Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

UK-EU Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement

Call for Information Findings

July 2026

We are responsible for improving and protecting the environment. We aim to grow a green economy and sustain thriving rural communities. We also support our world-leading food, farming and fishing industries.

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Background

On 19 May 2025, the UK government and the European Union (EU) reached agreement to pursue a new Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement. The proposed Agreement would be based on dynamic alignment with relevant EU SPS rules and would apply to Great Britain while interacting with existing arrangements governing movements involving Northern Ireland under the Windsor Framework. It is expected to cover the trade, production and movement of plants, animals and their products; food and feed safety; nutrition-related areas including food supplements and labelling; wider agri-food marketing and compositional standards; and the regulation of pesticides and biocides. While some sectors have seen limited divergence from EU requirements, others have diverged since EU Exit and may need to make changes to align with the final scope of the Agreement.

To inform its approach to implementation and business readiness support, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) launched a Call for Information in March 2026. The Call for Information ran for 6 weeks, from 9 March 2026 to 23 April 2026, and was open to all interested parties. Its primary audience was businesses and organisations involved in agri-food supply chains, including producers, manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, logistics providers, veterinarians, trade bodies, ports, and border enforcement bodies.

The Call for Information sought information on:

- awareness of the Agreement
- anticipated operational changes required for alignment
- transition timelines to prepare for alignment
- expected benefits and costs derived from the Agreement
- supply chain impacts associated with the Agreement
- how organisations would like to be supported ahead of implementation.

In total, 466 responses were received and analysed in addition to 25 unique submissions by email. Nearly 70% of responses were submitted on behalf of businesses, with a further 14% from business representative organisations (BROs).

Use of information and confidentiality

All responses have been handled in accordance with the commitments set out in the Call for Information. Personal names and contact details have not been published and are not included in this summary. Financial and commercially sensitive data provided by respondents has been anonymised in the analysis. Responses indicated as confidential have been treated accordingly. A list of organisations that submitted responses is published alongside this summary; individual names and personal contact details are not included in that list.

Responses to the Call for Information may be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, or the Data Protection Act 2018. Defra is the data controller for personal data provided through this exercise. Further information on how Defra handles personal data is set out in the Defra Personal Information Charter.

Note on interpretation and scope

This document summarises responses received to the Call for Information. In total, 491 responses were received: 466 submitted via the online platform, and a further 25 responses submitted by email in formats that did not conform to the Call for Information structure. All quantitative analysis in this document is based on the 466 structured responses. The additional 25 email responses have been analysed qualitatively, and their findings are reflected in the qualitative themes presented throughout this summary.

The Call for Information was an open information-gathering exercise, not a formal consultation. Findings are not statistically representative of the agri-food sector as a whole; respondents are likely to over-represent those already engaged with the UK-EU SPS Agreement. The largest groups of businesses were manufacturers (18%) and primary producers (12%) although many chose not to answer. Within the Agri-Food sector, the main responses were from Arable and Horticulture (29%) and Livestock (27%).

Business ranged from micro-organisations (1-9 employees) to large ones (250+ employees) when measured by employee numbers. Of the businesses that stated their size, 57% said they were micro or small (fewer than 50 employees). Notably, the majority already traded with the EU: around 62% reported selling to or buying from the EU which may impact previous exposure to SPS requirements. The findings do not determine the terms of the Agreement, and no sector-level breakdowns are provided in this publication.

This summary draws on both quantitative (closed-question) and qualitative (open-text) analysis. Qualitative findings are not generalisable or statistical; their purpose was to explore issues in depth across a range of businesses and to surface a broad set of views. Where qualitative responses are cited, they represent the range of perspectives raised rather than a prevalence across the sector.

The Call for Information was conducted at an early stage of implementation planning, when full details of the Agreement's scope, timetable, and sector-specific arrangements were not yet available. Some respondents noted this limited their ability to respond fully to certain questions. Since the Call for Information closed, the government has published further information on a number of sectors and will continue to provide further guidance and information as implementation arrangements develop. The findings therefore reflect a point-in-time snapshot.

Responses are presented thematically across seven areas: awareness and engagement; operational changes; transition timelines; expected benefits and costs; supply chain and regional impacts; and support needs.

