

AIC Policy Report

July 2024



Working in support of
a modern, sustainable
commercial, agriculture

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Summary

- This report was drafted before the outcome of the General Election, however all latest updates on the new Government, including new Ministers and their priorities, will be detailed on the AIC website and by Member Briefings.
- The announcement of a General Election in May 2024 has taken much of the focus of AIC policy work. In order to prepare for the General Election, AIC has provided a number of materials for Members including a breakdown of the different party manifestos and how they compare in policy areas of interest, a webinar, and materials to share with any prospective parliamentary candidates in Members' constituencies. The focus for AIC after the election will be to ensure meetings are arranged with new Ministers and MPs, as well as new Committee Members and Chairs. A change of Government will also see a likely launch of new consultations to reflect policy priorities.
- The announcement of the General Election has meant that a number of policy issues or expected legislation has been paused. This has meant AIC policy teams have been working to understand the possible outcomes and changes arising from a new Government, or even what a delay will mean. Key policy areas impacted by the Election include due diligence (deforestation (2.1)), gene editing (1.5), National Action Plan (5.2) and CBAM (6.2).

1. Cross Sector Policy

1.1 UK General Election 2024

In May, the Prime Minister called a General Election for 4 July 2024. Although the date took many by surprise, AIC had planned for this possibility by publishing its election manifesto in March 2024, complete with its three key "asks" of the next UK Government. It has also been used as an opportunity to explain who AIC is to all Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) and position the trade association in the wider stakeholder and civil service landscape. AIC sent its manifesto to all PPCs, targeted by AIC region, and the response across all parties and parts of the UK has been very positive, with many requesting a meeting should they be elected as MP. At time of writing the result of the General Election has not been announced, however with the change in parliamentary boundaries, many existing MPs standing down, and polls suggesting a change from 2019, AIC is preparing for a considerable workload throughout the autumn as it engages with new MPs and possibly new Ministers and Select Committees. To ensure Members have been keep informed throughout the Election period, AIC has provided a manifesto summary across all the main parties and their commitments or views on relevant specific issues. [This summary can be found here.](#) In addition, AIC provided Members with a webinar on the election and the likely process to be followed plus key considerations and insight so far from discussions with the main parties.

1.2 European Elections 2024

In June, elections were held to the European Parliament in the European Union, which saw an increase in more nationalist/right wing MEPs was seen with fewer seats for centre-left parties. This does not mean there is growing euroscepticism; pro-EU parties by far make up the biggest groupings and instead the shift to the right mainly mirrors national parties governing in some EU Member States.

AIC Policy leads visited Brussels in June to meet with EU Commission officials, Permanent Representatives of the EU Council's Special Committee on Agriculture, Third Country Missions to the EU, and European farming unions. The overwhelming feedback was that the new Parliament, alongside upcoming Hungarian and Polish Council Presidencies will see the prioritisation of domestic competitiveness in agriculture, food sovereignty, income for farmers with a likely reduced focus on green targets. AIC is regularly discussing with EU associations what this will mean for EU Deforestation, farm to fork, UK-EU relations and gene editing policies.

1.3 EU-UK Trade

This year's fourth Trade Specialised Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures under the UK & EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) will be held later in October 2024. AIC has provided feedback for this Committee, using the experiences of AIC Members on export challenges to the EU, and as part of our membership of the [UK-EU Domestic Advisory Group which has already made constituency for import and export of goods as a priority](#).

1.4 Ongoing Policy Work

Whilst a General Election had been anticipated in 2024, the July date was earlier than expected, reflected in the fact that many areas of policy or legislation have been left incomplete. This means that it will take a new Government to decide how they wish to continue with such legislation – if at all. AIC has compiled all the necessary legislation and consultation/policy work that has been left outstanding and will prioritise these for the next Government in order to provide legislative clarity. Many of these are detailed in the rest of this report, however CBAM, due diligence (deforestation) and gene editing are three clear areas that require immediate attention.

