

International Sheepmeat Forum

I am very grateful for the opportunity to present to this international forum on this extremely important and complex issue.

The red meat sector like any other industry, has to – and does take its environmental responsibilities seriously.

Arguably the biggest environmental issue facing the sector is Carbon and Climate Change.

It is a global issue that requires global solutions. There are challenges as the Commissioner suggests, but there are strengths and opportunities too.

So lets start off with these as I see it.

The relationship between humans and livestock predates CAP, global conflicts, recorded human history - and even banking crises! It is culturally, economically and socially very important. There are even environmental benefits too.

Red meat is an important and valued component of the human diet. Red meat, as part of a balanced diet, is a valuable source of iron and zinc, trace elements, a range of vitamins and high quality protein.

For much of Europe and especially those of us from the Northern and Western Parts of the EU, the most sustainable crop is grass. Like other parts of the world - including where Bruce is from, we are fortunate to be able to grow efficient crops of lush grass. It grows where it's a good place to grow grass.

In the UK around, 60% of the land area is grass. This reflects the country's climate and geography, and ruminant livestock are one of the most effective means of converting grass into nutritional human foods, namely meat and milk.

All over the world, ruminants make a vital contribution to human nutrition and livelihood by converting pasture, which cannot be used for other purposes, into high quality human food.

With a rising world population and anticipated doubling in world food demands by 2050 - it is clear we don't have the surplus capacity today.

It is inconceivable that Governments the world over would support a reduction in food production capacity, particularly livestock from land which would otherwise produce no food.

Grazing sheep support carbon sinks and grazing habits support plant and wildlife biodiversity. This grazing also supports a dynamic landscape enjoyed by millions.

Production of sheepmeat supports directly and indirectly rural economies, infrastructure and the more difficult to measure wider public benefits , such as recreation and heritage.

Consumers are also pretty resilient and despite negative environmental publicity, changes to consumption are believed to be down to other factors. For now.

However, all these positives do not mean we can justify doing nothing.

We cannot avoid that all food production has an impact on the environment. The time has passed to debate the science, we do so at the risk of sleepwalking into an industry wide catastrophe.

The negative environmental impacts of sheepmeat production can be grouped into two categories:

Firstly, there is the contribution to global warming through the generation of green house gases, either directly through energy use in production of feed & fertiliser; or indirectly through methane emissions from livestock themselves.

Despite the popular myth, the majority of which comes from the front end!

Methane is the second most significant GHG in the UK. It has a Global Warming Potential 21 times that of carbon dioxide. One-third of total UK

methane emissions are derived from agriculture and the most significant source is the production of methane from fermentation in the rumen.

Methane emissions have decreased by 52% since 1990 in the UK, through a combination of reduced livestock numbers and more efficient feeding. Enteric fermentation is the main agricultural source of methane, with emissions from slurry stores and livestock manure handling and spreading accounting for most of the remaining emissions.

Nitrous oxide has a Potential about 300 times that of carbon dioxide. Approximately 68% of UK emissions of nitrous oxide are attributed to agricultural sources. However, variations in soils, fertilizer management, manure inputs and productivity mean there is considerable uncertainty regarding the precise levels. Estimates vary substantially. Further research is required to develop better estimates than those currently employed.

Secondly there are those impacts which could be classed as wider issues such as water footprinting, pollution and resource inputs such as feed.

About a year ago a small group of food and farming organisations came together to tackle these difficult issues, and answer the critics of livestock & meat production.

After much discussion, we decided together as a supply chain to develop a beef and sheep roadmap. The aims of the roadmap were to quantify and characterise our current environmental “balance sheet” and to identify the scope and opportunities for improvement in the future.

For the last year, we have been working on this and we hope to be in a position to publish before Christmas. However, it will not have all the solutions. It is the start of a journey and we expect it to evolve year-on year as our knowledge expands and the priorities change.

I believe we are all in this together which is why we are keen to work with the whole supply chain, including our global partners.

So what is a roadmap? A roadmap describes a plan towards a goal. It identifies the evidence, the issues, the steps and the time and resources needed to complete the journey.

It also identifies opportunities to progress a method of assessing performance and progress, and a means of adjusting the plan as conditions or knowledge change.

EBLEX has undertaken to develop and lead the roadmap in the light of the following factors:

Measures to mitigate global warming is a reality to the UK industry. In the UK the Climate Change Act sets carbon reduction targets, covering all greenhouse gases that will require all sectors of the UK economy to reduce emissions.

