



**Report launch -
Moovin' on up - (How) can we use new technologies to improve productivity
on Britain's livestock farms?**

**Hybrid meeting - Tuesday 24 January, 5.00 – 6.00pm
Meeting Room S, Portcullis House**

Agenda

- 1. Chairman's welcome & introduction – Julian Sturdy MP**
- 2. Report introduction**
James Read, Director - Policy & Communications Lead, UK & Ireland, MSD Animal Health
- 3. Guest speakers:**
Aveek Bhattacharya, Chief Economist, The Social Market Foundation
Johnny Mackey, Associate Director, Ruminants, MSD Animal Health UK
- 4. Questions & discussion**
- 5. A.O.B.**

Moovin' on up

(How) can we use new technologies to improve productivity on Britain's livestock farms?

Key findings

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The Social Market Foundation is Britain's leading cross-party think-tank, standing proudly in the centre-ground of politics since 1989.

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Framing the policy problem facing UK agriculture

- **A productivity problem?**
 - British farming isn't keeping up with productivity gains made in other countries, with productivity challenge especially strong in the livestock sector.
- **An environmental problem?**
 - Biodiversity and net zero targets demand change to the status quo, meaning big shifts in how Britain farms.
- **Or something else?**
 - Food production/security has risen up the agenda in wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the cost of living crisis.
 - Improving animal health and welfare remains an on-going policy concern for government.

Figure 1: Systemic pressures on UK farming



Precision livestock technologies offer a partial solution to many of these issues

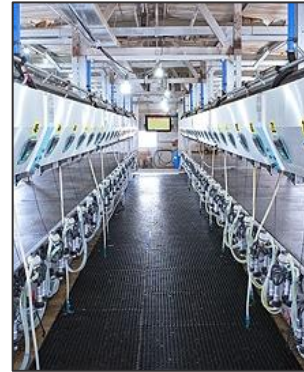
Example Technologies



Monitoring collars



Farm management software/apps



Automated milking systems



Electronic ID tags



Computerised feeding systems

- ✓ Labour productivity
- ✓ Animal productivity/output
- ✓ Animal health & welfare
- ✓ Farm safety

SMF conducted qualitative research with UK livestock farmers in early 2022

- We conducted a literature review of the benefits and drawbacks of precision livestock technologies, concluding that considerable gains to the UK's livestock sector were possible, but current levels of uptake are patchy at best on smaller farms.
- We wanted to understand:
 - What drives livestock farmers to invest in new technologies?
 - For those already using precision technologies, what benefits had they experienced?
 - What barriers prevent farmers from making such investments?
- In early-2022, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 livestock farmers in England (50%), Scotland (30%) and Wales (20%).



- Our interviews took place prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the sharp increase in inflation. We expect that events since have only served to strengthen our conclusions.

Summary of key themes

1

Farmers are open to using new technologies and are seeing the benefits

- Technologies are recognized to have a wide range of benefits, including to animal welfare, labour productivity and farm safety
- Some technologies were under-utilised or limited to certain aspects of the farm's practice

2

Optimism about potential of tech highest amongst younger farmers

- Older generations were generally viewed as resistant to change and hesitant towards investing in new technologies
- Young farmers wanted greater control over farm decision-making and saw technologies as crucial to future success

3

Proof of success from trusted, local sources of information is the best kind of evidence to encourage tech adoption

- The farming press, social media, local colleges and livestock markets were all common sources of information about new technologies
- However, 'over the farm gate' advice and practical demonstrations of the application and benefits of new technologies were valued most

4

Uncertainty about the future of farming is holding back investment in technology

- A lack of clarity over subsidy reforms, alongside other systemic pressures, was leading to short-term decision-making

5

Cost barriers are the bottom line for farmers looking to invest in new tech

- Insufficient physical/digital infrastructure, resistance from older generations and skills deficiencies were all given as examples of barriers to investment, but cost was the most pervasive
- Some participants thought government productivity improvements grants were not structured to help smaller farms

Summary of recommendations

1

Improve funding incentives for farmers to invest in precision technologies

- As the transition to a 'public money for public goods' approach continues, subsidies should be shifted towards productivity-enhancing grants. The current package of grants could be optimised further to support smaller-scale farmers.
- At present, the government plans to keep the share of farming support aimed at raising productivity constant at 9% - that figure should rise

2

Facilitate better knowledge exchange

- The What Works centre for agriculture and horticulture should be established within the next 12 months. Agri-R&D spending should rise from the current low base.
- Government and industry should partner to improve peer-to-peer support groups and farm demonstration networks.

3

Create better data sharing infrastructure

- Farmers often do not get routine access to data to improve practices. The launch of the Livestock Information Service is a positive development but data-sharing and benchmarking needs to become normalised throughout the livestock sector

4

Use regulation to promote change

- Compulsory bovine EID tagging – already implemented in Wales – should be introduced throughout the rest of the UK

5

Rejuvenate farm management

- The Westminster government's lump sum exit scheme for England is a welcome policy innovation, but further avenues should be explored to make farming more enticing and accessible for younger generations
- DEFRA should be as ambitious as possible with its new entrant to farming pilot (and any future programme).
- There is a post-Brexit opportunity to alter the young farmer payment scheme to help shift the generational balance towards young farmers.