

**SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE AHDB DAIRY SECTOR COUNCIL MEETING  
HELD ON THURSDAY 16 JANUARY 2025 AT 8.30 A.M.  
HYBRID MEETING – AHDB HQ, SISKIN PARKWAY EAST, COVENTRY AND MS TEAMS**

ATTENDEE NAME	ROLE	ATTENDANCE TYPE	AGENDA ITEM LEAD
Lyndon Edwards – CHAIR (LE)	Dairy Sector Council Member	In Person	2,3,4,
Andrew Rutter (AR)	Dairy Sector Council Member	In Person	
Andrew Warne (AW)	Dairy Sector Council Member	In Person	11
Colin Ferguson (CF)	Dairy Sector Council Member	In Person	
Emma Furnival (EF)	Dairy Sector Council Member	In Person	
Gemma Smale-Rowland (GSR)	Dairy Sector Council Member	In Person	
Ian Harvey (IH)	Dairy Sector Council Member	In Person	
Joe Towers (JT)	Dairy Sector Council Member	In Person	
Liz Haines (LH)	Dairy Sector Council Member	In Person	
Mike King (MK)	Dairy Sector Council Member	MS Teams	
Patrick Morris-Eyton (PME)	Dairy Sector Council Member	In Person	
Rob Nancekivell (RN)	Dairy Sector Council Member	In Person	
Apologies:	Anna Bowen (AB) Dairy Sector Council Member		
Paul Flanagan (PF)	AHDB - Dairy Sector Director	In Person	5,6,8,9,10,14
Graham Wilkinson (GW)	AHDB – CEO	MS Teams	8
Adam Short (AS)	AHDB – Data Programmes Associate Director	In Person	13
Alistair McLaren (AM)	AHDB - Strategic Comms Manager	In Person	12
Colin Turner (CT)	AHDB - Financial Controller	In Person	9
James Taylor (JT)	AHDB - Head of Farm Assurance	In Person	13
Ken Boyns (KB)	AHDB - Centre of Excellence Manager	In Person	13
Marco Winters (MW)	AHDB - Head of Animal Genetics	MS Teams	11
Mathew Clarke (MC)	AHDB - Head of Systems & Development	In Person	12
Nicholas Saphir (NS)	AHDB - Board Chair	MS Teams	1
Rosanne Thomas (RT)	AHDB - Communications Director	In Person	10
Sarah Reid (SR) (Minute Taker)	AHDB - Dairy PA	In Person	
Tom Ring (TR)	AHDB - Data Manager	In Person	12
Tony Holmes (TH)	AHDB - Finance & Ops Director	In Person	9
Will Jackson (WJ)	AHDB - Market Development & Comms Director	In Person	10



## NICHOLAS SAPHIR – FAREWELL

NS thanked the Sector Council for their support and gave some reflections on his five years in post as AHDB Chair. He acknowledged the collaborative efforts across departments and expressed confidence in the team's ability to drive the organisation forward, wishing everyone well in their future endeavours.

## CHAIR REPORT / LEVY PAYER FEEDBACK FROM COUNCIL

LE and PF provided the AHDB Dairy Sector Council Members with an update on the key activities they have been involved in since the last council meeting:

February Sector Insights Day for the Arla Board of Representatives received overwhelmingly positive feedback. RN noted that this was a notable improvement from 18 months ago.

The Farm Data Exchange (formerly the Data Custodian) was the area where Arla representatives showed most interest. PF confirmed that further discussions had taken place and Arla's Farmer Representatives had raised Farm Data exchange at a recent meeting in Denmark.

The Dairy Tech Event at Stoneleigh in early February was a highly positive show, with an optimistic atmosphere and engaged farmers.

The BUCS Super Rugby will take place on 16 April in Newport and LE encouraged everyone to attend and to mark the date in their diaries.

Sheffield Event, PF, GW and LE attended the BUCS event in Sheffield, and the positive sentiment towards dairy was clear among students. Muller's milk sampling saw positive engagement from students, with minimal pushback on the message of milk as a recovery drink. A meeting with the BUCS CEO revealed plans to expand sports participation from 800,000 to 1 million students, aligning with our demographic goals.

Dairy Survey, RN stated recent feedback from farmers, including a shift in support from those initially opposed to the levy increase, underscores the positive impact of our ongoing engagement efforts. Additionally, RN attended the Arla Dairy Insights event which provided an opportunity to highlight AHDB's work, with strong recognition of our dairy investment.

## 2024/25 BUSINESS PLAN

GW/PF informed the AHDB Dairy Sector Council members about the progress and key focus areas for the Business Plan, reflecting on the period until the end of January 2025. This discussion provided a comprehensive overview, ensuring that AHDB is well-positioned to achieve its goals & objectives.

GW/PF brought the following matters before AHDB Dairy Sector Council Members:

Rebrand: GW confirmed that work on a rebrand for AHDB had been paused to enable focus to be on work that delivers value for levy payers.

Culture and Values: GW detailed the range of work that had been going on about Mission and Values and Culture across the organisation. A Change Leaders Forum has been created and the Leadership Team was restructured last year to provide greater focus on Sectors and areas of value to levy payers. A senior person on a fixed term contract has been recruited to lead our cultural and transformation work.

