



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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Sir Robert Goodwill
Chair Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

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Dear Sir Robert,

I am responding to your letter from 22nd December. I apologise for the delay.

The Committee calls on you to revise the Avian Influenza compensation scheme so that compensation is paid based on the number of birds alive in the affected flock at the point of disease notification rather than the number of birds that are culled.

As set out in the Animal Health Act 1981, compensation is paid by HM Government for healthy birds culled for avian influenza disease control purposes. This is designed to promote prompt reporting of suspicion of disease. It is not intended to compensate for animals that will die from a particular disease. However, to provide greater clarity about entitlement to compensation and better reflect the impact of outbreaks on infected premises, changes to the compensation scheme were announced on the 28 October 2022. APHA's assessments of the health of birds will now be made at the outset of planned culling or within 48 hours of the decision to cull affected birds, whichever is shorter. This has already led to swifter payments to help stem cash flow pressures for poultry producers. The department has no plans to make any further changes, recognising the purpose of the scheme.

Please can you set out how you will support farms seeking to restock following an avian influenza outbreak?

Keepers at infected premises have a choice to either wait 12 months before restocking birds or undertake secondary cleansing and disinfection (C&D) to enable them to restock earlier. The choice is therefore a commercial decision for the keeper. APHA work with keepers throughout the process to explain the requirements and monitor the effectiveness of C&D in order to support restocking.

In many of the recent avian influenza outbreaks, epidemiological investigations have unfortunately highlighted a strong correlation to insufficient biosecurity measures. While it may seem attractive for the taxpayer to subsidise restocking efforts in order to maintain supply of poultry and eggs, we must make sure there is a level playing field within the sector.

Can you provide an update on what conversations you have had with the Treasury minister to ensure the necessary funding is made available for this project?

Regarding APHA resourcing and particularly its Weybridge re-development, work is already underway. Business case approval will proceed in the normal way.

The Committee calls on you to publish an updated mitigation strategy by March 2023, which should explicitly address future research priorities and the issue of carcase management.

Regarding avian influenza in wild birds, we published a strategy last August. Updates to the strategy will be in line with international best practice on limiting impacts in wild birds, and will reflect developments in the ornithological, epidemiological, veterinary and other scientific evidence since the strategy was published on the 31 August 2022.

Can you set out what support the Government is providing for the development of a vaccine? Can you also explain what work Defra is doing to address the regulatory and trade barriers that might stop the roll-out of any vaccine that is developed?

Defra in conjunction with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) are monitoring the development and availability of vaccines as they are put forward for market authorisation by vaccine manufacturers. The use of vaccination is unlikely to be a viable option for the 2023/24 high risk season.

In addition to establishing a cross government and industry task force to explore potential for use of vaccination as a preventive measure whilst ensuring our wider trading relationship with third countries is not impeded by the use of vaccine.

Defra continues to invest in avian influenza research. International collaboration and knowledge exchange including on vaccine development is facilitated through discussions between the UK Chief Veterinary Officer and her counterparts in the EU, The QUADS Alliance, the WOA and the International Alliance for Biological Standardisation.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for their engagement on this issue and express our gratitude for the ongoing collaboration across government and industry. This joint up approach is key to ensuring good biosecurity, reducing the likelihood and impacts of future outbreaks and ensuring the poultry sector is effectively supported.

Yours sincerely,



RT HON THÉRÈSE COFFEY MP