

# Farming Regulation Task Force Implementation Paperwork plan

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# Introduction

1. This document sets out the Government's plan for reducing the burden of paperwork on farmers and food processors, in response to a recommendation from the independent Farming Regulation Task Force<sup>1</sup>. This plan covers activities in Defra, the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), the Environment Agency (EA), Natural England (NE) and the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA). The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is producing its own response to the Farming Regulation Task Force.
2. This plan gives examples of some of the work Defra and its agencies are already doing to reduce and rationalise the paperwork burden on farming and food-processing businesses. It commits the Government to a programme of actions to reduce this burden further, and gives examples of the work we will do. The Farming Regulation Task Force Implementation Group, chaired by Richard Macdonald, will hold us to account on delivering these and the other commitments from the Task Force Report. More detail on many of the actions in this plan will be provided in the full Government Response to the Task Force, which will be published in early 2012.
3. This is an evolving plan. We need more information on the paperwork and process burdens on farmers before we can identify every area where we can reduce paperwork. We will review and update the plan every six months, to ensure we are taking every opportunity to reduce burdens, as we gather more information and as progress is made.
4. The Task Force made over 200 recommendations covering the full range of the regulation that affects farming. A key theme that emerged from the Task Force's report was on paperwork; the Task Force reported that "*[i]f there is a single universal 'complaint' from farmers, it is that there is too much paperwork*". While acknowledging that Defra and the agencies have taken steps to improve service to their customers on paperwork and processes, the Task Force felt that the Government would benefit from a plan to reduce paperwork and process. The Task Force recommended that:

**[2.43]... Defra, its agencies and delivery partners, including the Food Standards Agency produce a coherent plan for Ministers of how they intend to further reduce and rationalise the process and paperwork for farming and food-processing businesses, with the aim of improving efficiency and effectiveness. We recommend that the plan:**

- **is produced by the end of 2011;**
- **explains where paperwork and process cannot be reduced, and address 'customer journey mapping' where it makes sense to do so; and**
- **is based on the Task Force principles and recommendations elsewhere in this report.**

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<sup>1</sup> The report of the independent Farming Regulation Task Force. Striking a balance: reducing burdens; increasing responsibility; earning recognition. A report on better regulation in farming and food businesses. May 2011. Available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/05/17/pb13527farming-reg-report/>

## Context

5. Paperwork exists for good reasons: it can be used to record important data, track progress, and ensure accountability. Where farmers and food processors are receiving public money for the activities they carry out or protecting public health, it is important that these are monitored against outcomes. Without a proper audit trail we cannot demonstrate to Parliament and ultimately taxpayers that, according to the rules set down for the various schemes, the correct amount of money is reaching the correct people.
6. The Farming Regulation Task Force report explained that the farming and food processing industry feels mired in paperwork. We know that when time is spent on paperwork, less time is spent on farming, producing food products and managing the land.
7. Paperwork can also be reassuring to farmers and food processors, as it can help demonstrate that they have done the right thing. We want to ensure that paperwork is valued where it contributes to outcomes, and that the right balance is found, keeping important records without being onerous.
8. The Government is committed to reducing burdens and reforming regulation. Rationalising the paperwork and processes surrounding farming and food businesses will contribute to this. But this is not about removing all paperwork from our lives; this plan aims to streamline processes; make paperwork easier; make more use of digital routes; and do things differently where this would make things better.

## Part I – Existing and ongoing work

9. Across Defra and the agencies we have been reducing the burden of paperwork as far as possible. Examples of the activities we have already done, and the work we are currently doing are set out below.

