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Brussels could extend deadline for BPS claims

By Johann Tasker and Phillip Case

Brussels is considering an extension to the deadline for 2016 Basic Payment applications amid growing fears that farmers will be unable to submit claims on time.

The deadline for claims is 16 May. But with just one month to go, IT issues and the knock-on effects of delays to payment verifications for last year have left UK farmers and their agents concerned that it might be missed.

It is likely any extension would be Europe-wide. EU farm commissioner Phil Hogan said: "In view of the problems which were created last autumn by the earlier postponement of the applications deadline, I want to reflect further on the request for a similar derogation this year."

The NFU is encouraging farmers to submit their 2016 applications as soon as possible and to the best of their ability – even if they have not been paid for 2015, or

believe they were underpaid. Any extension to the claims deadline would again cause payments to be delayed, it said.

NFU vice-president Guy Smith said about 10,000 farmers in England – including himself – were still waiting to receive their BPS 2015 payments.

Therefore it was questionable to expect people who hadn't received their 2015 payment to submit claims for 2016, he added.

"We just want them to tell us what the problem is. RPA boss Mark Grimshaw is not a chief executive on top of his game. He has some explaining to do."

Mr Smith warned that extending the application deadline would have "significant, negative consequences" that would shorten the window for processing claims and cause delayed payments and disallowance penalties for Defra.

Mr Grimshaw said he had "every sympathy" for farmers yet to be paid. "I want to reassure the industry we are handling many issues that are specifically related to



TIM HARFORD THOMPSON

*** RPA boss Mark Grimshaw (pictured) is not a chief executive on top of his game. He has some explaining to do**

Guy Smith, NFU vice-president

year one of the new scheme – and 2016 will be different," he added.

Exeter-based chartered surveyors Townsend said many farmers had found the online application system easy to use and had submitted claims. But others with transfer entitlements were starting to experience problems with the system.

In Wales, about 96% of claimants had now received part-payments for BPS 2015 – roughly 80% of the total value of claims. Others have received balance payments, but some 4% of claimants haven't

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received a penny.

NFU Cymru head of policy Dylan Morgan said: "If they haven't been paid, they don't know if there were any issues with their claims. Effectively, these people are being asked to complete their 2016 forms in the dark."

The Scottish government said it would always encourage farmers to submit their BPS 2016 applications as soon as they can. The system had been operating well so far and applications were being successfully submitted, it added.