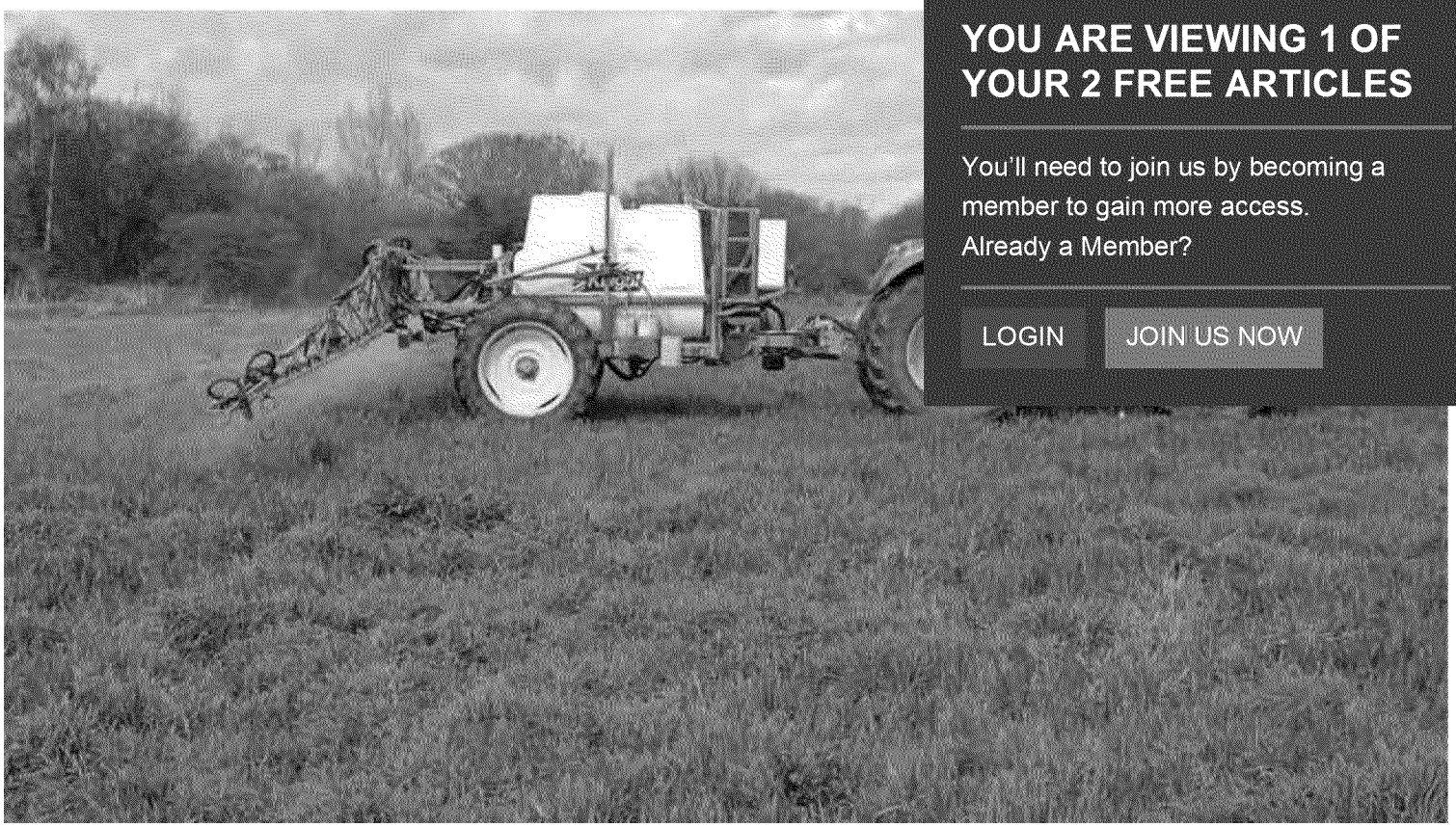
GLYPHOSATE 'UNLIKELY TO BE CARCINOGENIC THROUGH DIET' - WHO AND FAO

NEWS | 16 MAY 2016 | BY ALISTAIR DRIVER | SHARE

Ahead of a major EU vote on the future of glyphosate this week, experts from two global bodies have concluded the chemical is unlikely to pose a risk of cancer to humans through diet.



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Glyphosate is unlikely to be carcinogenic via diet, experts have concluded

The World Health Organisation and the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization have concluded glyphosate is 'unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans from exposure through the diet'.