1.5 Precision Breeding Act (Gene Editing)

Following the announcement of a General Election, the anticipated secondary legislation that would have completed the Act's implementation did not go ahead. This means that a new Government has to make a decision as to when (and if) it should implement this final secondary legislation. With the recent proposals on approvals, feed and food law, traceability and public registers already agreed by the FSA, it would be difficult for a future Government to alter the anticipated secondary legislation entirely, though a pause or review is possible. In any case, the General Election will mean that the legislation will be delayed. AIC will keep Members informed once there is political clarity.

1.6 Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) 2023 and the SFI Expanded Offer for 2024

The window for new SFI23 applications closed at midnight on 10 June. In total approximately 22,000 agreements have been issued by the RPA since the SFI23 window opened last summer. Any SFI23 application that had already been started at the time the window closed will need to be submitted within 60 days of the date the application was started. There are up to 6,000 applications that have been started in the RPA system.

Details of the SFI24 Expanded Offer were released on 21 May 2024. Farmers will be able to access options currently available in Countryside Stewardship Mid-Tier, actions from the SFI offer, plus new actions increasing the number available under SFI from 23 to 102.

Guidance around a number of the 23 actions already available in SFI has been strengthened in terms of what to do, where and when, including preventing some actions from being rotational. With the introduction of new actions, there is now also an increased number (10) that are now capped in terms of the area of a farm they can be adopted on.

Applications will open fully later in July 2024, however, to apply early and access the new range of actions sooner, farmers can complete an expression of interest survey on the RPA website. They will then be invited to apply at an appropriate time as part of an early controlled roll-out of the scheme.

1.7 Sustainability Self-Assessment Framework and Introduction to Sustainability for the Agri-Supply Industry training

Work has been undertaken with VBMS to structure the framework into a modular approach alongside making it a Member benefit and some additional communications to Members on the benefit of completing it. There is now a direct link to the sustainability content of the AIC website on the homepage.

1.8 AIC Roadmap for a Sustainable Food Chain, 2024 Update

The roadmap update continues to progress with the main content written but requiring editing to align with an infographic approach. Communications agency RDP is working on design ideas using AIC branding and collectively working on the final content. Summary key messages for Members and stakeholders/government are being prepared.

1.9 Food Data Transparency Partnership (FDTP)

In April the Eco-Working Group (on which AIC is represented) published their report [FDTP: towards consistent, accurate and accessible environmental impact quantification for the agri-food industry - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118444/FDTP_towards_consistent_accurate_and_accessible_environmental_impact_quantification_for_the_agri-food_industry_-_GOV.UK.pdf) covering the priorities for the next 12 months encompassing farm data, food supply chain reporting at company and product level, environmental impact data, data infrastructure and what support is needed in the industry. Monthly meetings are on hold due to the pre-election period, but AIC and Viterra jointly hosted five of the FDTP team members on an educational visit to Teesport to see a feed mill, biofuel refinery and port with positive feedback on the value of the visit in increasing their knowledge of global supply chains.

2. Animal Feed

2.1 UK Forest Risk Commodity Regulation (UKFRC) and EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)

AIC was given indications from Defra that the secondary legislation for UKFRC was to be laid by the end of May. The surprise call for a General Election resulted in a considerable amount of legislation not making it onto the statute book prior to the dissolution of Parliament. There is little reference to UKFRC in party manifestos other than the Conservatives who indicate they would implement the legislation as soon as possible. AIC feel it likely that any new Government would seek to address the issue of deforestation in supply chains, but it remains unclear what priority might be attached to this policy. AIC has fielded questions from Members on the possibility of UKFRC being amended to meet the requirements of EUDR. Given how the primary legislation for UKFRC is set out in the Environment Act we are of the view that this would be very difficult to achieve.