**Table 1: Existing and ongoing work**

<b>Table 1: Existing and ongoing work</b>		
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Status</b>
<p><b>Making paperwork shorter, clearer and easier to understand</b>            We are working to keep any new paperwork, particularly guidance, concise, targeted and actively helpful. This should minimise the time it takes businesses to read, interpret and implement any regulatory or guidance updates.</p>		
Cross Compliance Guidance	We reviewed “The Guide to Cross Compliance in England” for 2011, in partnership with industry, to make it easier to read and understand.	Complete
Pollution inventories	The Environment Agency replaced the 30 page food and drink manufacturing sector guidance on how to complete the annual Pollution Inventory return with a two page note that is more specific to the sector	Complete
<p><b>Taking users’ views on the paperwork we produce</b>            We know that processes and paperwork which work well are designed with the user in mind, and with input from the people who will be working through them. We have therefore set up a number of approaches to ensure we involve farmers and others in the industry when we develop processes and paperwork.</p>		
SPS form and handbook	The RPA set up a Farmer Panel to provide independent views and insight from up to 1000 farmers. The RPA used the Panel to review the draft 2010 Single Payment Scheme Claim Form and Handbook. In response, the form was changed to allow customer details to be manually changed on the form (rather than requiring farmers to telephone the Agency) and subsequent versions of the guidance used more helpful language.	Complete
Cattle passports	We worked in partnership with bovine industry representatives on the new cattle passport, the end of the cattle keepers’ statement and changes to legislation for electronic cattle death reporting. RPA consulted their technical stakeholders and the Farmer Panel to help make sure that the language, content and format were actively helpful for the industry	Complete
Environmental permits	The EA simplified the process of applying for Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR) permits by providing factsheets, templates and examples of what is needed to satisfy permit conditions. These were developed with EA’s EPR intensive pig and poultry industry liaison group.	Complete

### **Moving paperwork online**

Digital technology can drive better services and lower costs. We are committed to delivering services digitally “by default” and encouraging online paperwork. However, we understand that rural businesses are in a range of circumstances with respect to internet access, and we will take that into account in the manner and timescale in which we move to digital services.

Pig movement reporting	We moved pig movement reporting from a paper-based system to electronic in October 2011. This new system saves time as it pre-populates basic information automatically, reducing the number of times pig-keepers have to fill in the same information. It will also save Government time and resources, as the previous system required manual input of 190,000 movements per year in England and Wales, by over 120 local authorities.	Complete
Entry Level Stewardship	We increased use of Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) online. ELS online applications have risen from 692 in 2009/10 to 6784 in 2010/11, delivering approximately £250,000 savings for farmers in reduced time spent on paperwork. We are running targeted workshops and training webinars for farmers and agents, and demonstrating the online system at agricultural shows to encourage this further.	Ongoing
SPS forms	We have increased the use of the online facility for submitting Single Payment Scheme. The online system was used by approximately 13,000 farmers in 2010, and over 27,000 applicants in 2011. The SPS online system means that users can access their data, track claims, check and mend errors and receive an instant on-screen acknowledgement that RPA has received the application. Feedback on this system has been very positive and we are working to further streamline the process and increase use further.	Ongoing
Abstraction licences	EA has introduced an on-line returns system for abstraction licence holders and through the EA web-site or sign-posted via the Businesslink website, farmers can apply on-line for simple waste exemptions.	Complete

## Part II – What we will do

10. The section below sets out specific actions that we will do to further reduce and rationalise paperwork burdens on farming and food processing businesses.

**Table 2: What we will do**

<b>Table 2: What we will do</b>		
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
<b>Making paperwork shorter, clearer and easier to understand</b>		
All Defra guidance	We will <b>review and update the principles and templates we use for producing guidance on regulations in Defra</b> . This review will take into account the recommendations of the Anderson Review. This will include a commitment to new “Principles for Guidance” which will align with the Task Force’s recommended Principles for Paperwork, and will involve engaging with the industry and producing and drafting guidance; and making guidance available online as the default. We will also recommend that guidance should have a “Quick-Start Guide” in response to the Task Force’s recommendations and the Anderson Review. All new guidance should follow the new templates and principles from this point. We will be seeking commitments from policy teams as to when they will be reviewing existing guidance.	Review to take place by Easter 2012
Cross Compliance Guidance	We will <b>review “The Guide to Cross Compliance in England” for 2012</b> , in partnership with industry, to make it easier to read and understand. We will include a “What’s new?” section which will summarise important changes.	For 2012
SPS handbook	The RPA will <b>provide an “update only” Single Payment Scheme information booklet (supplement) to farmers</b> , showing key regulatory changes instead of issuing a comprehensive guidance handbook.	For 2012
Uplands Transitional Payment	We <b>will not revise or re-issue the current Uplands Transitional Payment booklet prior to the scheme ending in 2013</b> .	No revisions for 2011 and 2012
Environmental stewardship	Natural England will <b>revise Environmental Stewardship (ES) handbooks</b> to make the handbooks more customer friendly including simple “How to Apply” guidance. This will include changes from the Making Environmental Stewardship More Effective (MESME) project, considering the “customer journey” through the ES process, and developing sector-specific leaflets and webpages.	Sector specific leaflets and webpages from spring 2012; revised handbooks by October 2012.
<b>Moving paperwork online</b>		

Cross compliance guidance	We will move <b>“The Guide to Cross Compliance in England” online from 2013 onwards</b> to reduce the amount of paperwork sent to farmers. From 2013, the full guidance document will be available online as a default, and that farmers will receive a brief document highlighting changes since last year, and directing farmers to the online edition. This will reduce the number of copies of the whole handbook posted out will reduce from 100,000 to 30,000 by 2015. We <b>will establish an Industry-Government Group to support the process of moving the guidance online</b> , which will advise on roll out of online provision, and what support and intermediary services should be provided, and how.	Guidance online from 2013 onwards. Industry-Government Group to be established in January 2012.
<b>Asking for paperwork in a better way</b> We will aim to reduce the amount of paperwork we ask farmers and food processors for, and we will work to join up better, only ask for information once, and asking for that information in a better way.		
All Defra forms	We will <b>review the principles and templates we use for producing new and revised forms</b> . We will commit to working with farmers and other stakeholders to design forms wherever appropriate, and making forms available online as a default, as well as explaining the rationale for collecting the information we are asking for. All new forms should follow the new templates and principles from this point. We will be seeking commitments from policy teams as to when they will be reviewing existing forms.	Review to take place by Easter 2012
Environmental permitting	The EA will tailor environmental permitting application forms to the agricultural sector; and will <b>revise the forms it uses to provide a “farmer-specific” application form</b> .	Farmer specific application forms to be available in 2012
Regulatory data	The Environment Agency will <b>review the regulatory data it asks for across regimes, sectors and permits</b> . This will aim to deliver benefits for business and Government through simplifying and reducing data requirements, and will specifically <b>review the amount of data it asks for in the food and drink manufacturing industries</b> (alongside some other key sectors).	Benefits delivered across 2012-14, with food and drink manufacturers targeted in 2012-13

## Part III – Next steps

11. We will not stop at the immediate actions set out in Part II; we will keep working to reduce the burden of paperwork. Examples of the long-term work we will do are set out below.

**Table 3: Next steps**

<b>Table 3: Next steps</b>		
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
<b>Principles</b>		
All Defra paperwork	We <b>will adopt the Principles for Paperwork proposed by the Task Force</b> , through the activities in this plan, and further work that will be announced in the final Government Response to the Task Force.	Ongoing
<b>Reviewing this plan</b>		
Reviewing	We <b>will review this plan every 6 months</b> , to ensure that we take every opportunity to reduce the burden of paperwork.	Review every 6 months
<b>Gathering evidence</b>		
We need to understand the scale and specifics of the problems caused by paperwork in more detail to address them in the best way. We will run a number of research and evidence collection projects.		
Information collection	We <b>will run a research project gathering exercise to look at processes, paperwork and data provision from a farmer's perspective</b> . This project will establish an evidence base of what farmers across different sectors are asked to do in order to meet both regulatory and non-regulatory requirements. This project will help us define a clear "baseline" of regulation, so that we can monitor additional burdens and against which we can measure the progress we are making in reducing and rationalising the paperwork burden.	Research project will report by summer 2012
Data sharing	We will <b>pilot increased data sharing between Defra agencies</b> . This will look at barriers to sharing more information between Defra agencies and examine how these can be overcome. If information can be shared between Defra agencies we hope that this will reduce duplication of information requests from businesses.	Research project will report by summer 2012
All Defra advice and incentives	We will <b>review how we use advice and incentives for farmers and land managers</b> , to create a more streamlined approach that is clearer for farmers and land managers and yields better environmental results. (This responds to the commitment made in the Natural Environment White Paper <sup>2</sup> ).	Report on streamlining advice by summer 2012.

