



House of Commons:

**ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE: 25-YEAR
PLAN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

Call for written evidence:

**Submission from the Agriculture and Horticulture Development
Board (AHDB)**

1 March 2018

Executive summary

AHDB has identified a number key areas in the 25-Year Plan for the Environment likely to have the biggest potential impact on agriculture and horticulture. The submission details:

- AHDB research shows that productivity needs to be increased across all sectors of agriculture and horticulture to enable producers and their onward supply chains to become more competitive and sustainable. The drive for increased productivity and the financial imperative of doing so is compatible with improving environmental sustainability, enabling farming systems to become more resilient to economic and environmental challenges, while meeting future consumer needs and developing overseas trade opportunities [Ref: Driving Productivity Growth Together, Jan 2018](#)
- Growth in productivity should enable businesses to reinvest or restructure to address various environmental drivers and to deliver goods efficiently
- Elements of the 25-year plan align with the four core strategic priorities in AHDB's 2017-2020 [Inspiring Success Strategy](#). AHDB's four core priorities are included below
- In order for the Environment Plan to deliver, greater clarity is needed in its objectives, in establishing relevant robust metrics which will help the agricultural and horticultural industries to deliver while improving productivity
- Working with industry partners and researchers, AHDB would be in a position to assist with the development of clearer measurements to enable industry to achieve SMART objectives when they are developed
- Drawing on key areas of DEFRA's plan, AHDB is able to highlight research, development and knowledge exchange projects, which are ongoing, relevant and may provide evidence to inform future iterations of the plan.

AHDB

AHDB's purpose is to inspire our farmers, growers and industry to succeed in a rapidly changing world. We are the independent go-to place for trustworthy information and evidence-based research. We equip the industry with easy-to-use, practical know-how which they can apply straight away to make better decisions and improve their performance.

Through deepening our technical, commercial and market insight, and making this available where, when and how the industry needs it, we aim to enable British agriculture to become truly world class.

We will also strategically align our research funding to six new technical themes to accelerate innovation in the agricultural and horticultural industries. We will focus our activities on four strategic priorities:

1. Inspiring British farming and growing to be more competitive and resilient.
2. Accelerating innovation and productivity growth through coordinated research and development (R&D) and knowledge exchange (KE).
3. Helping the industry understand and deliver what consumers will trust and buy.
4. Delivering thought leadership and horizon scanning.

Inquiry questions and AHDB's response

1. *Ambition and Reporting*

2. AHDB recognises that the 25-year plan is a blueprint for the environment for the next quarter of a century, with a set of metrics to be developed to assess progress towards the goals set within the plan.
3. Currently a small number of objectives set within the plan are SMART, for example the voluntary timetable for ending peat use relates directly to the agricultural and horticultural industries. However, greater clarity is needed across all objectives to enable industries to deliver.
4. Working with industry partners and researchers, AHDB would be in a position to assist with the development of clearer measurements – using existing R&D and knowledge exchange projects – to enable the agricultural and horticultural industries to understand requirements and deliver against SMART objectives when they are developed.
5. There are already existing targets set as a result of historic agreements which do not appear to be represented against the objectives in the plan, including: The National Emissions Ceilings Directive, The Water Framework Directive, The Low Carbon Transition Plan, [The National Biodiversity action plan](#).
6. To help improve clarity against existing objectives, timelines quoted on page 114 of the plan could be expanded to cover existing and future commitments, taking into account overlapping areas and providing opportunity to integrate and simplify objectives.

7. *Implementation*

8. While the plan provides a developing framework to ensure industries help to protect the environment, including approaches that would be adopted in England, it will be valuable to see how these approaches are set within the UK and global context, to enable the adoption of common standards and metrics to evaluate comparative progress and impacts.
9. As part of the onward development of the plan, identify which bodies and organisations will collaborate and work together to implement, regulate and deliver against its objectives. For example, the Environment Agency, AHDB, Water Companies etc.
10. As the plan is implemented, an emphasis on explaining environmental consequence of actions, including measures to reduce environmental impact alongside improving productivity is an important part of ensuring the success of its objectives.
11. To implement the objectives of the plan when they are clarified, AHDB has a network of frontline staff, which disseminate information, exchange knowledge and take R&D projects from the lab to farmers and growers, using communications and meetings with levy payers and alongside industry stakeholders (eg the NFU, farmer and grower trade bodies). We support this delivery with technical resources, including print, digital, and visual. Through our websites, these resources are available to all levy payers, industry advisers and other interested parties.
12. There are specific areas of the plan that AHDB has R&D and knowledge exchange projects, which are already underway as part of its Inspiring Success Strategy. These are listed below.
13. *'Improving how we manage and incentivise land management'*
 - i. On designing and delivering a new environmental land management system, AHDB is able to draw on a broad range of resources, and active projects
 - ii. AHDB produces the industry renowned [Nutrient Management Guide \(RB209\)](#), which relates to the application of fertilisers and developing farming rules for water. There is

ongoing investment in research to inform revision of the guide, this regularly updated information is shared, discussed and put into practice across the UK.

