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Focus on best value for money at heart of AHDB Beef & Lamb Strategy

In a post-Brexit world, working out where levy funds can add best value and have greatest impact is at the heart of the new three year AHDB Beef & Lamb strategy published today (1 December).

The vision of AHDB's new 'Inspiring Success' corporate strategy is 'creating a world-class food and farming industry'. It has also redefined AHDB's purpose as 'inspiring farmers, growers and the industry to succeed in a rapidly changing world'.

The 2017-2020 AHDB Beef & Lamb strategy is now out for a six week consultation. It maps out the long term areas of focus for the English beef and lamb sector to meet the specific challenges driven by the need for a more consistent product to meet changing consumer demands and consumption trends.

Beef & Lamb Sector Board Chair Adam Quinney explained the Board had taken a 'blank sheet of paper' approach to areas of focus over the next three years.

"The sector is heading into uncharted waters around markets in the wake of Brexit with little indication of what might happen to farm support after 2020.

"With smaller, more traditional family farms at the heart of the industry, helping ensure the sector remains sustainable was at the forefront of the Board's thinking. We were determined to look long and hard at where levies could add best value for farmers and processors and have the most impact on returns longer term." he added.

As a result the strategy focuses on three key areas:

- Improving production consistency and competitiveness to deliver a more consistent carcase. This will be delivered through a focus on enhanced knowledge exchange and better on-farm translation of genetic research. This will be backed by continued investment in consumer insight and analysis.
- Increasing consumer demand through a focus on export and market development activities. Market development work will focus on working with existing industry-led campaigns and activities run by retailers. Exploring the potential of the halal market longer term is also seen as key to increasing consumer demand for lamb. Continued investment in health and education to promote the benefits of red meat is also seen as an important area of work.
- Better meat quality through rolling out a 'Quality Standard Mark Plus Scheme' to the supply chain.

With longer term uncertainty around domestic and export markets, the strategy places a renewed focus on benchmarking and helping producers understand their business costs to put them in a better position to respond to market opportunities.

“Understanding costs is now seen as a fundamental part of the knowledge exchange (KE) package, reflected in the fact that AHDB farm economics is now part of the wider AHDB knowledge exchange team.

“This would be delivered alongside an increased focus on peer-to-peer learning as part of the wider KE uptake delivered through a new network of Focus Farms. These would tackle issues such as maximising forage, use of Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) and developing a better understanding of how disease impacts on productivity,” added Mr Quinney.

With ‘out of spec’ beef carcasses estimated to cost the industry around £1million a week, improving producers’ ability to hit specification is also seen as a critical part of the strategy, encompassing genetics work, on farm management and marketing decisions.

Exports would remain a key strand of AHDB Beef & Lamb’s market development work, with a focus on around opening up new markets for offal and premium cuts, particularly in countries with large import needs such as China. With one eye on the new post-Brexit world, the draft strategy proposes increasing the weighting of levy funds to export and market access work in 2019 – 2020.

Domestic marketing spend over the next three years under the proposed strategy would improve alignment with existing industry promotional work such as Love Lamb and Great British Beef Week, rather than focusing on development of stand-alone AHDB marketing campaigns. Following the example of AHDB Pork’s Pulled Pork work, future beef and lamb consumer facing spend would also look at how projects could better hook up with retailer activities.

Mr Quinney said: “Our proposed domestic marketing spend is looking to capitalise on working with others in the industry over the longer term to get the best impact and return for levy funding, and making the best use of the great digital and creative skills which have been brought in-house at AHDB.

“The Beef & Lamb Board is absolutely determined to ensure it uses those funds carefully to enhance the sustainability of the beef and lamb sectors, and exploit the opportunities which will inevitably present themselves over the next three years,” he added.

The strategy can be found online at <http://www.ahdb.org.uk/publications/consultation.aspx>

.The closing date for the consultation is 9 January 2017.

Cattle and sheep levy rates for 2017/18 are to remain unchanged.

- Ends -

Notes to editors

AHDB is a statutory levy board, funded by farmers, growers and others in the supply chain. Established in 2008 and classified as a Non-Departmental Public Body, it supports the following industries: meat and livestock (cattle, sheep and pigs) in England; horticulture, milk and potatoes in Great Britain; and cereals and oilseeds in the UK. Further information on AHDB can be found at www.ahdb.org.uk

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