other countries along, I'll co-ordinate the MEPs.

He added: "If member states have dragged their feet that's unfortunate. But the consequences of that should not be that they are allowed to undermine the intra-community market by wilfully failing to comply.

"We all remember how quickly the doors closed against us when BSE broke out. What I'm calling for is not only possible - I think it's the only fair way to punish those states that have dragged their feet."

South American Beef Standards Under the Spotlight

Alyn has just returned from a fact-finding trip to Brazil and Paraguay to investigate beef production standards and see how they compare to EU requirements.

South America is becoming increasingly important as a global meat producer, and Alyn travelled to farms, feedlots and slaughterhouses in Mato Grosso do Sul, a state in the south west of Brazil, before crossing over into Paraguay.

The aim was to get first hand information and to see if lower production standards justified the maintenance of European trade barriers. Alyn has persistently warned that an EU trade deal with Mercosur would disproportionately hit Scotland's beef farmers.

He will be publishing his research trip findings in the new year with the Scottish Beef Cattle Association.



Alyn reviews animal welfare standards

News in Brief

Alyn's deep and long lasting commitment to animal welfare has been recognised by the British Veterinary Association, which awarded him with the title of Honorary Associate.

He received the award in a presentation at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies at Easter Bush on the outskirts of Edinburgh. The school has a global reputation for the quality of its animal healthcare and Alyn was invited to see the world class teaching and research facilities.

He was given a tour of the school and the neighbouring Small Animals Hospital where he saw the students at work and also discussed current issues in veterinary science.

The award itself was handed over by the Kelso-based President of the BVA's Scottish Branch, Robert Anderson, and by Ronnie Soutar, the organisation's Scottish Branch Junior Vice President.

Alyn said: "I'm both delighted and humbled to be offered this Honorary Associate membership of the BVA.

"It means a huge amount to me to have this relationship with an organisation which upholds the very highest standards of animal welfare practice and which is recognised internationally for its knowledge, integrity and professionalism."

Farmers and others involved in the rural economy have attended a series of events with Alyn where they have been able to listen to his views on the future of the EU and Scottish agriculture.

At an evening in Kelso, Roxburghshire organised by the Scottish Borders Chamber of Commerce, he said that a working, efficient and prosperous countryside was vital to everyone, and not just those working in it.

"If times are hard, that will have an effect on the turnover of other businesses," he said. "Cash flow problems in the farmyard ultimately lead directly to issues such as decaying town centres and empty units in the high street."

At a separate event in Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire, Alyn told the audience that Scotland was already "pretty much independent", adding: "Our parliament and government are already responsible for so much of daily life in rural Scotland, from agriculture itself through to the environment, planning, land reform, transport and local government.

"These things are crucial to rural life, but with full independence, we could do more - including being better and more fully represented in the EU."



Alyn listens to Richard Lochhead talking on animal welfare

Alyn has finally won his long standing campaign to ban the barbaric practice of allowing rogue fishermen to slice the fins off sharks before throwing the creatures back into the water to drown or be eaten alive.

MEPs voted to close the current EU loophole which allows this to happen - largely to line the pockets of Spanish and Portuguese fishermen who then sell the fins on as an ingredient for gourmet soup in Asia.

In order to draw attention to the issue and the vote, Alyn swam with 10 sharks - some of them more than 12 feet long - in a special tank at Deep Sea World in North Queensferry.


The attraction also collected signatures from its visitors for a petition which Alyn took to Strasbourg on the eve of the vote.

After the victory he said: "I'm extremely proud to be a member of the European Parliament today. Hats off to my MEP colleagues for voting sensibly in order to preserve this wonderful species.


"It's astonishing to think that a third of European sharks are classed as under threat - that's something that I hope will now change."


Getting in Touch

 e-mail me at: alyn.smith@europarl.europa.eu

 Write to me at my office: **c/o SNP Headquarters, Gordon Lamb House, 3 Jackson's Entry, Edinburgh, EH8 8PJ**

 Find me on Facebook: [alynsmithSNP](https://www.facebook.com/alynsmithSNP)

 Follow me on Twitter: [@AlynSmithMEP](https://twitter.com/AlynSmithMEP)

 Visit me at my web site at: www.alynsmith.eu where you can also register for future issues of this newsletter.