13 October 2015

Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Rob

BASIC PAYMENT TIMETABLE

I write to express severe concerns about the Scottish Government's ability to deliver CAP basic payments in December 2015.

NFU Scotland appreciates the work the Committee has undertaken on this area and recognises the concerns raised in the Committee’s letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment dated 3 June 2015, with regard to the potential for delays in payments as a result of problems with the online Rural Payments and Services service.

Whilst the Cabinet Secretary has sought to allay fears that the payment schedule will slip, NFU Scotland has already noted that the government’s message has shifted from payments being delivered in ‘early December’ to ‘late December’, and is now convinced that these payments will not be made until 2016.
NFU Scotland is aware that the verification process for each claim is underway, but far from complete. Whilst the Scottish Government can make payments before completing all inspections, it cannot make payments in advance of completing all verification checks without accepting an element of risk. The effort and determination of Scottish Government staff must be recognised, but without the ability to validate claims, it is surely an insurmountable task for these payments to be delivered to the traditional timescale as is anticipated by many farmers.

NFU Scotland wishes to emphasise the importance of the Scottish Government providing a timeframe, as the lack of information is not only hindering our members from planning their businesses but will also have serious implications for downstream ancillary industries that depend upon farmers paying bills on time. I am positive that the Committee will recognise the knock-on impact this could have in the longer term for rural economies, employment and confidence within the industry. Of course, it is also essential that farmers receive clarity on what the value of their claims will be, so they can effectively plan for any cuts that will have to be made in the coming year.

Due to the critical nature of these concerns, NFU Scotland therefore asks whether the Committee might consider holding an extraordinary session in which to question the Cabinet Secretary on the anticipated timeline for payment.

I do hope the Committee will seriously consider this request, and as ever NFU Scotland would be more than happy to meet or give evidence to the Committee on this vital topic.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Allan Bowie
President, NFU Scotland