The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan sets out a comprehensive plan for achieving the interim target for reducing emissions by 34% on 1990 levels

by 2020.

The Plan sets out targets for different sectors of the economy, including agriculture, and an outline of possible actions. The Plan also makes it clear that the Government expects a proactive response from the food and farming industry, and that it will review the voluntary actions taken by the industry in 2012 to decide whether further intervention is necessary.

Interventions might include regulation and other economic, voluntary and advisory policies.

It is therefore vital that the beef and sheep industry recognises its responsibilities, and identifies the steps it can take itself rather than having inappropriate measures imposed on it.

While there is growing public awareness of the negative impacts of ruminants on the environment, the positive aspects of ruminant livestock production are not always recognised publicly.

The complexity of the issues is often ignored in some quarters and has led critics of the meat and livestock industry and those seeking quick fixes to environmental concerns to attack production, including suggestions that stopping meat eating would 'save the planet'.

It is important that industry counters such simplistic approaches through balanced and informed debate about these complex technical and policy issues. At the same time, the industry's own long term interests lie in

tackling the adaptation and mitigation challenges - and opportunities - of climate change.

This roadmap is the articulation of the industry's long term commitment to continuous environmental improvement.

It is vital however that in carrying out the work we have been doing we also recognise that the industry has not been standing still.

The development of our roadmap in no way implies that the industry has only now recognised the environmental issues and challenges.

Many businesses already have processes in place to reduce their demand on limited resources and lower their impact on the environment. In many cases this goes hand in hand with profitability.

The meat and livestock industry has already responded to past and current environmental schemes, including ELS and HLS and other countryside stewardship schemes, NVZs and IPPC. These are not included in the substance of the roadmap, but we should note that the industry has adapted to these schemes.

Other programmes involve producers in a wide range of local or private initiative schemes designed to preserve bird numbers by habitat management or create havens for wild flowers. Such measures sit

alongside the continuing pressures to maintain competitiveness and enhance the viability of the business.

The livestock industry is on the whole becoming steadily more efficient and the GHGs produced per kg of meat are, and will continue, to decline.

Progress in animal breeding and feed management have contributed to the 15% reduction in UK methane emissions by agriculture since 1990.

Technological development will continue and this will include plant and animal breeding as well as production systems. Recent examples in plant breeding include the development of high sugar ryegrass varieties, which can improve the nutritional value of grass, and grass and clover varieties that have been developed to grow more effectively together.

Other supply chain initiatives look beyond the farm gate. We have the emergence of ISO accreditation of Environmental management systems, more investment to reduce energy inputs for refrigeration, energy recovery initiatives and waste reduction programmes.

Other steps, particularly the more efficient use of limited resources have taken place. Examples include: additional metering of energy and water; recycling of water and the collection of rainwater; and, the recycling of waste materials to generate energy.

Improving the efficiency in the whole supply chain must be the right approach, and can be perfectly consistent with improving both

environmental performance and economic competitiveness.

Given that much of the world's food supply is internationally traded it is important to consider our livestock production on a CO₂ equivalent efficiency basis rather than on a total production footprint. This is something that the previous speaker also touched on.

I'd like to sum this point up by saying it makes sense to keep sheep where the grass grows.

In drawing to a close, we have found there are opportunities for reducing the emissions of GHGs from sheep production and there are wider issues we need to consider on our journey. However, none of us in this room can go it alone and we must work together towards a global goal.

Improving the technical performance of our management systems by applying existing knowledge could make further contributions to reducing GHG emissions. The supply chain can work together by pooling resources to improve knowledge and environmental performance.

But there will be limits, as the previous speaker rightly identifies.

Sustainability is a broader church – it is wider than Environment and there will be limits to the pace and extent to which the production impact can be reduced by Industry alone.

I believe it is the role of Government in partnership with industry to balance the sustainability challenges against the wider benefits I have described here. I hope the roadmap model will provide a positive contribution to the debate.

The Commissioner touched on some of the levers at a European level to influence the industry. I personally believe that there is a need for smarter support for the sheepmeat industry. This smarter policy should help the sector deliver on all three pillars of sustainability – and

1. provide a contribution to international food security
2. minimise environmental impacts and maximise benefits
3. contribute to rural and global economic stability

Thank you.