

# PRESS RELEASE

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## NEW CLEAN AIR STRATEGY POSES SIGNIFICANT HEADWINDS FOR FARMERS



Farmers across England have had first sight of the new 109-page strategy paper released by DEFRA intended to crack down on ammonia emissions that are believed to damage to both the environment and public health.

UK agriculture is accountable for more than three quarters of these ammonia emissions, with spread fertiliser and high-protein feeds both contributing factors.

Farming minister George Eustice comments that as “custodians of the land” farmers have a moral duty to change damaging farming practices. The Government has acknowledged the untimely financial burdens that these changes put on farmers and has offered support through grants and monetary rewards for carrying out the works and applying improved methods.

Areas that the Government has in the cross hairs include:

- new rules on the spreading equipment for slurry and digestate (waste material from anaerobic digester power plants) by 2025;
- action to reduce emissions of urea-based fertilisers;
- stricter design standards in the construction of new “intensive” poultry, pig, beef, and dairy housing;
- tighter time periods to incorporate spread solid manure and digestate;
- a requirement to cover all slurry and digestate stores by 2027, if not sooner.

Many lobbyists believe that in light of reduced subsidy payments in the coming years and the struggles that may be faced from potential tariff barriers, the economic viability of many farming operations will be brought into question following these changes.

Whilst the statistics look stark and changes are needed, the timing and delivery of these new requirements must be dealt with caution in order to mitigate further disruption to an already fragile industry.

It may be beneficial, and in order to pre-empt conditions, to utilise current grants and funding for the improved efficiency of applications for fertilisers, slurry, and digestate such as GPS-based variable rate software systems. Further soil mapping and new management techniques could also be brought into play.

Livestock farmers should also consider future-proofing any housing and storage requirements for their livestock enterprises. This should be considered now, obtaining the benefits of any current grants rather than waiting.



As the UK leaves the European Union (assuming, at time of writing, that Parliament does not block the process) and looks to set out its stall to global markets it is important to avoid putting UK farmers at a competitive disadvantage derived from unnecessary costs and legislative restrictions.

Notably, the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF) believes that the small dairy farm will be worst hit and may not be able cope with the new regulatory changes. With dairy cattle producing just under one third of all ammonia emissions changes were needed but the strategy's requirements have been deemed "unrealistic".

Before any farmers can reasonably form an action plan, the Government needs to clarify details on how both increased costs will be compensated and support for farmers will be managed in the future to ensure the continuation of a largely besieged, but resilient, agricultural industry.

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