Stakeholder Management: GW shared that extra focus has been put behind this area. This focus is particularly around the formal recording of stakeholder interactions and building that into our CRM system.

Dairy Exports: PF shared progress with Exports on shows and the three in market representatives covering the US, Middle East, and Asia. IH said that the Sector Council had the annual value of Dairy Exports (£1.8bn in 2024 – HMRC figures)

Milk Aisle: PF explained that we were working closely with Arla and Muller's marketing teams to ensure that we were not repeating work that had already been done and they had both agreed to share what they had done in this area.

## Comms Update

WJ and RT attended the meeting to share updates on the communications strategy and proposed changes. They emphasised the need for confidentiality due to potential impacts on personnel,



including changes to roles, responsibilities, and team structure. The discussion focused on several key areas:

**Decentralisation of Communications:** RT discussed transitioning from a centralised communications model to a more decentralised approach. This shift involves moving sector communication managers from the central communications team into the sector teams. This change enables sector teams to develop and implement their own communication plans, ensuring these plans are closely aligned with the sector's daily activities and needs.

**Sector-Specific Events:** WJ highlighted the significance of sector-specific events, such as on-farm activities and other initiatives tailored to the dairy sector. The budget for these events will now be managed by the sector team instead of the communications team. This change aims to streamline the process and ensure more efficient management and delivery of the events.

**Engagement & Efficiency:** The communications strategy seeks to boost engagement and efficiency by involving sector teams more directly in planning and executing communication activities. This approach is designed to improve the relevance and impact of communication efforts.

**Feedback & Continuous Improvement:** WJ sought feedback from the AHDB Dairy Sector Council Members for the proposed changes and emphasised the importance of continuous improvement. They highlighted the need to adapt and evolve the communications strategy based on feedback and the changing needs of the sector. As part of AHDB's long-term strategic direction, these actions aim to enhance communications and engagement with levy payers and other stakeholders. The ongoing steps include finalising the matching algorithm for data, addressing any anomalies, and continuously building up the data to ensure accurate and effective communication.

## Genetics Presentation

AW and MW presented an overview of the genetics project, covering genetic and genomic evaluations, the role of AHDB, and the collaboration with SRUC. This was presented as a direction of travel update and was followed by a discussion, during which the AHDB Dairy Sector Council Members made the following decisions:

**Governance Structure:** The AHDB Dairy Sector Council Members decided that the Genetics Advisory Forum (GAF) should continue to provide an advisory role in this area to the Sector Council, and that a Genetics working group should be established to make recommendations to the Sector Council on this area.

**Levy Funds:** The AHDB Dairy Sector Council Members discussed the level of levy funds per annum that should be allocated to this area to allow medium to long term planning. No conclusions were reached and this item would be revisited at a future Council meeting.

**Decision on Collaboration Sign-off:** The AHDB Dairy Sector Council Members decided that the AHDB Dairy Sector Council Members must approve formally any changes to the collaboration with SRUC, given the long-term financial commitment.

## Farm Data Exchange & Farm Assurance Presentation

KB and JT joined the meeting and provided an overview of the Farm Data Exchange and Farm Assurance programs:

**Farm Data Exchange (KB/AS):**

**Proof of Concept Activity:** The team emphasised the need for pilot (proof of concept) activities to start cross-sector projects like the Farm Data Exchange. This involves funding pilot activities to build confidence among sectors and sector levy payers.

**Cross-Sector Collaboration:** The importance of cross-sector activities was highlighted, with a focus on collaborative efforts within the industry to address changes in government policy and environmental prioritisation.

**Funding Mechanism:** Discussions were held on how to fund cross-sector activities, either through pitching to sectors for parts of their budgets or creating a central budgeted fund. The Sector Council agreed that given the strong support for Farm Data Exchange within the Dairy sector, they would increase funding for this area in 2025/26 to ensure that they were the lead (or co-lead with Beef & Lamb sector) on this.



### **Farm Assurance (JT):**

Leadership Role: The Sector Council thanked the AHDB team for the briefing and discussed the need for AHDB to take more leadership position in farm assurance schemes.

Environmental Focus: The role of Red Tractor on Environment was discussed. PF explained that discussion at the Red Tractor Dairy Board was leaning towards the Dairy Roadmap leading work in this area and Red Tractor linking with this.

Communication with Levy Payers: The Council emphasised the importance of Red Tractor enhancing its communication with levy payers to keep them well-informed about its activities and the advantages of farm assurance schemes.

Leavers: LE acknowledged and expressed gratitude to AHDB Dairy Sector Council Members LH and JT, as well as IH, for their contributions over the last three years. LE thanked them personally for their input, support, and assistance during this period, including the years prior to his own involvement. Their efforts were highly appreciated, and a token of appreciation, in addition to formal recognition, was presented to them.

Blue Tongue: RB raised concerns about Blue Tongue, noting its growing presence, though still minimal, European dairy colleagues have reported significant issues. PF assured that an internal working group, well-connected to state bodies, is closely monitoring the situation, especially given the time of year.

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 12 June 2025, at AHDB HQ in Coventry.