- iii. On protecting crops while reducing the environmental impact of pesticides, this is a significant area of work for AHDB. The development of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programmes is crucial for industry, particularly given the pressures on the availability and use of current Plant Protection Products (PPPs). In addition to IPM, AHDB works in partnership with researchers, farmers and growers to carry out genetic evaluation, develop new varieties of crops and methods of protection, to improve the use of crop protection measures together with work to improve water quality and protect wildlife.
14. *'Improving soil health and restoring and protecting our peatlands'*
- i. To develop better information on soil health, this area is a key component of business sustainability and for delivery of natural capital. Soil monitoring and a range of management options are listed in the plan. AHDB's [GREATsoils](#) programme includes a large element on measuring and managing soil health. Here an understanding from government of how it is envisaged soil health metrics would be exploited is important as rates of managed improvement will differ greatly under different farming systems and quantification of this necessary to realistically benchmark individual grower, catchment or national performance.
 - ii. On restoring vulnerable peatlands and ending peat use in horticultural products by 2030, AHDB is already working with DEFRA on a £1m Knowledge Exchange & Research project to design growing media to replace peat, further information is available through the [Growing Media Review](#).
15. *'Reducing risks from flooding and coastal erosion'*
- i. Working with farmers and growers, AHDB has carried out work on soil management covering areas such as runoff, cover crops, buffer strips evidence is available as part of a case study on [engineering the landscape for asparagus production](#).
16. *'Protecting and recovering nature'*
- i. Specifically on improving biosecurity to protect and conserve nature, here horizon scanning is an important aspect of this activity and with possibly new trading arrangements post-Brexit, there will need to be an ongoing re-evaluation of risks for both crop and livestock production, not just in relation to nature conservation. The ongoing importance of this section of the plan to the productivity of producers is reflected in the role AHDB is taking in co-ordinating industry approaches to managing plant and animal disease risks.
 - ii. AHDB works closely with DEFRA, EA, Natural England (NE) and levy payers on the implementation of environmental legislation. Our horizon scanning, research and development projects identify techniques and technologies, which improve farm performance and reduce negative impacts on the natural environment. Examples include research and collaboration on ammonia emissions from livestock housing.
17. *'Respecting nature in how we use water'*
- i. Water abstraction reform will continue and water efficiency on farm and nurseries will become increasingly important. The availability and quality of water is crucial for a diverse range of agricultural enterprises e.g. maintaining production of GB potato and vegetable crops, ornamentals and for livestock welfare. AHDB has access to research, development and knowledge exchange projects to help shape approaches.
 - ii. Effective use of water for dairy farming and livestock delivers water resource management, but also is important for building resilience into farm systems, animal health and welfare, including reducing antibiotic use. AHDB projects and knowledge exchange materials are developing our resource and capabilities in this area and seen as high priority.

18. *'Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste'*

- i. AHDB is actively engaged with the Green House Gases Action Plan (GHGAP) and information and advice on improving production efficiency contributes to reduction in emissions. This will continue and it is noted that targets could be extended to ammonia, which would draw on AHDB's work on livestock systems, buildings and storage.
- ii. On publishing a chemicals strategy, AHDB advises that the evidence base to inform this area of the plan, which is being established needs to be robust and risk based (rather than hazard), as there may be significant implications for agricultural productivity if there continues to be loss of effective Plant Protection Products.
- iii. On DEFRA's work to minimise the risk of chemical contamination in our water, the lessons learnt from this review will be valuable and can be used to focus AHDB research and knowledge exchange activities on plant protection methods, nutrient management, and livestock management.
- iv. Matching product to market specification, efficient handling and optimal storage all contribute to reducing waste and delivering resource efficiency. We have many projects that fall into this area. Our Sutton Bridge Potato Storage facility is a unique resource in this area, which we consider has the potential to deliver greater value, and be of increasing importance going forward.
- v. Our new network of Strategic Farms offers opportunities for direct delivery to farmers and growers, activity relating to these objectives.

19. Principles and Oversight

20. In 2011, [AHDB consulted on the Farming and Regulation Task Force](#), which found 200 ways of reducing unnecessary "red tape". The review aimed to establish a new regulatory culture, primarily (but not solely), in DEFRA, its agencies and delivery partners; and made specific recommendations for change.
21. The findings of this review may help to provide a holistic approach to the 25-year Environmental Plan and its relationship with the agricultural and horticultural industries. This may help to ensure that there is a holistic approach adopted considering the interrelation of projects and outcomes. For example, considering the relationship and expectations of our trading partners and neighbouring countries. We should maintain close working relationships with organisations and bodies in member states.