Challenges to the implementation of EUDR on 1 January 2025 continue to be made by international Governments, EU trade associations, EU farmers representatives and even EU Member States representatives in the AGRIFISH Council. To date, the Commission has made no public statement suggesting they are considering a postponement on the implementation date. A recent meeting with the Permanent Representative of Hungary to the EU confirmed that the Hungarian Presidency of the European Council (commencing 1 July) regards EUDR as inconsistent with its aims to deliver greater competitiveness for EU farmers. AIC would summarise that the mood in Brussels suggests a postponement is more likely though stresses that the Commission has given no indication whatsoever that this is being considered.

2.2 Proposal to establish an AIC cross-sector contaminants/undesirable substances group

Following Member requests, AIC has held internal discussions to consider how best to ensure cross sector coordination on identifying the scope of current contaminant data collection activity. There is also a need to understand how this data is being shared within the Membership and to consider how improve Member access to data. Finally, there is a need to identify any gaps in the data being gathered and to discuss measures to help plug the gaps.

The feed sector Legal Affairs and Scientific Committee discussed the principle of establishing such a group and the committee confirmed that there was a definite need for a group addressing the issues identified and asked AIC to feed that viewpoint back to the AIC Board and to the Feed Executive Committee.

2.3 Future Forum careers booklet and call for new Members

AIC Feed Sector's Future Forum has completed and published a careers booklet aimed at attracting new entrants into the feed industry. The intention is for the booklet to equip the next generation with the knowledge and better understanding of what a career in the UK's livestock feed industry looks like and why it is rewarding.

The booklet is available as a hard copy and as a digital download, and offers information on a wide range of roles within the animal feed supply chain, including technical, procurement, sustainability, logistics, IT and engineering. The Future Forum aims to promote the booklet at careers shows and events in the coming months. AIC has also put out a call for Member companies to nominate new Members to the future Forum.

3. Combinable Crops

3.1 Digital Passport (Combinable Crops)

The revised Business Case for a Digital Passport (Combinable Crops) has been published. Following an industry-wide consultation which closed in February 2024, a range of significant changes and clarifications have been added to the Business Case to take account of feedback around data, funding and accessibility.

The AHDB-chaired Digital Passport Leadership Group, supported by the Development and Data Groups, has reviewed industry comments and almost 80 questions submitted during the consultation, amending the Business Case to consider points raised. The revised Business Case and answers to all industry questions, of which a substantial number were submitted by AIC Members, can now be viewed on the AHDB website, along with an industry communication.

While a further industry consultation phase is not planned, AIC made clear to the Leadership Group that time must now be given to allow its Members to review the changed Business Case and supporting information.

3.2 Renewable Red Directive II

AIC has continued to work closely with the other voluntary schemes, industry, and the Government to ensure a more permanent resolution for the UK biofuels industry is found. In May, AIC and the other voluntary schemes wrote to the EU Commission to request an urgent meeting to discuss this matter. It has been requested that representatives from the Commission, Member States, Certification Bodies, EU and non-EU Accreditation Bodies and the Voluntary Schemes are present. Implementation of the major changes to the European Commission's recognition of UK voluntary scheme's accreditation is now expected to be 1 January 2025.

NUTS 2 - It is a requirement of RED II that nations assess the typical emissions from the cultivation step of biofuel supply chains at a regional level. In early May, recalculated NUTS 2 values for UK regional emissions for biofuels cultivation were submitted by the Department for Transport (DfT) to the Commission for approval, and it was made clear that approval was needed as soon as possible. It is understood that this is currently being reviewed by the Commission, along with many other EU Member States. Implementation of the Union Database is due to be 18 November 2024.

3.3 Red Tractor – Entry Level Feed Standard

Over the past year, AIC has worked with Red Tractor on the development of its Entry Level Feed Standard (ELFS), providing constructive feedback on proposals with the support of the Universal Feed Assurance Scheme (UFAS) Working Group. A series of recommendations have been made to Red Tractor on key points where current legal food and feed safety requirements were not met by the draft proposals. These concerns need to be addressed before a positive decision on recognition by AIC's feed trade assurance schemes – including UFAS – could be reached.

