

Scotland 'on message' on farm subsidies

Wyn Grant | December 7th, 2009 - 3:54 pm

Scotland is far more in tune with current thinking on farm subsidies in mainland Europe than England and Wales, claims Scotland's rural affairs minister Richard Lochhead. Addressing farmers at a Christmas Carcass competition in Inverurie, Mr Lochhead brought them glad tidings about the deep divide in agriculture policies on the two sides of the border. 'My opinion on CAP reform is very different from DEFRA's view that all direct subsidies should be removed and we should rely on a free market. Scotland should not go down that route and our thinking is much closer to the mainstream of Europe which is that the pendulum is swinging back towards support for active agriculture.'

The minister felt that outgoing farm commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel didn't envisage that pendulum swinging too far, ruling out headage payments, but new commissioner Dacian Ciolos could bring in a new era.

There are certainly those in Brussels who think that Ciolos will favour more market support and help to smaller farms. However, others take the view that he is on message with the Commission view on reform and has been playing down his linkages with France to reassure pro-reform countries.

However, Christmas has come early for some English farmers, with over 80 per cent of farmers receiving £1.3bn in Single Farm Payments to date. That's approximately £15,116 per recipient. Not quite a banker's bonus, but welcome all the same. Organicduck tweeted from Devon, 'Hurrah and thank you RPA. Maybe off Christmas shopping or maybe pay off some overdraft.' Payments are also well advanced in Wales and Scotland.