

## NFU Council resolution explained

**The NFU recognises and respects the diversity of views among its membership.**

*The NFU membership is a broad church of opinion. In 28 meetings there has been a range of views expressed. The question we asked at the end of every meeting was 'Would the interests of farmers be best served by being a member of the EU or not being a member of the EU?'*

**The NFU's position is based solely on an evaluation of the agricultural merits of the case and the NFU is fully aware there are many wider issues at stake.**

*As a farming organisation, we can only consider the referendum in farming terms. Referendums mean polarised opinion, and it may be that some farmers would vote differently as a farmer than they would as a citizen. Our meetings discussed farming issues with farmers; it is not our place to comment on wider issues in the referendum debate.*

**The NFU will not be actively campaigning in the referendum; it will not be joining with any campaign groups and it will not, in any circumstances, advise its members how to vote.**

*We are an apolitical organisation. We work to hold policymakers and political parties to account to advance the interests of farmers and growers and this remains the case. The NFU does not get a vote in the referendum, it is up to individuals to decide on the basis of their own judgement.*

**It is, however, the case that the Electoral Commission rules governing the referendum in effect mean that the NFU will be required to register to enable it to continue to carry out its essential role of informing members of the issues as they affect farmers.**

*There are Electoral Commission rules on what organisations can and can't say in a referendum. There is a spending limit of £10,000 if organisations decide not to take a position, as well as further scrutiny in what is already an intense political debate. By taking a position, NFU will be able to continue to hold meetings with our members; debate the issues and hold all hold both sides of the debate to account on the big farming questions. The NFU has taken a position based on evidence as we see it – we will not actively campaign and we will not tell our members how to vote.*

**The NFU Council resolves that on the balance of existing evidence available to us at present, the interests of farmers are best served by our continuing membership of the European Union.**

*One of the NFU guiding principles is to advocate policy based on evidence; our work on bovine TB and plant protection products are two good examples. This approach equally applies to economic and political questions. Our first report set out the facts of the relationship between UK agriculture and the EU. Our second report was an independent study on the potential scenarios facing UK agriculture in the event of leaving the EU. The report provides nine different scenarios; in some instances UK agriculture would be better off, in other instances it would be worse off. Underpinning all of this economic analysis are political questions. We know the trend in global agricultural policy is for breaking down barriers to trade. UK governments consistently advocate moves away from direct support to rural development payments.*

*We have led from the front on evidence. We commissioned Wageningen University in the Netherlands for two main reasons: one they had the data available and an econometric model to be able to carry out the work, and two they are the number 1 agriculture university in the world – see the evidence for that [here](#).*

**Whether the vote is to stay or to leave, the NFU will always lobby to obtain the best possible deal for British farmers.**

*We are the leading agricultural organisation in the UK with significant expertise and influence. We will continue to fight for the best interests of British farmers whether that is in a reformed EU or whether that is building a British Agricultural Policy. The next two months will involve intensive political debate but farming continues and so does the work of the NFU – whether that's [challenging the RPA](#) on payments, holding [retailers to account](#) on backing British, getting a [win on glyphosate](#), in a [meeting with the Prime Minister](#) or indeed any number of the hundreds of [other policy issues](#) currently on the table for NFU.*

#### **Notes to editors:**

The vote at NFU council looked at key issues including:

- **The implications for our agricultural trade with the EU and the rest of the world**

*Whatever your political view; 73% of UK agri-food products and 38% of our lamb goes to the EU. Market access and the terms of that access will be crucial for farmers in the future.*

- **The balance of risks of a national farm policy versus the CAP**

*In agricultural terms, no one knows exactly what would happen in the event of the UK leaving the EU. We do know however that UK governments' have consistently urged a cut to the CAP budget and to move money from direct payments to rural development. They urged a 15% shift in the last reform, and with NFU lobbying this was set at 12%.*

- **The impact of the agricultural uncertainty following a vote to leave**

*Farmers are currently operating in a period of uncertainty. Commodity markets are volatile, and farm businesses prosper when there are clear signals from the market which help to inform farm business decisions. Uncertainty about future agricultural policy in or out of the EU to a certain extent fuels uncertainty in decision making on farms.*

- **The potential impacts for the wider food chain**

*It's unclear what the agri-food industry would do if the UK left the EU. One thing we do know is that a strong and successful food chain should mean a strong farming industry.*

- **The consequence for farming regulation, in or out**

*NFU consistently lobby to improve farming regulation. Most farmers would surely agree that there is a need for some regulation but this should be proportionate, pragmatic and practical. It is unclear what the impact of the UK leaving the EU would be on farming regulation – but it is an extremely important consideration.*

- **The consequences for agricultural labour availability**

*The NFU will only comment on agricultural issues. Immigration is a huge issue in this referendum, and some may argue is the issue that will decide the outcome. It is essential that UK farms have access to adequate labour, and the access to that labour and under what conditions is a key question in the referendum discussion from an agricultural perspective.*

- **The consequence for agricultural product approvals**

*Plant protection product availability is a big deal. A lot of issues around PPPs arise in the EU, where there is intense lobbying from environmental groups. We see similar campaigns in the UK – the Soil Association campaign to ban glyphosate is a timely example.*

- **The consequences for science and R&D relating to agriculture**

*In the period 2007-2014 the UK received €6.8bn for research from the EU, some of which went on agricultural research. Scientific research is important and whether UK government would fund agricultural research to the same extent, in the event of the UK leaving the EU is a key question.*