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Call for views on levy expenditure

Technical
AHDB review

As Brexit approaches, farmers have been asked to give their views on how the AHDB levy is spent. CPM draws some opinion.

By Tom Allen-Stevens

If there's something you like about AHDB, or something you'd like to change, now's your chance to have your say. Levy payers are being asked for their views during a 10-week exercise that ends on 9 Nov.

As a UK statutory levy board, funded to the tune of £60M by farmers, growers and others in the supply chain, AHDB is overseen by the Government to ensure that the sectors it covers are as competitive as possible. Farming minister George Eustice is keen that its purpose and priorities are reviewed, looking at its strengths and where improvements need to be made.

“At a time when we're designing a new agriculture policy from first principles, now is also a good time to review the role and function of this agricultural and horticultural levy body. This request for views is an opportunity for levy payers to have their say about the role and function of the various components of

AHDB in the future.”

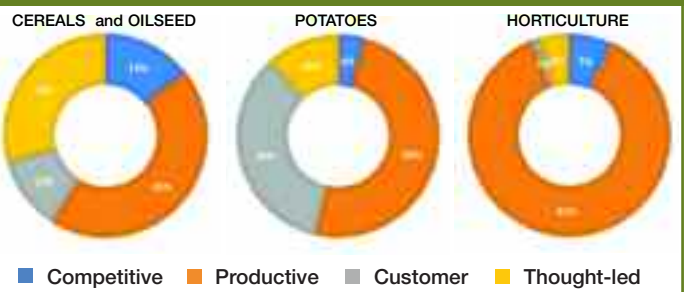
AHDB's CEO Jane King says she wants the feedback to help UK farmers and growers compete in a global marketplace as the country prepares to leave the EU. “We'd encourage views to shape where we can have the biggest impact and drive value as an independent, evidence-based organisation, which carries out marketing at home and abroad, while sharing best practice and innovation with farmers, growers and the wider industry, at this crucial time,” she says.

Created in 2008, the board serves six agricultural and horticultural sectors, with only Cereals and Oilseeds serving the whole of the UK — Potatoes and Horticulture cover Great Britain only. Cereal and oilseed growers also pay among the lowest average levy, with potato and horticulture growers paying considerably more.

Levy payers are asked to give views on how they pay the levy — it's currently statutory, with the grower paying 46p per tonne (about 0.2%) for every tonne of cereals that passes over the weighbridge at the point of supply, for example. One of the options in the on-line questionnaire is to make the levy voluntary.

“The Cereals sector is generally doing a pretty good job,” thinks NFU Combinable Crops Board chairman Tom Bradshaw. “There are areas it

How the AHDB levy's spent across arable sectors



Source: AHDB

AHDB has four priority areas:

1. Inspiring British agriculture and horticulture to be more competitive and resilient.

This covers broadening the benchmarking of performance to inform how UK businesses measure up against the best internationally, and maintaining crop protection to underpin competitiveness. Examples include the whole farm benchmarking service Farmbench (see article on p27) and Extensions of Authorisations for Minor Uses (EAMUs).

2. Accelerating innovation and productivity growth through co-ordinated R&D and knowledge exchange.

This makes up by far the largest portion of arable budgets and is geared towards delivering scientifically robust and commercially useful outcomes for levy payers. The single biggest element of this in Cereals and Oilseeds is the Recommended Lists.

Knowledge exchange, and in particular the Monitor and Strategic farm network, is where an increasing portion of the budget is being directed.

3. Helping industry understand and deliver what consumers will trust and buy.

Although this takes up the lion's share of beef, lamb and pork levies, for the arable sectors comparatively little is spent here. It includes work on exports, such as bread-baking workshops and seed-potato campaigns, as well as consumer-facing TV ads and marketing campaigns.

4. Delivering thought leadership and horizon scanning.

This occupies a relatively significant part of the Cereals and Oilseeds levy, mainly due to market information and supply chain transparency work. This area also includes the Horizon publications and online tools.

could do better, such as the speed of delivering harvest results from the RL trials — we need that information to make informed seed choices.