Draft ELFS proposals have also been examined and discussed by AIC's Feed Executive Committee and Combinable Crops Committee (formerly Arable Marketing Committee). Working with its Members and scheme Participants, AIC's priority is to ensure that the ELFS does not compromise essential food and feed safety requirements, thereby providing the supply chain with confidence in the proposed new scheme.

3.4 AHDB Levy deduction collection rate

Following AIC's response to AHDB's proposal for amending the rebate that levy-collecting businesses can claim to reflect the administrative costs of collecting the levy, AHDB has granted AIC Members a grace period. This period is to provide a further opportunity for AIC to supply additional information before the AHDB Cereals and Oilseed Sector Council makes a final decision on the new rate and implementation date for any changes in July 2024. AHDB is of the opinion that the costs undertaken by businesses collecting a levy amount to no more than four hours of accountancy time per annum, totalling £140 per year, per business. For this reason, AHDB expects a future levy rebate to be no more than this amount.

4. Seeds

4.1 Seed availability

AIC has resumed early discussions with Defra's Plant Variety and Seeds team (PVS) regarding the availability of winter seed varieties this 2024 autumn. This is following concern among MPs regarding spring seed availability in January. With Member support, clarity was provided to Ministers and the media that the sector would be able to meet the exceptional demand seen this season.

AIC made clear at that time that amending the law was not necessary and such a move would have damaging long-term consequences for farmers and the certified seed sector alike. Again, assurances will be provided by AIC Members to support farmers following a difficult spring drilling campaign due to extensive rainfall and changing farming schemes. AIC is also working in hand with the PVS team in Defra to ensure that the derogation review and process is as pragmatic as possible should it be required this autumn.

4.2 Border Target Operating Model

As of April 2024, businesses are no longer able to submit notifications using the PEACH system, and now must submit their import notifications using the Import of Products, Animals, Food and Feed System (IPAFFS). Importers must be registered with a UK address within IPAFFS to ensure they can submit import pre-notifications.

4.3 Seed treatments

AIC is working with Defra to assist in developing an understanding of the potential impacts from the loss of access to seed treatments in 2027, as well as offering insight into the views of Members in relation to this policy area, as Defra further scope and develop future options.

In relation to treated seeds, AIC is providing Defra with information on which crops and products, in addition to maize, are likely to be most affected by the absence of EU seed imports in 2027 when the statutory instrument that was put in place at the end of last year expires.

This legislation was passed at the end of 2023 and meant that farmers and growers in Great Britain can continue using seeds treated with PPPs authorised for use in the EU up to 1 July 2027, as long as the PPPs are authorised in at least one EU or EEA Member State.

5. Crop Protection and Agronomy

5.1 Promotion of Knowledge Exchange and IPM

The sector has continued with demonstrating the work AIC Members undertake in knowledge exchange and promotion of IPM solutions to farmers and growers. In June, Members hosted five events at their arable trials sites which 39 policy makers from the Chemicals Regulation Division (CRD) attended. Defra and CRD staff are attending a further two trials events in July and a horticulture visit in August. The events have been well received to date.

5.2 National Action Plan for the sustainable Use of Pesticides

The publication of the National Action Plan has been further delayed due to the General Election being called on 4 July. AIC has been advised that it is likely that any new Government may wish to review the plan content before it is published. Alternatively, as it is a framework document with voluntary measures, best practice and legislation delivering NAP aims, it may be one of the earlier documents to be published. AIC Head of Crop Protection & Agronomy Hazel Doonan emphasised on BBC Farming Today the importance of publishing the document as soon as possible to enable the development of the GB pesticide regulatory regime, which AIC is advised will go hand in hand with the NAP. AIC will continue with this message beyond the 2024 General Election.

5.3 Grassland IPM Infographic now available

A Grassland Integrated Pest Management (IPM) infographic has been developed and published by AIC. The aim of the document, which is available as a PDF and in hard copy, is to help policymakers to understand the various measures that grassland farmers can undertake as part of IPM delivery. It will hopefully be a useful aid for growers to understand what measures they are currently doing and what they may wish to do in the future. The document is also available as a PDF in Welsh.

