



Alyn Smith MEP 



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FROM FIELD TO FORK ON WORK EXPERIENCE 2008

Alyn spends the first two weeks of the EU Parliament recess doing work experience placements in order to see the impact of issues he deals with in Brussels. This year, as Scotland's only full member of the Agriculture Committee, he explored the infrastructure around farming. His placements included days as: a slaughterman at an abattoir in Aberdeenshire; a trainee vet in Shetland; a volunteer with the North Glasgow Community Food Initiative; an Artificial Insemination technician in Dumfries and Galloway; a stockman on a farm in the Borders; and a biodiesel plant worker with Argent Energy in Motherwell.

Speaking afterwards he said: "I'm hugely grateful to everyone who looked after me over the last couple of weeks. It has, as always, been a real experience, seeing all airts and pairs of the country as well as the industries around farming. We have world-class agriculture but we often forget the big industry dependent upon the primary production, and I specifically wanted to spend time working around the industry to see the wider implications of EU rules. While nobody could claim to pick up an entire industry in a day I am one of the few politicians who can justly claim to have treated sheep with scrapie boluses, a cow for mastitis and assisted in the insemination of 20 cows in Dumfries and Galloway!

"The Government's Food Policy is beginning to bring into focus the world class asset we have in Scottish food, and the public is becoming more and more interested in where food comes from and how it has been treated. We have a good news story to tell in Scotland and I'm proud of the people I met on my travels and the enthusiasm and loyalty they have for Scottish production.

"There are also some real issues to be addressed in the coming months and years, and my experience this year will strengthen my ideas. It seems clear to me that we could be doing more on animal disease control in Scotland, as well as using public procurement more to boost local production. I know my colleagues in the Government are keen to explore ways to boost the sector in Scotland and I will be working with them to achieve this aim."

ALYN SLAMS LABOUR-TORY SCAREMONGERING

Alyn has acted to quash the persistent scaremongering of Labour and Conservative MEPs regarding European Commission proposals on funeral VAT.

The European Commission recently issued a consultation paper – 'Review of existing legislation on VAT reduced rates' – which has been consistently misinterpreted and criticised by Labour and Conservative MSPs and MEPs who have made claims that this paper signals the start of a new European 'tax on death'.

Speaking from Edinburgh, Alyn said: "I have had it plain and simple from the European Commission that they have no plans to remove the reduced rate of VAT on these services for the foreseeable future so let us have an end to this persistent scaremongering. Indeed, Commissioner Kovács was keen to stress that the passage in the consultation that has caused all this fuss does not reflect the views of the Commission anyway; rather it is in response to requests that have been submitted to them.

"Further, as is clarified by the Commissioner, and as my colleagues should be aware, if the European Commission had a particular wish to amend the current legislation on reduced rates, it would require the unanimous support of the European Council.

"So let this be an end to Labour-Tory scaremongering. It is quite clear that in absence of any facts, this has been jumped upon as an opportunity to attack the European Commission and to alarm the public unnecessarily."

INVITATION FOR PESTICIDES DRAFTSWOMAN TO SCOTLAND

Alyn has invited the draftsman of the EU pesticides package to Scotland to come meet farmers and crofters to hear and see first hand the potential impact of the pesticides package as it currently stands. He has also published a briefing on the package so that non-agricultural MEPs and others interested in the progress of the package will be able to understand the issues.

Alyn hopes that by inviting Hiltrud Breyer, a German Green MEP, to enjoy Scots hospitality the industry in Scotland he will be able to persuade her that a number of the proposals currently in the package cause grave concern in Scotland. Negotiations on the package begin in earnest in the Parliament in September.



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Above: Alyn treating a cow for Mastitis. To treat the inflammation, penicillin must be injected into the udders therefore making it necessary to hover precariously under the rear end of a slightly agitated cow. This explains Alyn's hood.

CRAZY FROG GETS IT IN THE NECK WITH CRACKDOWN ON RING TONE SCAMS

Alyn welcomed the announcement by the European Commission that it will launch inquiries into ring tone websites across Europe.

The announcement came on the back of an initial investigation by the Commission which uncovered a high proportion of consumers were being tricked into subscription packages, when they were under the impression the service was free, or came with a one off fee.

Alyn commented: "This is great news for mobile phone users, particularly kids who are all too often conned by these off the wall deals. From the charges these companies make, it's clear that this is big business. Ring tone websites have been swindling consumers for far too long.

"I hope this investigation by the Commission will send a clear message to ring tone websites that if they are found to be abusing consumer trust, then there will be consequences to their actions."

PROTECTION OF KILTS CAMPAIGN MOVES FORWARD

Alyn has urged the UK Government to adopt a proposal by the EU Commission that will protect the status of Scottish made kilts. The purpose of this proposal is to enhance transparency, help consumers make informed purchase decisions, and also to reduce the incidence of fraudulent or misleading indications that would undermine the reputation of Scottish kilt makers.

Alyn said: "Scots kilt makers have built a world renowned reputation for quality over the past 500 years. This is a fantastic, distinctly Scottish fashion that not only encompasses time honoured traditional styles of outfit, but also a new breed of tartans that Scottish designers have flaunted on catwalks from Paris to New York.

"It is for this reason that kilts be protected from cheap imitations that seek to capitalise on a traditional industry that is a hallmark of Scotland. I put it to the Secretary of State that this measure is necessary in order to ensure the reputation of Scottish kilt makers is not tarnished by cheap foreign knock-offs. I trust that he will take this into consideration and act in the interest of Scotland."

SCOTLAND'S VOICE TO FORE ON FARMING REFORM

Alyn submitted amendments to the Santos Report for the CAP Health Check aimed at easing the burden on Scottish farmers and increasing their influence in decision making. His amendments deal with decoupling of aid and payment scheme simplification; modulation; cross compliance; and an end to tobacco aid.

He said: "Scottish farmers face tough times, not least because of the rising cost of raw materials and inputs, the high price of oil, the strong pound, and the looming spectre of sheep EID as well as uncertainty over the future pesticides and LFA regimes. With this economic backdrop as we reform the CAP I have been 100% focused upon assisting farmers, not adding further burdens and complications. I am confident my amendments will gain support, as we have been active in promoting them and winning friends for our views.

"I remain against voluntary modulation, but the debate has moved on and I seek to make modulation work without placing our farmers at a competitive disadvantage. I believe that all modulated money should be retained by the country that generated it, to offset lost income for farmers. I seek the deletion of the "progressive modulation" proposals, which punish farms merely for their size. I have submitted an amendment which asks Member States to reduce voluntary modulation as compulsory modulation is raised, so that Scottish farmers are not at a competitive disadvantage compared to most of our European counterparts. At the same time, we must make sure that rural development money is not lowered as a result, and again I have submitted an amendment to that effect.

"I believe in local decision making. Devolved implementation allows EU policies to take account of the infinite variety of local contexts. Therefore, decisions on cross compliance must be made by devolved assemblies, and decisions on an appropriate threshold for minimum payments must be taken by Member States.

"I have also put in amendments on making set-aside a normal entitlement and focusing Article 68 payments on disadvantaged and peripheral regions. Finally, I seek to abolish aid to tobacco production. It is flatly illogical for the European taxpayer to spend millions on educating people away from tobacco for this work to be undermined by public money supporting its production. I will do all in my power to see that this funding is ended."

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