“But this isn’t about having a gripe – it’s about positive engagement and we should be challenging AHDB to improve things. It’s also important that as many growers as possible take this opportunity, as it’ll have a significant bearing on how the industry fares post Brexit.”

One area Tom believes the sector does particular well is the Monitor farm activity. “This area

has really come on and it’s incredibly beneficial — I’d strongly recommend all growers get involved. It’s a great example of true knowledge exchange and good use of research — rather than sitting on a shelf at Stoneleigh Park, it comes out onto farms to be shaped and put into practice by growers, where it belongs. It shines as an example to the industry demonstrating how knowledge exchange works in practice and something the AHDB can learn from.”

One area of improvement is in integrated pest management,

he believes. “As a sector, we’re very exposed to the loss of neonicotinoids, glyphosate and other active ingredients because we haven’t done enough to research non-chemical alternatives. We also need a good scientific base to ensure we have a strong independent voice in this area as we face regulatory challenges.”

Suffolk grower and member of the NFU Organic Forum John Pawsey believes the online webinars are a particularly good use of levy funds. “Many of them are really informative, especially the ones that include real farmer engagement — it’s a great way to get easy access to quality, practical information.

“My frustration is with the RL — there needs to be more information that’s not related to inputs, and less emphasis on yield. This wouldn’t just be of benefit to organic growers. All progressive growers understand the value of tillering, rooting and crop architecture. If varieties were scored on these criteria, it would drive breeders towards real improvements and diversity



Tom Bradshaw would like to see more made of the Monitor farm network.

in the available gene pool.”

As a mixed farmer, John feels Cereals could also learn from Beef and Lamb. “Some of the information available on sheep is absolutely fantastic, and has been invaluable as we’ve introduced the flock into the business. It’s delivered in a way that allows you to set ambitious but achievable targets, with guidance on practice that’ll get you there.”

The online survey is hosted on the Defra website <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/farming/viws-on-ahdb> ■

AHDB levy income

	2017/18 levy income (million)	Estimated no of levy payers	Average contribution per levy payer
Beef and lamb in England	£16.7	85,000	£200
Cereals and oilseeds in the UK	£12.7	61,600	£210
Pork in England	£9.2	21,600	£420
Dairy in GB	£7.7	11,700	£660
Potatoes in GB	£6.1	2400	£2500
Horticulture in GB	£7.9	1300	£5940

Source: Defra

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Crop protection conference joins with congress



Simon Kightley will reveal the geographical spread and intensity of cabbage stem flea beetle infestations and explore strategies for improving crop establishment.

The Crop Protection in Southern Britain conference takes place this year in Brighton on 12-13 Nov, and has a focus on dissemination to advisers and practitioners. What’s more, for the first time it runs alongside the BCPC Congress (13-14 Nov), so anyone with an interest crop

protection, and looking to find out how the UK Agriculture Bill, the threat of glyphosate withdrawal and Brexit will play out will likely find registering for both well worthwhile.

Papers range in content from those with a high biological science focus, to those that report new options for chemical or non-chemical control approaches to weed, pest and disease management in crops. Highlights of a packed programme include:

Focusing on fungicides — an insight into what’s set to come to commercial crops over the next 18 months, and control of ramularia in barley. Looking below ground, papers will also explore clubroot and Rhizoctonia solani.

Grappling with grassweeds — the conference has a tradition of breaking new ground on blackgrass control. This year, papers will look at the impact of stubble cultivations and changes in blackgrass populations. The presence and distribution of brome is featured.

Post-neonic pest control — arguably one of the greatest challenges facing oilseed rape growers, with resistance and non-chemical

control methods high on the agenda. Implications for non-flowering crops are also explored.

Non-chemical crop protection — Integrated pest management takes centre stage, with what’s set to be a fascinating insight into allelopathy and the competitive ability of hybrid barley. There’s also a paper on the latest findings on verticillium wilt.

The AAB conference, sponsored by Adama, will have four sessions on Mon 12 Nov at the Mercure Brighton Seafront hotel, and then share two plenary sessions with the BCPC Congress on the morning of Tues 13 Nov at the nearby Brighton Hilton Metropole hotel. The AAB conference dinner takes place on Mon with a complimentary pre-drinks reception.

www.aab.org.uk/conferences

