

New law comes into force to protect farm animals from dog attacks

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New law now in effect strengthening protections for sheep, cows and other farm animals saving farmers thousands of pounds each year.

A new law comes into effect today (18 March) that will see farm animals in England and Wales get stronger protection from dog attacks. The maximum penalty for livestock worrying has increased. Livestock worrying, occurs when a dog you own or are in charge of chases, attacks, or causes distress to livestock on agricultural land. The aim is to prevent livestock death and injury, which will save farmers thousands of pounds each year.

The fine has increased from £1,000 to an unlimited fine and police now have powers to detain dogs they suspect may attack or worry livestock.

A survey of farmers from the National Sheep Association found that almost four in five (87%) sheep farmers experienced a dog attack on their flock in 2024. Many have reported multiple incidents. Recent National Farmers' Union research found that the cost of livestock worrying has risen by 10% from the previous year. This has now reached almost £2 million. The midlands alone saw an estimated £438,000 worth of livestock harmed by dog attacks, followed by the Southeast at £330,000.

The police will now have greater powers and can investigate incidents more effectively. These powers include entering premises to secure evidence or animal DNA. Alongside this, courts will also be able to require offenders to cover the costs of seizing and caring for a detained dog.

These changes will reduce the emotional and financial strain placed on farming communities from these dangerous attacks. This will not only save animals but save farmers from around £6,000 a year from replacing animals. While these incidents can unfold in moments, they leave lasting damage, harm businesses, affect livelihoods and cause considerable stress in rural communities. The new law brings much needed stronger powers to address the problem.

Farming Minister Dame Angela Eagle said:

Farmers can now have greater peace of mind knowing that proper penalties are in place for people who carelessly let their dogs worry livestock.

Dog attacks have devastating consequences and this new law reflects the Government's strong commitment to our farmers and animal welfare.

Advice to farmers:

- Farmers should report, record and retain any information or evidence relating to a livestock worrying incident where available, and share it with the police.

Advice to dog owners:

- Follow the The Countryside Code when visiting these areas
- Any dog is capable of livestock worrying - always keep dogs under control and in sight
- It is good practice to keep dogs on a lead when walking in rural areas where livestock are kept, but let go of the lead if chased by cattle
- Always follow local signs
- Report any incidents of livestock worrying to the police or local farmers
- Ensure dogs cannot escape from homes or gardens near livestock fields

These stronger protections will help keep livestock safe and give farmers more confidence that incidents can be quickly and properly investigated, It will support the safety and wellbeing of rural communities and ensure that irresponsible dog owners can be held to account.

The law extends protection to incidents that happen on roads and paths. This recognises incidents can occur when farmers move their livestock, for example along a road to another field or milking parlour. It also expands the definition of livestock to include camelids such as llamas and alpacas.

This announcement follows the launch of the Animal Welfare Strategy for England, where the Government has also reconvened the Responsible Dog Ownership (RDO) taskforce. This is a group of experts that will provide recommendations on ways to encourage responsible dog ownership and reduce dog attacks across England and Wales.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The Act applies to England and Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland already have their own livestock worrying legislation.
- To better reflect the seriousness of certain incidents, the law now distinguishes more clearly between a dog attacking livestock and a dog worrying livestock. This does not create new offences but helps ensure the law better captures the nature and severity of what has happened.
- The law expands the definition of livestock currently afforded protection to include camelids (such as llamas and alpacas) that are commonly farmed.
- The Act extends the locations covered to include roads and paths to cover incidents that may take place when animals are being moved, such as from one field to another.
- The Act introduces a new defence for dog owners where their dog worries livestock whilst in someone else's charge without their consent, such as if it had been stolen or taken without permission.
- Police will have new powers under the Act, including powers of seizure and detention, the power to take samples and impressions and powers of entry.
- The Act introduces new court powers allowing a court to order an offender to pay expenses associated with seizing and detaining a dog.
- The maximum penalty for an offence will be increased from a fine of up to £1,000 to an "unlimited" fine, to act as a deterrent.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-law-comes-into-force-to-protect-farm-animals-from-dog-attacks>