Awareness and Engagement

Respondents generally demonstrated a high level of awareness of the Agreement, although confidence in understanding its implications was more mixed. 81% of respondents were previously aware of the Agreement, citing government communications and industry bodies as the primary sources. 87% indicated a willingness to receive future government alerts, demonstrating strong demand for continued engagement.

Qualitative responses revealed a more nuanced set of views. While awareness was high, fewer than half of respondents (46%) said they were confident about what EU SPS rules would mean for their business or sector, compared to 28% who were not confident and 21% neutral. However, those who said they were confident often noted they still needed more detail on scope, transition arrangements, and implementation.

The most cited drivers of uncertainty were unclear scope and coverage of the Agreement; lack of clarity on timelines; uncertainty about compliance and documentation requirements; and, for some, concerns about regulatory autonomy.

Operational Changes

Quantitative analysis of responses showed that 71% of respondents anticipate some level of operational change, with most expecting this to be minor to moderate. The most commonly anticipated changes were compliance and regulatory processes (58%); labelling and packaging (40%); contract changes (32%); and IT and digital systems (30%).

Qualitative responses provided important additional context. Businesses in more highly regulated sectors, particularly those that require formal approvals, said they may need to put new processes in place. Several noted that the time needed to prepare would largely depend on regulatory approval processes, rather than their own operational readiness, highlighting that some factors affecting preparedness sit outside business' direct control.

On labelling and packaging, concerns were most commonly raised by food and drink manufacturers and retailers supplying consumer goods. These respondents highlighted the complexity of unwinding 'Not for EU' labelling, noting that post-EU Exit decisions - such as investment in separate labelling runs – mean that cost exposure varies considerably between businesses even within the same sector. Some raised the risk of stock write-offs if transition arrangements do not allow existing labelled stock to sell through.

Respondents highlighted that contract and supply chain changes often go together, including renegotiating supplier agreements, and in some cases, changing how products are sourced. Several noted that they have limited control over other parts of their supply chain, with the speed of changes sometimes dependent on external factors such as labelling and printing capacity. Those whose operations depend heavily on certification, border services, or products requiring regulatory reassessment described potentially significant changes. Some noted that current uncertainty made it difficult to assess the scale of change required.

Transition Timelines

Quantitative analysis shows variation in the minimum lead time businesses indicated they would need to be ready for alignment. 29% said they would need a minimum of 0–3 months whereas 25% said they would need a minimum of over a year. This variation reflects genuine differences in business size, sector, and the nature of the changes required, illustrating why businesses may require different types of guidance and support as implementation arrangement develop. Quantitative data suggested that respondents anticipated higher costs where implementation timelines were shorter, with cost pressures easing as lead-in time increased.

Qualitative responses demonstrated the importance of adequate transition time for those businesses facing more significant operational change. Open-text responses linked this to changes in supply chain models, the need to update IT systems or work through regulatory approval processes outside their direct control.

Respondents across a range of sectors noted that the length of transition time needed varied significantly depending on the nature of changes required, and that some processes - particularly regulatory reassessments and supply chain restructuring - have lead times that businesses cannot accelerate unilaterally. Several respondents indicated that until the final scope and timetable are confirmed, detailed planning remains difficult.

Benefits and Costs

Respondents anticipated the SPS agreement would deliver benefits, though views varied considerably by sector and degree of EU trade exposure. Reduced compliance costs were the most cited benefit, selected by 68% of respondents. Improved market access, reduced import costs and increased exports were cited by around half of the respondents. These findings reflect a respondent base in which 62% already trade with the EU and currently face significant border friction.

Qualitative responses provided additional context to these headline figures. The dominant theme in open-text benefit responses was cost savings and reduced administrative burden, with 134 of 215 qualitative respondents citing this benefit. These were commonly linked to the removal or simplification of certification and documentation requirements, such as Export Health Certificates and phytosanitary certificates. A second key theme was border processes, with 51 responses linking expected benefits to fewer inspections, faster movements and reduced delays. Improved market access and trade volume opportunities - including re-entering export markets closed since EU Exit, such as seed potato exports - were identified by 42 respondents.