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The FAO's Panel of Experts on Pesticide Residues in Food and the Environment and the WHO's Core Assessment Group on Pesticide Residues (JMPR) evaluated the safety of glyphosate and other chemicals at the WHO headquarters, in Switzerland last week.

The evaluations considered a number of new studies that had become available since their last full assessments.

The experts concluded, overall, there was 'some evidence of a positive association between glyphosate exposure and risk of non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL)' from the studies.

But they said it was 'notable the only large cohort study of high quality found no evidence of an association at any exposure level'.

DIETARY EXPOSURES

"The Meeting concluded that glyphosate is unlikely to be genotoxic at anticipated dietary exposures," WHO and FAO said in a joint statement.

When glyphosate was administered by the oral route at doses as high as 2000 mg/kg body weight by the oral route, the route most relevant to human dietary exposure, it was 'not associated with genotoxic effects in an overwhelming majority of studies conducted in mammals'.

Several carcinogenicity studies have been carried in mice and rats.

The meeting concluded that glyphosate is not carcinogenic in rats but could not exclude the possibility that it is carcinogenic in mice at very high doses.

But it noted the 'absence of carcinogenic potential in rodents at human-relevant doses and the absence of genotoxicity by the oral route in mammals'.

"Considering the epidemiological evidence from occupational exposures, the Meeting concluded that glyphosate is unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans from exposure through the diet," the experts concluded.

EU VOTE

The European Commission's Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed will consider the latest

Commission proposal for re-licensing glyphosate in Brussels on Wednesday and Thursday.

Leaks suggest the new Commission proposal will recommend licensing glyphosate for nine or 10 years, not the 15 originally proposed, in a bid to secure a qualified majority with some members still hostile to re-licensing the chemical.

If a qualified majority is not secured, the Commission will make the final decision.

This week's vote follows a vote by the European Parliament in April recommending glyphosate should be re-licensed but for only seven years and with additional restrictions, including permitting application for professional use only.

The Parliament's position was partly guided by a report by International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) which concluded glyphosate was 'probably carcinogenic to humans'.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) subsequently published its own findings, concluding glyphosate was 'unlikely to pose a carcinogenic hazard to humans'.

REACTION

Monsanto said the WHO/FAO finding was 'consistent with well-established evidence on glyphosate safety'.

In a statement, it said: Regulators around the world agree that glyphosate is not a carcinogen and can be safely used, for example EFSA and the Canadian regulatory authority findings in 2015.

"Glyphosate offers farmers and gardeners one of the safest and most effective tools for weed control. On farms, glyphosate contributes to less erosion and more biodiversity by reducing the need for soil disturbing tillage as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and saving time."

"Farmers around the world will be pleased that the WHO and FAO have confirmed yet again that glyphosate is not a carcinogen."

Greenpeace said the finding contradicted the WHO's IARC assessment, which stated that glyphosate was a probable cause of cancer.

It also questioned the independence of the latest evaluation as two of the scientists involved, Alan Boobis and Angelo Moretto, had ties to the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI), which receives funding from private companies like Monsanto.

Greenpeace EU food policy director Franziska Achterberg said: “The agencies contradicting the WHO cancer warning seem to either rely on officials who prefer not to be named, or lack a watertight policy to protect their impartiality.

"Any decision affecting millions of people should be based on fully transparent and independent science that isn’t tied to corporate interests.

"It would be irresponsible to ignore the warnings on glyphosate and to re-licence this pesticide without any restrictions to protect the public and the environment.”

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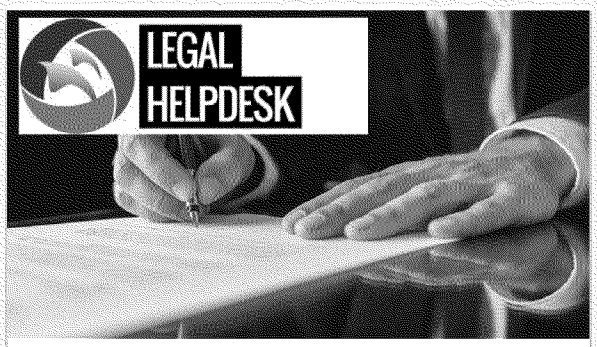

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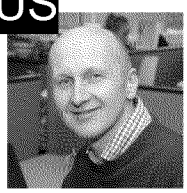

Alistair Driver
Political editor

There is never a dull moment as Farmers Guardian's political editor. There is always something happening that affects farmers, whether it is the chaos of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the battle over bovine TB, a ferocious debate over Red Tractor or the latest bombshell from Brussels.

