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Deputy Minister for Farming and Food



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref

Andrew RT Davies AM

23 August 2015

Dear *Andrew,*

As part of my update to Assembly Members on the significant progress being made with the implementation of the principles and recommendations from the Working Smarter review in Plenary on 15 July, I offered to provide you with an update on progress with the delivery of recommendation 25. I have also included an update on the wider activities to reduce the burden of inspection on farmers which you raised.

Recommendation 25 refers to the need for formal contracts between the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and private veterinary practitioners to include the requirement to inform Rural Inspectorate Wales (RIW) in advance of all bovine TB inspections on behalf of Welsh Government to enable a decision on joint visits to be actively considered in every case.

As Gareth Williams identified in his report, the opportunity to combine visits was previously limited by the availability of test dates from APHA. This was often as a result of the Official Veterinarians (OVs), who undertake the majority of bovine TB tests, not entering a planned test date on the APHA IT system. This has now been resolved and in line with the recommendation there is a formal contract in place between government and private veterinary practitioners which includes the requirement to enter planned TB testing dates in advance of their visit. The annual round of bovine TB testing using this contract started in earnest last month and the entry of planned test dates will be monitored as a key performance indicator for the contract.

In answer to the wider issues that you raised, Working Smarter has at its core a commitment to ensure that the number and requirements of inspections are appropriate and that farmers are provided with clear advice and support to ensure that they understand these requirements.

Fundamental to this is the design of scheme applications and the quality of guidance and support provided to ensure that farmers submit accurate and appropriate information, therefore reducing the risk of breaches being found at inspections. The Welsh Government investment of £7.9 million towards developing online applications with inbuilt checks and validation, the design of which was undertaken in collaboration with farmers, is key to this as is the work of the Welsh Government Farm Liaison Service who help groups and individual farmers to understand the requirements.

The Working Smarter Task and Finish Group which includes representatives from farmers, Farming Unions, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), APHA, Local Authorities and Farm Assurance Welsh Livestock (FAWL) has produced a clear and concise set of guidance to help farmers prepare for inspections. This guidance, "When the Inspector calls", also includes simplified and standardised formats for record keeping which have reduced the need for multiple records being held by farmers and simplified the inspection process. This has been available to farmers across Wales since 2013.

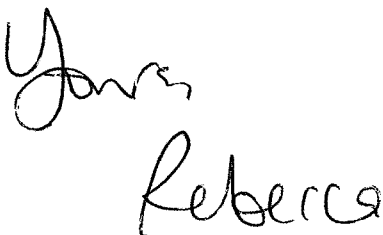
In addition to Cattle Identification inspections and TB Testing being coordinated, there are elements of the Cross Compliance inspections that warrant NRW inspectors to accompany Rural Payments Wales (RPW) staff on certain inspections and these are combined as part of the RPW annual inspection cycle.

RPW also shares selection and results data with local authorities and in the future NRW will also be sharing their annual selection of inspection cases, so that their inspections can be combined wherever possible. If a farmer has been selected for an inspection by both NRW and RPW, but it is not possible to combine the inspection (as they cover specific and separate elements), then both organisations will aim to arrange their inspections in a way that lessens the burden on the farmer.

The number and requirements of most farm inspections undertaken by government are determined by European Regulations. Welsh Government is undertaking the minimum number of inspections required by these regulations and continues to identify further opportunities to reduce this burden on farmers, for example by undertaking inspections remotely. Remote sensing was used for the Single Payment Scheme and we will continue to be used for the new Basic Payment Scheme in 2015.

Excellent progress has been made on improving the guidance, levels and quality of support and in reducing the burden of inspections by combining them where ever possible. This is not a one off task but one which, together with the wider Working Smarter principles, will be taken forward under the strategic framework for Welsh Agriculture so that they continue to be at the centre of the way the agricultural industry and government works together.

I will publish a further update on progress with the Working Smarter recommendations, including specific details of the number of inspections that have been combined, later this year to coincide with the introduction and publication of the Strategic Framework.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca', written in a cursive style.

Rebecca Evans AC / AM

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