



NEWS RELEASE

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Scottish sheep producers call on government to come clean

The National Sheep Association Scotland (NSA Scotland) and The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) have joined their voices in calling on the UK Government to give more clarity to the Scottish sheep industry in the event of failure to reach an agreement with Europe on trading terms.

"The tups are going out", said Jen Craig, NSA Scotland's chair, "and there is still no plan being put forward by the UK Government on what will be done to support sheep producers should there be no deal, or an inadequate deal, struck with Europe." Around 90% of the UK's lamb goes to Europe. Referring to comments on the Andrew Marr show, given by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, George Eustice, she added, "For a Government minister to suggest on national television that our mixed farmers could diversify into beef in the event of the lamb price crashing is, quite frankly, a laughable response."

"We are facing up to 50% tariffs on lamb going to Europe," added Yvonne White, chair of SCF, "which could see the market collapse. Having at first denied this, Mr Eustice then admitted that prices for UK lamb would go up in Europe and therefore demand would drop. There have been discussions about introducing a prime lamb uplift scheme, but it has only been talk. We need to see clarity on this – a tangible plan. The UK government is dragging its heels, not getting to a deal of any description, not giving the four nations a steer and not putting contingencies in place. We appreciate that negotiations are on-going, but it is time for the UK Government to stand up and show support to the sheep sector. To prevaricate at such a crucial time is insulting and irresponsible."

Ms Craig added, "The industry has been calling for support packages to be put in place for compensation for the sheep sector, in the event of a no-deal. However, there continues to be a complete lack of clarity and guidance for our industry to plan for the next few months. If the UK Government cannot reach a deal with the EU, and if Mr Eustice believes we will be unaffected, then I see absolutely no reason for the UK Government not to have a compensation scheme ready and waiting. Not only would this allow sheep farmers to plan ahead and know there will be support available in the event of a no deal, it would also reassure them that the Government is indeed taking the threat to their businesses and livelihoods seriously."

Ms White concluded, "The sheep trade is central to rural Scotland's wellbeing, supporting many thousands of farming and crofting families. It makes a huge contribution to sustainable food production, land management and population retention. Brexit was instigated in June 2016, nearly four and half years ago, and there is merely six weeks left before a completely new trading regime with Europe commences. It is long past time for the UK government to show some initiative - and its backing to this vital industry."

END

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