

Trade – Claire Williams

- Like many other areas of business the trade continues to be impacted by the same range of external influences as other parts of the equestrian industry, whether it be as a result of legislative measures, climate or international events. Overall trade continues to be fair to middling as everyone's purse strings continue to be stretched. Some areas are holding up well with trade feedback indicating this includes safety products, saddlery fitting and sales and perhaps not surprisingly feed.
- Businesses across the board continue to feel the impact of the further increase to minimum wages as well as the changes to rateable values. Added to this many small businesses, particularly retailers, are concerned about the impact of the new Statutory Sick pay changes moving from a waiting period before sick pay is due to a first day right to this. As this cost is born entirely by the employer, these businesses many of whom employ very part time – ie weekend only – workers are anticipating higher costs and challenges in staff management.
- Climate continues to impact feed manufacturers albeit not to the extremes as last year. Whilst some parts of the country are still seeing issues around drought, by and large the prospect for a better harvest in terms of both straw and hay is looking more likely.

On a broader point, climate change is impacting many other areas of the feed sector including forage yields which has focussed attention on the issue of resilience to climate change. We focussed on this and other issues impacting the sustainability of the feed sector at the annual BETA feed conference held earlier this month.

- International events – as an industry that relies on an international supply chain for finished product and raw materials, the closure of the Straits of Hormuz has impacted on the both the cost and supply of key materials used in feed and the shipping schedules and costs. This has resulted in not only higher costs but also delays in supply both for the feed but across the supply of products coming from the Far East.

- SPS has been discussed already and just wanted to add that the feed industry too has a strong degree of interest, breaking down as it will many of the non-tariff barriers that were created as a result of Brexit. Once implemented it will impact positively on the cost of exporting and reduce if not totally take away much of the onerous paperwork now required. Whilst anticipated especially by exporters because of what I have just detailed, it will impact on all companies placing feed on the market in the UK even if not exporting as post implementation, thanks to dynamic alignment, companies here will need to comply with EU regulations rather than the UK assimilated regulations we now work to. This will particularly impact companies using certain herbal extracts in their products, many of which are about to be made unavailable for use in feed in the future.
- On the safety front there are no big changes due on the standards front. We are all waiting for final agreement to be reached on a new head form and testing standard in Europe which will enable further development and testing of rotational or angular impacts on safety helmets. Inconsistency in testing 2 different models of these headforms has caused a year's delay in this but once agreed will be incorporated firstly into cycle helmets before we feel comfortable to include in riding hats.
- Work on the FEI safety vest project on which I sit on behalf of British Equestrian, continues which aims to create more data upon which vest design and innovation can be based in the future.
- A first meeting of a group of interested manufacturers is scheduled to take place in July to discuss setting minimum levels of performance for stirrups. A EU committee is being set up within the CEN standards system to focus on elements of safety in stirrups, but due to the time this is taking, we are kicking off first to consider overall manufacturing quality looking at a number of areas that stirrups should perform to in order to be fit for purpose.