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Dear *Tim*

Thank you for your email of 28 July on behalf of your constituent about the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) 2015.

An impact assessment was carried out prior to the implementation of BPS 2015 by the European Commission, on its own proposals, which suggested that they would result in a 15% increase in the administrative costs over the previous Single Payment Scheme. In June 2014, Minister Eustice wrote to Baroness McIntosh explaining that the Department felt this was an under-estimation.

The Department has already accepted the EFRA Committee's recent recommendation on the need to communicate openly and clearly with those accessing our services. We have reflected on our experience of BPS 2015 and will build on the lessons learnt to improve our approach. This will include ensuring that the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) more clearly and consistently communicates when payments are likely to be made to different groups of farmers. The RPA will also ensure that the helpline and customer-facing services are better equipped to provide answers to claim and payment queries throughout the scheme year.

In answer to your question about the completion of legal proceedings around probate, at this point in time, it is impossible to be certain, as some probate cases can take several years to complete.

With regards to making full and final payments, the RPA recently published details of a planned reconciliation process to address concerns from farmers about differences in the payments that they have received.

So far, nearly 3,000 claims have been completed, worth over £5 million to farmers, and we anticipate that this will be completed by the end of September.

Having built on the experience of BPS 2015, the RPA anticipates BPS 2016 will be easier for farmers and the Agency. We have already seen a greater proportion of online applications made in 2016 than in previous years, with a record 80% submitted online. Similarly, processing of BPS 2016 will be easier with an additional month for processing as compared to 2015 and more of the relevant data already held by the RPA. The Agency is committed to paying 90% of farmers their 2016 BPS claim by the end of December.

