
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Ken Roy
Head of Profession for Statistics, Defra Group
Natural England
(by email)

21 December 2017

Dear Ken

STATISTICS ON TOTAL INCOME FROM FARMING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

We recently reviewed compliance of the *Total Income from Farming in the United Kingdom* statistics against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This letter summarises our findings.

We found clear evidence of where the statistics meet the standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value set out in the Code. We welcome the closer working between the statistics team and policy colleagues, which has resulted in a better understanding of their needs, following a change in structure. The team said it also has a close relationship with stakeholders in the devolved administrations and with key user groups, such as the National Farmers' Union, to discuss and interpret the statistics. We welcome this positive and proactive approach to engagement to increase the value of the statistics.

You could enhance the value further by conveying a stronger sense of why these statistics are important in the statistical release, especially as discussions on leaving the European Union progress. We talked to the team about the potential for greater public interest in these statistics. The team told us that it is putting together an information pack for policy makers that could be used as the basis for a publication designed to inform the wider public debate, and we think such a publication would be very helpful.

We encourage you to highlight links with other, relevant UK agricultural statistics, and include comparisons between the four UK countries and between the UK and other European countries. This would increase the value of the statistics by helping users understand their comparability and coherence. Similarly, we encourage you to publish analysis of the long-term trend in total income from farming, as this would put short-term changes into context and help inform the upcoming debate.

In terms of trustworthiness, we welcome the open and transparent way that the statistical team handled recent errors they found in the data. This includes providing information on the effect of the errors on the statistics and the improvements to the quality assurance process that were introduced to minimise the potential for similar errors in future.

There are ways in which you could improve users' understanding of the quality of the statistics. Presenting more information in your [quality report](#) about your quality assurance processes would provide further reassurances to users about the quality and trustworthiness of the statistics. We recommend that you use our [quality assurance of administrative data toolkit](#) as a starting point to evaluate this aspect of the data quality.

We also encourage you to publish more details about your methods, so that people who want to use the statistics can understand how you derive your estimates, the reasons for choosing the methods that you use, and the limitations associated with those methods. The team publishes helpful information about the size and effects of scheduled revisions in the quality report, but these were last updated several years ago. You should regularly update the quality report so that the information, including, but not limited to, planned revisions, remains current.

The team has been very helpful and cooperative during this short review, and we look forward to seeing the continuous improvements to the statistical release.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Pont', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead