

Future funding system requires urgent reforms

I have attended a number of farmer meetings in England and Scotland recently where there has been much discussion about what form future funding will take.

I have consistently emphasised that - irrespective of whether the focus is environmental, agricultural or social - national governments need to be clear about the high level outcomes they are expecting to be delivered from farming going forward



I have also suggested that there needs to be some general principles established to guide the development of future funding frameworks.

For me, these revolve around five key areas.

Firstly, historic levels of payment should not dictate future funding – neither with regard to the overall budget available at national level nor the amount of support received by individual businesses.

Future funding should be dependent on the levels needed to achieve scale of the desired outcomes and the extent to which these are being delivered by individual businesses.

Secondly, those already delivering on the desired outcomes should be recognised and rewarded for doing so. Only rewarding those who need to make a significant change in order to deliver the new outcomes is inherently unfair.

Thirdly, any funding model should be flexible enough to allow for changes going forward. By that I mean reward payments should be capable of increasing for those actively delivering more of the desired outcomes.

By the same token, reward payments should be capable of decreasing if the desired outcomes are not continuing to be delivered. A greater use of regulation is also likely to feature in the future.

Fourthly, careful consideration needs to be given to how national support is best made available to land managers.

I would certainly support a move away from delivering support primarily through annual payments. By this I mean using much more of the national funding pot to support the purchase of new equipment and training in how best to use that.

Such one-off funding will be crucial if we are ensure land managers can either continue to maintain the desired outcomes or transition their businesses towards being able to deliver those outcomes more cost-effectively.

The scale of change needed in farming in the coming years is such that a final general principle should be that change is required as a matter of urgency. Hence, anything that can be done within the next four years to show how such change can best be achieved should be looked at seriously.

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