

UK Agriculture Bill

Explanatory Notes on Scottish Government Amendments

Funding Guarantees

There is currently no provision in the bill, as drafted at introduction, to ensure that after exiting the EU, at least the current levels of EU-funded CAP support are maintained.

In the course of the EU referendum campaign, those who campaigned to leave made promises that, after exiting the EU, any lost rural EU funding would be 'at least replaced'. Since the EU referendum, the UK Government has given a number of assurances about post-exit rural funding, but these do not go as far as guaranteeing the full replacement of all lost EU rural funding.

The Scottish Government considers that those promises should be adopted as UK Government policy, and the proposed amendment would give those promises a statutory underpinning. That is of course without prejudice to any future UK-wide review of agricultural support though, in light of the proposed amendment, that should not result in any diminution of support below current funding levels.

Standards to which imported agricultural and food products must be produced

There is currently no provision in the bill, as drafted at introduction, to ensure that the standards to which imported agricultural and food products must be produced will be maintained after exiting the EU. At least maintaining the current EU standards and regulations for imports is a clear priority for the Scottish Government, and carries cross-party, as well as cross Administration, support, as evidenced during the debate on the 2nd reading of the Bill when many MPs from across the political spectrum raised this issue.

The tariffs included in the current EU common commercial policy in relation to such imports mean that EU farmers and food producers are protected against competition from third country producers who may be able to produce at a lower price, because their costs of production are lower than in the EU as a result of not having to observe such strict regulatory standards.

The UK Government have indicated that they will seek to take a free-trade approach to future international trade policy, however such trade agreements typically include the reduction or removal of tariffs, in accordance with the Free Trade Area provisions of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT Article XXIV and especially XXIV(8)(b)).

While the UK Government has, at different times, given some verbal assurances that they will not permit UK producers to be undercut as a result of these future trade deals, at other times, a different message has been given. The proposed amendment would provide the clarity and certainty that the public and consumers in particular deserve by creating a statutory footing for this.