<sup>2</sup> The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature. 2011. Available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/>

Guidance	We will <b>review the guidance available to farmers</b> , using a case study mapping exercise focussed on the arable farming sector, to looking at how the range of regulatory guidance can be simplified.	Review completed by April 2012.
<b>Moving paperwork online</b>		
“Digital by default”	The Government is committed to delivering services digitally “by default”, and is developing a single Government website, which will include simplifying guidance and online transactions and providing shared facilities (such as e-forms). The single Government website will be the location for new and improved government forms and guidance on a wide range of farming-related activity.	Long-term
RPA documents	The RPA is <b>considering moving to electronic only format for online customers</b> in the run up to CAP reform. This means that the number of hard copy documents sent to farmers will reduce between 2011 and 2014: the number of SPS and Cross-Compliance documents sent out in hard copy would reduce by 36%; British Cattle Movement Scheme documents will reduce by 37%; and some other documentation, including PIN letter packs (which help give farmers secure access to RPA’s digital services) will reduce by 57%.	Move to electronic format, if confirmed, by 2014
Sheep, goats and deer movements	We are looking at <b>introducing an e-reporting system for sheep, goats and deer</b> , as we did recently for pig keepers. We are currently procuring an industry service supplier who will operate the system.	If confirmed, industry service supplier by autumn 2012, system operational by spring 2013
Export health certification	AHVLA <b>will work towards a single online application to request for multiple border control clearances</b> (e.g. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and Export Health Certificates). The technology behind a system is currently undergoing initial feasibility testing.	Design work finished by end 2011/12 financial year.
Interactive tools	The EA <b>will pilot an interactive “pre-application tool”</b> on their website, allowing customers to tailor advice and guidance to their sector and specific requirements. This pilot is currently running for waste carriers; if it is successful, the tool will be rolled out to the agriculture sector elements of the EA website.	If pilot successful, rolled out by early 2012.
<b>Asking for paperwork in a better way</b>		

All Defra forms	We <b>will consider how to make greater use of pre-populated forms</b> , where these can alleviate burdens. But there are data sharing and technological issues involved in the pre-population of data, and revising IT systems to pre-populate forms could be costly. We want to make sure that any changes have proportionate costs to the benefits they will deliver. We will therefore consider how to use pre-populated forms more once we have completed our research projects and have more information on the burden of paperwork from a farmer's perspective, and a better understanding of where data sharing could improve paperwork processes.	Long-term
All Defra paperwork	<b>We will explain why we need information more clearly</b> when we cannot reduce the paperwork we need from farmers and other businesses.	Ongoing
Food and drink performance reporting	The Environment Agency <b>will review data reporting by food and drink operators</b> . It will working with the trade associations to look for an agreed common approach to performance reporting that reduces the burden of reporting	Ongoing
Customer segmentation	We <b>will look at “customer segmentation” to make sure that we provide the right paperwork to the right people</b> , and do not overload businesses with information that they do not need. The RPA will look at providing more tailored, personalised and concise guidance for farmers. They will divide customers into groups by business characteristics and customer preferences, which will help ensure that only the specific information required by a farmer is presented to them.	Ongoing  RPA guidance review likely to happen from 2013 onwards.

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