



Veterinary
Medicines
Directorate

Summary of responses and Government Response to the consultation on National Residues Control Programme: revision of charges

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Introduction

From 24 November 2025 to 19 January 2026, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), the Scottish Government, and the Welsh Government ran a joint consultation on revised charges for the National Residues Control Programme (NRCP). The consultation was conducted using Citizen Space, our online consultation tool. The consultation was launched with a press release and uploaded to Citizen Space. It was also published on VMD's X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn accounts and communications were also sent to sector group representatives.

This document provides a summary of responses received to the consultation as well as a government response.

Background

The VMD is an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The VMD manages the [National Residues Control Programme](#) (NRCP), which is a statutory programme that is designed to help protect human health by identifying unsafe residues of banned substances, veterinary medicines, and contaminants in products of animal origin before it enters the food chain. The NRCP helps to protect human health. It also provides assurances to the UK's trading partners about the quality and safety of exported food products of animal origin. The programme helps to support international trade worth approximately £12 billion per annum to the UK economy.

Residues policy and surveillance is a devolved matter, so the VMD works in close partnership with the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government to deliver the NRCP in Great Britain. To note, the NRCP does not include sampling from premises in Northern Ireland, as they have their own national residues sampling plan which is overseen by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

The NRCP operates on a full cost recovery basis, so food business operators in each of the livestock sectors that take part are invoiced each year. The programme currently costs approximately £6.6 million per annum, and this is forecast to reach approximately £7 million per annum by 2028. This is due to a rise in the costs of procured services which are necessary to deliver the programme such as sampling, testing, and consumables. Without the proposed revisions to the current charges that NRCP participants pay, it is forecast that there will be an under recovery of the costs of the programme by £1 million in the 26/27 financial year.

There are currently more than 500 companies across the various sectors (including farm premises) included in the NRCP.

Overview

Number of responses received

We received 9 responses via Citizen Space, our online consultation tool.

A list of organisations who responded to the consultation is set out below. All respondents were happy for their responses to be published.

Headline messages

Almost all respondents agreed with our recommendation that the most equitable approach to setting the new charges would be to base the calculations on the specific production volumes of each sector (see option C below). This approach would prevent some sectors unfairly cross subsidising others and takes account of different risks and characteristics of sectors, aligning charges with their actual programme costs. The new charges are set out below in Table 1.

A few respondents raised that they would appreciate further clarification and transparency on breakdown of costs by sector, as well as information on measures considered by those running the NRCP to give customers value for money and cost effectiveness.

Most respondents suggested that these additional costs could likely be transferred to the primary producers, rather than remain with food processors.

Summary of responses – by question

The consultation document explained the reasons behind the need to increase charges for businesses covered by the NRCP. It set out the following three options with a recommendation for Option C:

- A. Do nothing. Schedule 1 will be unchanged, and charges would be maintained at current levels. This would risk food safety and international trade obligations.
- B. A flat rate 22% increase to the charges in Schedule 1, applied across all sectors taking part in the NRCP. This would risk sectors cross subsidising others.
- C. A specific percentage increase tailored for industry sectors based on their specific sampling plans, testing costs and production levels. See Table 1.

Question 1 asked: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our assessment that the most equitable approach to amending Schedule 1 is option C?

All but one respondent agreed that Option C would be the most equitable approach. The main points were as follows:

- Most responses agreed that this scenario is the most reasonable, as it reflects the differences in costs, time, and regulatory requirements across sectors.
- There was a call in some of the responses for a review of the sampling processes used, information on any new alternative methods or technologies that have been explored and how these can possibly lower operating costs and administrative burdens going forwards.
- While inflationary pressures were recognised partly for rising costs, the feeling was that increases cannot be accepted without reassurance that efficiency measures and alternative options have first been considered.
- It was also felt by a couple of respondents that the rise in costs exceed that of inflation and would appreciate a greater breakdown of costs between sectors of how the money is being spent.

Question 2 asked: What impact would you expect the revised rates to have on your profit margins?

Respondents generally believed that the increase in costs will not impact too much on profits, with 67% of respondents noting that there would be low impact or even no impact at all on their profit margins.

Only one respondent believed there would be a high impact on profit margins.

Response to question	Number of respondents
High Impact	1
Medium Impact	1
Low Impact	4
No Impact at all	2
Don't Know	1

Question 3 asked: Would you expect to absorb this additional cost or transfer it to your customers?

Most respondents were of the belief that additional costs arising from the new charges would be transferred.

Response to question	Number of respondents
Absorb	2
Transfer	4
Other	0
None of the above	2
Don't know	1

Additional thoughts on this included:

- It was generally felt among responders that this additional cost could land with the primary producers, whether being absorbed or transferred down the chain.
- There were some calls to hopefully see this additional cost shared equally by parties across the supply chain, but also recognition this is unlikely to happen.

Question 4 asked: How will this affect the demand for your goods and services?

Respondents were split on this question, with a slight majority believing demand would stay the same, but a few also not knowing how demand might be affected because of these changes.

Response to question	Number of respondents
Increase Demand	0
Demand would stay the same	4
Decrease Demand	2
Don't Know	3

Government Response

The UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments are grateful for the insightful and constructive comments received to this public consultation. Whilst it is hard to calculate an exact percentage with regards to the extent of participants represented by these responses, we appreciate the high-quality feedback as it provides a helpful litmus test. The responses will form part of discussions about the future charging arrangements for the NRCP. The low response may be due to several factors, including that historically participants tended to engage with the NRCP purely from an operational and compliance perspective, and have historically had little policy interaction. We are however encouraged that we received more responses to this consultation than when we last consulted on this topic in 2024. We will continue to actively seek views and engage with participants to better understand sector-specific issues. We strongly encourage stakeholders to continue the conversation by contacting the VMD Residues Team at residues@vmd.gov.uk.