6. Fertilisers

6.1 Regulation

a) A New Fertiliser Regulation

The much-vaunted consultation on a new mineral fertiliser regulation based on a matrix approach like that adopted by the EU has again been delayed, this time owing to the hiatus on regulatory development caused by the suspension of Parliament for the General Election. AIC has a rapid response working group primed to work with Defra officials on a co-design approach for the technical elements when the consultation eventually takes place.

b) REACH

The Government is consulting on changes to reduce costs to businesses moving from the EU's Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) regime to a UK REACH regulatory framework for England, Scotland and Wales. Defra - working with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Environment Agency (EA) - has devised an Alternative Transitional Registration model (ATRM) for UK REACH.

Hazard requirements

A proposal has been made to significantly reduce the hazard information provided in registrations for transitional substances, toward a greater focus on use and exposure information. These revised hazard requirements will apply to all registrations of substances that were on the market before the end of the EU Exit Implementation Period. The full hazard information requirements will continue to apply to registrations of new substances that enter the market after that date.

Use and exposure information

A proposal to enhance what information on "use and exposure" registrants in Great Britain need to provide in registrations - Grandfathered; Downstream User notifications; and New Registrations of Existing Substances.

Chemical Safety Reports (CSRs)

A proposal for reduced hazard requirements in CSRs carried out by all registrants of a transitional substance manufactured or imported in quantities of over 10 tonnes per annum.

Assessment of proposals

A reduced REACH assessment process that recognises products registered under the EU prior to 2020 is welcome. Unfortunately, the devil is in the detail, nothing of which is explained or worked out in the proposals which will be worked up following the consultation. With the Initial registration timetable unaffected by the consultation, this gives industry less than 18 month to implement whatever comes from the consultation. This is likely to be the largest criticism of the whole consultation and proposal.

6.2 Trade and Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

The UK Government is seeking to introduce a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) in 2027 to reduce the risk of "carbon leakage", where production and associated emissions are effectively shifted overseas. UK plans trail 12 months behind the European Union's timetable for similar measures.

In December 2023, HM Treasury and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) announced that goods from certain sectors imported into the UK from any country with a lower or no carbon price will soon have to pay a levy. Having regard to the current Carbon Price in the UK the Levy with no free allowances works out at approximately £10 CBAM levy per £10 of Carbon. This equates to circa £33-£36 on the current price of a tonne of Nitrogen fertiliser dependent on its type and origin.

7. AIC Scotland

7.1 Agricultural Policy

The Agriculture & Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill has passed its final stage in the parliamentary process and has now become law. The nature of the legislation as a framework bill means that the next step in the process i.e. secondary legislation will be key in terms of the detailed support mechanisms and payment rates etc. Of

equal importance will be the UK agricultural budget, which is reserved to HM Treasury, clarity on a multi-annual financial settlement is required both at a Scottish Government and farmgate level.

AIC along with key stakeholders have been working closely with Scottish Government officials on co-design of key aspects of the future support framework to ensure Members interests are protected. This has included calling for government recognition of FAR, FACTS and BASIS qualified advisers within the requirements of the whole farm plan. Work continues on other aspects of the framework including the code of practice for sustainable and regenerative agriculture, where we are working with stakeholders to ensure that this recognises the wide range of farming practices which contribute to regenerative agriculture.

7.2 Net Zero

AIC met with Scottish officials to discuss the options available to farmers in terms of reducing emissions from cereals production. This will help to inform ongoing support work whilst also informing the update to the climate change plan. AIC highlighted the key measures which will contribute to this outcome covering the role of advice, use of precision technology including the need for access to precision breeding and key PPPs including glyphosate for reduced tillage systems.

