

ARE YOU RURAL PAYMENTS READY?

with Sandy Kapila, Head of External Affairs with the Rural Payments Agency



2020 has been a really difficult year for many. No one could have anticipated the challenges faced by communities across the country and everyone's resilience has been sorely tested. But what 2020 has demonstrated is where there is adversity there is also opportunity and 2021 will bring more of the same.

The RPA plays an important role for agricultural and rural communities in creating a better place to live. Many of our people live, and are part of, these communities. It is this knowledge and experience coupled with the insight we get from farmers, land managers, environmental and farming associations/bodies which has driven the year on year improvements across the full range of our services.

We know the importance of cash flow to rural businesses which is why we have focused and prioritised paying more farmers and businesses earlier than they have before. This has allowed farmers to continue to enhance our natural landscape; restore their land and property from the effects of flooding; increase their productivity by buying new equipment and creating jobs in their communities by helping expansion; plant and care for more trees, restore, improve and increase environmental and wildlife habitats in accordance with the Defra 25 year environmental plan.

2021 will bring with it a fresh way to consider future farming as we enter the 7-year transition. So, change is on its way. It is extremely important for farming businesses to start considering the impacts these changes will have on them to ensure they are ready to make the decisions they need to in a timely way. To help prepare for this Defra's Farming is Changing booklet explains what these changes will mean for farmers and land managers in practice and what you can do to prepare for the start of the agricultural transition next year. I would urge you, and there is no time like the present, to understand the opportunities available.

RPA will support you in your choices, we'll continue to run our familiar schemes over the next few years which means that farmers and land managers can continue to plan and prepare for the future while continuing to benefit from existing income opportunities. We will take the opportunity of the schemes moving to being under UK law to further streamline our schemes and services to continue to make it simpler to apply for and easier for us to administer. Although the services we offer will evolve and change the way in which we serve the farming community will remain underpinned by the skills, strengths and commitment of our people. Where farmers experience difficulties, working closely with farming help organisations, the RPA will provide whatever support we can.

Also, as the delivery partner for the national Environmental Land Management pilot scheme, we will continue to work closely with Defra, and using your insight to help shape the scheme and ensure it delivers the best outcomes. Our efforts to simplify our existing schemes, which have already led to increases in the uptake and driven performance improvements, show we can be relied upon to listen to our customers to help ensure their experience is positive.

In addition, we are continuing to help develop world-leading standards of livestock traceability for the UK. This will not only make us more resilient and responsive to animal disease but will drive innovation and productivity improvements throughout the meat and livestock sectors. During Spring 2021, RPA will deploy a new customer service function for our sheep and goat sectors.

I can assure you that the RPA is working hard to ensure that farm businesses continue to prosper while they improve their productivity and continue to enhance our environment. Finally and importantly 2021 will be a year of changes and I'd encourage you to act now to understand the future landscape and not to leave things to the last minute.