The responses centred around the following key themes:

- Ensuring that the NRCP remains efficient, cost effective and transparent, with particular interest in any advancements, alternative methods or streamlining of processes that have been considered.
- The continued need for close stakeholder engagement to consistently review the sampling processes and the associated costs with each sector.
- A view that the current economic environment is difficult for businesses due to increased operating costs, and while inflationary pressures are recognised there needs to be reassurance to stakeholders that these increases have come as a last resort.

The legislative basis of the NRCP was detailed in the consultation paper. This explained that the approach we take to residues surveillance is based on equivalence with international standards, which have also been adopted by the UK's trading partners. These standards were incorporated into domestic legislation, and as a result help to underpin £12 billion worth of annual exports of UK products of animal origin (£8 billion of which is destined for the EU market).

The NRCP is a statutory official control and must legally be delivered by designated competent authorities and approved reference laboratories. This framework places necessary constraints on who may undertake the analytical work, but also provides assurance to consumers, industry, and trading partners that the programme maintains the high standards required of an official surveillance system.

We note the comments about the difficult operating environment that businesses face, and the increased costs. The VMD continuously works with our delivery partners and

commercial experts to monitor and audit the NRCP to ensure value for money. Any cost savings are immediately passed through to businesses in the NRCP. The Treasury rules on managing public money do not permit the VMD to make nor retain any profit.

To ensure continuity, consistency, and value for money, the laboratory contract operates on a ten-year cycle and is awarded through open, competitive tender. This approach allows us to secure specialist capability at scale, while providing predictability of costs over time.

The Government agrees on the importance of continually reviewing the programme to ensure it remains efficient, transparent, and proportionate. The NRCP today is the product of decades of development, supported by dedicated coordination systems and laboratory databases without which the programme could not operate at its current level of efficiency. Regular review is already an embedded feature of delivery, and we remain committed to adapting the programme and how it is delivered as opportunities arise.

Proposals to change the NRCP's approach to residues surveillance are currently outside the scope of this present consultation exercise and would require the gathering of robust evidence to ensure the NRCP still meets the standards which have been established to protect human health. However, the government has noted industry feedback and will feed this into wider plans to review the NRCP.

As set out in the consultation paper, our financial forecasts show that costs are likely to continue rising in future years. The VMD is proposing to increase charges on the 1 June 2026 (please note, charges were increased on 1 April 2026 in Wales) and on the 1 April 2027 to allow us to return the NRCP to full cost recovery while we consider future charging options and methodologies.

We intend to continue to monitor the operation of the scheme and to bring forward a further public consultation if other changes are required.

As the majority of respondents agreed that Option C was the most equitable approach, the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments will separately bring forward the necessary legislation to update the charges as per option C. This option is set out below in Table 1.

Annex 1 – List of organisations who responded to the consultation

We have provided a list of organisations of which representatives or individual respondents did not request confidentiality. One respondent did not provide an organisation name and therefore does not appear on this list. However, their views have still informed our analysis of this consultation and are incorporated in the figures presented throughout. The following list is presented in alphabetical order.

- Aquatic Vets Ltd
- British Meat Producers Association (BMPA)
- British Poultry Council (BPC)
- Lister Veterinary Consultancy
- National Office of Animal Health (NOAH)
- National Sheep Association (NSA)
- Streamline Veterinary Services Ltd
- VSSCO Vet Practice

All respondents

Type of respondent	Number of respondents
Individual	4
Organisation	3
Industry	1
Campaign Group/NGO	1

Location of respondents

Location of respondent	Number of respondents
England	4
Scotland	1
Wales	0
Northern Ireland	1
All of the above	3

Table 1 – Proposed changes to Schedule 1

Type of animal or animal product	The Charges for Residues Surveillance (Amendment) Regulations 2024 for charges (£) on or after April 2025	Proposed charges (£) in 2026 - 2027	Actual increase (£)	Proposed charges (£) in 2027 - 2028	Actual increase (£)
Bovine	0.7617 per carcass	0.9964 per carcass	0.2347 per carcass	1.0216 per carcass	0.0252 per carcass
Goat	0.0751 per carcass	0.0864 per carcass	0.0113 per carcass	0.0886 per carcass	0.0022 per carcass
Sheep	0.0751 per carcass	0.0864 per carcass	0.0113 per carcass	0.0886 per carcass	0.0022 per carcass
Soliped	0.4660 per carcass	0.5359 per carcass	0.0699 per carcass	0.5495 per carcass	0.0136 per carcass
Swine	0.0735 per carcass	0.0845 per carcass	0.0110 per carcass	0.0867 per carcass	0.0022 per carcass
Game and wild game	1.0461 per tonne	1.0461 per tonne	0 per tonne	1.0461 per tonne	0 per tonne
Poultry	0.6432 per tonne	0.7397 per tonne	0.0965 per tonne	0.7584 per tonne	0.0187 per tonne
Eggs	0.0206 per case of 360	0.0237 per case of 360	0.0031 per case of 360	0.0243 per case of 360	0.0006 per case of 360
Milk	0.0405 per 1000 litres	0.0466 per 1000 litres	0.0061 per 1000 litres	0.0478 per 1000 litres	0.0012 per 1000 litres
Fish other than trout	2.3546 per tonne of marketed product	2.7078 per tonne of	0.3532 per tonne of	2.7764 per tonne of	0.0686 per tonne of

		marketed product	marketed product	marketed product	marketed product
Trout	2.8222 per tonne of fish food	3.2455 per tonne of fish food	0.4233 per tonne of fish food	3.3278 per tonne of fish food	0.0823 per tonne of fish food