7.3 Political Engagement

AIC along with fellow members of FAST (Food & Agriculture Stakeholder Group) hosted a parliamentary reception on 22 May 2024. Bringing together the full range of rural stakeholders with MSP's and government ministers. A number of AIC Member companies were in attendance. The event was hosted by Elena Whitham MSP and provided an opportunity to highlight the economic importance of agriculture and the wider agri-food supply chain to the economy. The event culminated in MSPs from across the political spectrum signing our pledge card which committed parliamentarians to supporting a multi-annual agriculture funding budget and to promote the career opportunities across agri-business supply chains, amongst other pledges.

The Royal Highland Show provided an excellent opportunity to meet with a range of key politicians, AIC had an introductory meeting with the recently appointed Minister for Agriculture (Jim Fairlie), key issues discussed included vDCF soya and implications of both UK and EU regulations for Scottish agriculture, the need for clarity on detail of proposed tier 2 support options to enable AIC Members to plan ahead i.e. for seed mixtures/feed additives etc. The Minister was also presented with a copy of the AIC-commissioned report "Powering Productivity for Sustainable UK Food Security" as well as the AIC Scotland manifesto for the 2024 General Election.

8. AIC Cymru

8.1 Development of AIC Cymru

The latest AIC Cymru Committee meeting on June 11 completed the slight refresh of the Committee with Gary Davies and Caradog Hughes joining to replace Eric Thomas who has now retired. The next development will be a new Chair as of early 2025 with Gareth Davies having then completed his two-year tenure.

8.2 Wales Future Policy

Notable development was the announcement in May from the new Rural Affairs and Climate Minister Huw Irranca-Davies that the Sustainable Farming Scheme introduction would be pushed back to early 2026 rather than 2025. This is seen as a pragmatic and sensible decision on the back of the significant backlash to what is deemed to be an unworkable SFS in its present form.

AIC Cymru and farming unions welcomed this move as well as the Cabinet Secretary announcing a smaller Roundtable stakeholder group, 18 from the previous 35, to advise and consult on the policy evolution. The 10% tree cover, and 10% biodiversity remain the contentious issues regarding Universal Actions of the policy. Given the delay BPS payments in Wales are expected to remain at 100% payout until now 2026. Depending naturally on budget constraints. No announcement of this has yet been made. Welsh Government are expected to communicate their response to the earlier SFS consultation round prior to the Royal Welsh Show in July. Welsh Government confirms there were over 12,000 submitted responses to the consultation.

8.3 Election manifesto

An AIC Cymru version of the General Election manifesto has been generated and will be used to help inform lobbying activity, especially with future events such as the Royal Welsh Show. The AIC Cymru manifesto has been made available in English and Welsh. Our AIC Cymru informal drinks event planned for the first day of the Royal Welsh Show will also provide an opportunity to potentially interact with MPs and Members of the Senedd after the General Election.

9. Northern Ireland

9.1 Ammonia

The DAERA Minister, Andrew Muir, is planning to meet industry delegates and other stakeholders to share his vision on what he wants to see as a route to bringing ammonia emissions under control.

9.2 Carbon Farming Partnership

The Carbon Calculator for carbon footprinting is out to tender with responses expected soon. This project is very far behind schedule due to the procurement requirements DAERA must follow.

9.3 Phosphorus

The Northern Ireland Grain Trade Association (NIGTA) is liaising with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and DAERA regarding phosphorous levels in feed. Work has been done by researchers at Hillsborough to establish the lower limits in feed, consistent with health requirements.

9.4 EU Deforestation Regulation and UK Due Diligence legislation

There continues to be no clarity as to which scheme NI will have to abide by. Or who the competent authority will be in Northern Ireland. NIGTA wrote to the outgoing Secretary of State, Steve Barclay to seek clarity but did not receive a response. Importers are anxious due to uncertainties around certification and what this means for 2025 product. AIC and NIGTA will press the position of Northern Ireland with respect to EUDR as a matter of urgency when the new Government is established in Westminster.

9.5 Dairy Demonstrator

A contract has not been awarded yet – the Programme was due to start on 15 March and set to run for 18 months. AFBI remains hopeful that its tender is successful. It is anticipated that it will be awarded in the coming weeks.

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