On costs, one-off compliance costs were most anticipated (36%), followed by ongoing operational costs (26%) and staff training (24%). 23% of respondents indicated uncertainty about what costs to expect. Qualitative open-text responses on anticipated costs most commonly raised financial burdens and cost increases (78 responses), followed by uncertainty limiting the ability to plan (37), and workforce and skills implications (34). A smaller number cited labelling and packaging changes (18), IT and digital systems (20), and certification and documentation (17).

Views were not uniformly positive. Around a quarter of qualitative respondents either identified no anticipated benefit from alignment or said that uncertainty about the Agreement's scope and implementation prevented any meaningful assessment of net impact for their business.

Supply Chain and Regional Impacts

56% of respondents anticipate that SPS alignment will affect their supply chain operations. The most cited areas were border clearance and checks, and transportation and logistics, followed by supplier compliance and raw materials sourcing. This may partly reflect that 62% of respondents are businesses trading with the EU, who generally reported greater anticipated impacts on EU trade than on trade with the rest of the world.

Qualitative responses indicated mixed anticipated impacts. Positive effects most cited included reduced border delays, shorter and more predictable lead times, simplified paperwork and shipping logistics, reduced storage costs, and improved stock control. Negative and uncertain impacts centred on the cost and complexity of supplier network restructuring, transition disruption for products with short shelf lives or long production cycles, and viability concerns among businesses whose current models depend on certification, border checking, or related services. A small number of respondents questioned whether anticipated benefits would outweigh implementation costs for their specific circumstances, and some said insufficient detail prevented any meaningful assessment of net supply chain impact.

On regional impacts, 43% of respondents anticipated region-specific effects. England was most cited as a region expected to be most affected (selected by 34% of respondents), followed by Northern Ireland (26%), the EU (23%), Scotland (19%), Republic of Ireland (17%), Wales (17%) and Rest of World (8%). Some respondents from, or trading with, Northern Ireland highlighted the interaction between the SPS Agreement and Windsor Framework, particularly in relation to the future operation of SPS-related movements and associated requirements. A small number called for differentiated impact assessments across UK nations, noting that regulatory divergence since EU Exit means impacts will not be uniform across Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Support Needs

Across both quantitative and qualitative responses, businesses stated they would like clearer, more detailed and more timely information from government. The top themes in qualitative responses on support needs were the need for clear, practical guidance (148 responses); adequate lead-in time and phased implementation (99); preferred engagement and support mechanisms (60); and the need for clarity on scope and coverage (36).

Quantitatively, the most preferred communication formats were newsletters, webinars and teach-ins and industry-wide forums. Qualitative responses added further detail, with respondents calling for sector-specific guidance, involvement of officials with specialist knowledge of their industry, live Q&A sessions with regulatory experts, collaborative co-design of guidance, and up-to-date FAQs, with a strong preference for updates to be provided promptly as implementation details become available. About half of qualitative respondents on communications explicitly requested sector-specific rather than generic SPS messaging.

On preferred contact methods, email and online channels were most commonly cited, though the Call for Information's online-only format may mean that the need for offline and direct engagement is underrepresented. Requests for in-person meetings, phone contact, and sector-specific stakeholder advisory groups featured in open-text responses.

Beyond communications and guidance, several respondents requested financial support to assist with implementation costs, and several called for investment in the resourcing and capacity of relevant regulatory authorities to ensure these can respond promptly to business queries.

How we will use these findings

The findings from this Call for Information will inform Defra's approach to implementation support, communications, and business readiness activity as we conclude SPS Agreement negotiations and plan for subsequent implementation and entry into force. The Call for Information has provided valuable insight into the range of operational changes businesses anticipate and the types of guidance and engagement that would be most useful.

Defra will use these findings to shape how government communicates with businesses and sequences guidance and support work closely with other government departments, agencies, and delivery partners to ensure businesses and organisations receive coordinated, practical support as implementation arrangements develop.

Defra will continue to engage with businesses and representative organisations as further detail on the Agreement's scope, timetable, and implementation arrangements becomes available.

A list of organisations that responded to this Call for Information is published alongside this summary on GOV.UK. Personal names and contact details are not included.