

Where Am I? (Sheep Farmer)

What I do

I am a sheep farmer specialising in breeding and selling lambs. I also buy lambs from local farms and markets, consolidating them into batches with my own lambs and arranging transport for the export to external markets. I export approximately 400 lambs every 2 days (avg. of 400 lambs per vehicle).

How I do it

In order for me to buy the lambs from local farms, I require proof of their identity, ownership and health status. Although they do not need to be RFID tagged at birth, lambs will be tagged and registered on the government database prior to being sold, or moved to a new holding or prior to slaughter.

To ensure the identity of lambs I purchase are valid and they are approved for transport, each lamb is tagged and recorded in a government database. The owning farmer records the tag numbers and year of birth in the government holding register within 7 days of tagging or, in the case of animals first tagged at the time of movement. The owning farmer must notify the government system within 7 days of any movement from their home field. A medical check is required from the vet if the new owner is using the animal for breeding, if so, this is done before the lamb leaves.

The lambs are kept in batches whilst the sale and transport to me is confirmed. Once the purchased lambs are transported to my farm, I scan the tags and record the transfer of ownership to myself on the government database. Each lamb undergoes an ID check (their tag number and information listed against it), history of disease checked, and my ownership is confirmed on the government database. The lambs are then batched and kept together in holding pens.

I can now prepare to export and sell all my lambs to the buyer. I notify the government system of my intention to move the lambs listing their IDs; the government system will either approve or reject this movement for export. If approved, I arrange for a vet to perform a physical check on every lamb at my farm. If even one lamb has risk or history of disease, then my whole flock cannot move. If the vet provides the all clear, the batch is released and the VET provides a licence to export. I can now update the government database with confirmation of the movement. (Note, my farm can also be physically audited by government official at any time).

Transport for the lambs is now arranged with a licenced transporter. Only licensed and approved transport firms can be used as listed on the government database. We confirm the time of collection, together with the route and duration of their journey (additional stops may be required if over 8 hours), and I update all this information on government system.

When the transporter arrives at my farm to collect the lambs, I provide a list of IDs and the corresponding vet certificate proving the flock is healthy. Upon arrival at the border, or sea port, the transporter stops at a specified inspection point (BIP) where another vet check is performed on the

lambs, and all documents and IDs are verified. Once cleared, the transporter is able to continue to cross the border or embark on the ferry.

The Answer

I am a sheep farmer, breeding and exporting lambs in Armagh in Northern Ireland!

Beyond the EU Exit

When the UK exits the EU customs union, if an all-island SPS zone is maintained for NI and ROI, today's policies and process as, described above, will be maintained and continue to protect the integrity of the livestock supply chain. Farmers will of course, in addition to today's processes, be required to submit a customs declarations for import and export of livestock.

Inspection of North/South and West/East livestock trade can continue to be performed at dispatch and arrival points, as they are today, avoiding any contentious requirement for the introduction of a border inspection post. More advanced vehicle tracking and 'smart lock' technology can provide assurance that vehicle journeys have not deviated from agreed routes, and livestock have not left or entered the vehicle during their transportation.

The Withdrawal Agreement of 25th November 2018¹ provided assurance to avoid a hard border between North and South including no physical infrastructure or related checks². This statement must be amended to clarify existing checks, and the ability to perform in-market checks and audits, may continue in order to maintain the integrity of the supply chain.

There is an opportunity to use technology to optimise many of the procedures livestock farmers are currently mandated to perform. These improvements will provide significant savings in time and effort for farmers and transporters of livestock, as well as relevant government agencies, and help reduce the impact of new procedures such as customs declarations;

- The use of mobile technology will allow farmers to perform many of their administration tasks 'in the field', freeing up time currently spend in the back office, and allowing them to spend more time attending to their livestock;
- Digitising today's physical documents will reduce time and cost by removing the need to print and manually handle documents such as Veterinary certificates, transport sheets and livestock medical records;
- Digitisation paves the way to efficiently exchange data with government agencies where processing and checking can be automated, driving operational efficiency and enabling improved risk assessment capabilities;

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/withdrawal-agreement-and-political-declaration>

² Withdrawal Agreement, Page 303 – "RECALLING the commitment of the United Kingdom to protect North-South cooperation and its guarantee of avoiding a hard border, including any physical infrastructure or related checks and controls, and bearing in mind that any future arrangements must be compatible with these overarching requirements,"

- Strengthened 'identity' management using DNA testing, location verification (association livestock with the farm holding) and other security mechanisms, all stored electronically on secure ear tags, will significantly reduce the potential for fraud, protecting legitimate farmers and their markets.