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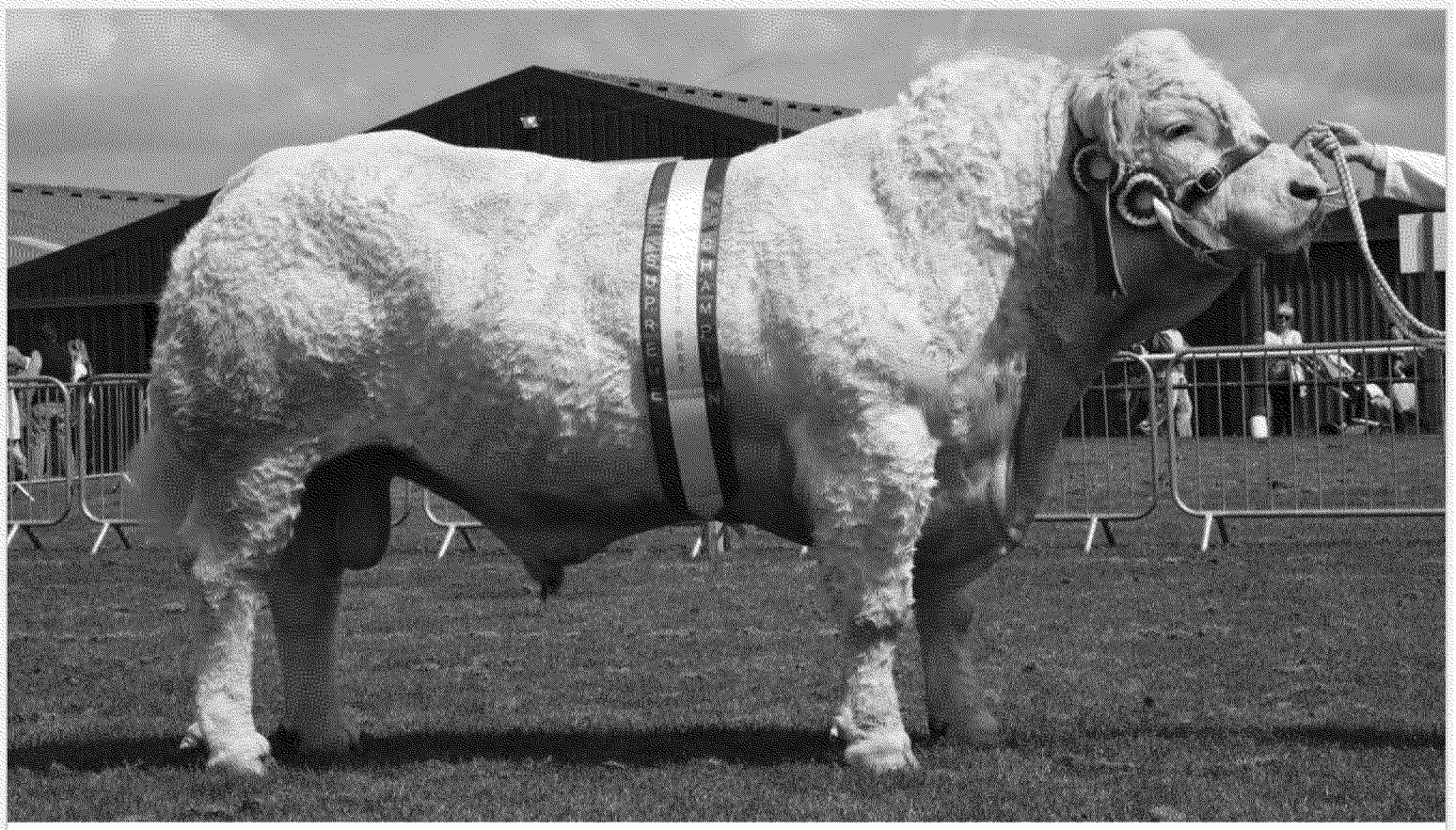

CHAROLAIS TAKES SUPREME BEEF AT NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

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Nottinghamshire kicked off the 2016 summer show season with a strong display of livestock. Angela Calvert and Laura Bowyer report.

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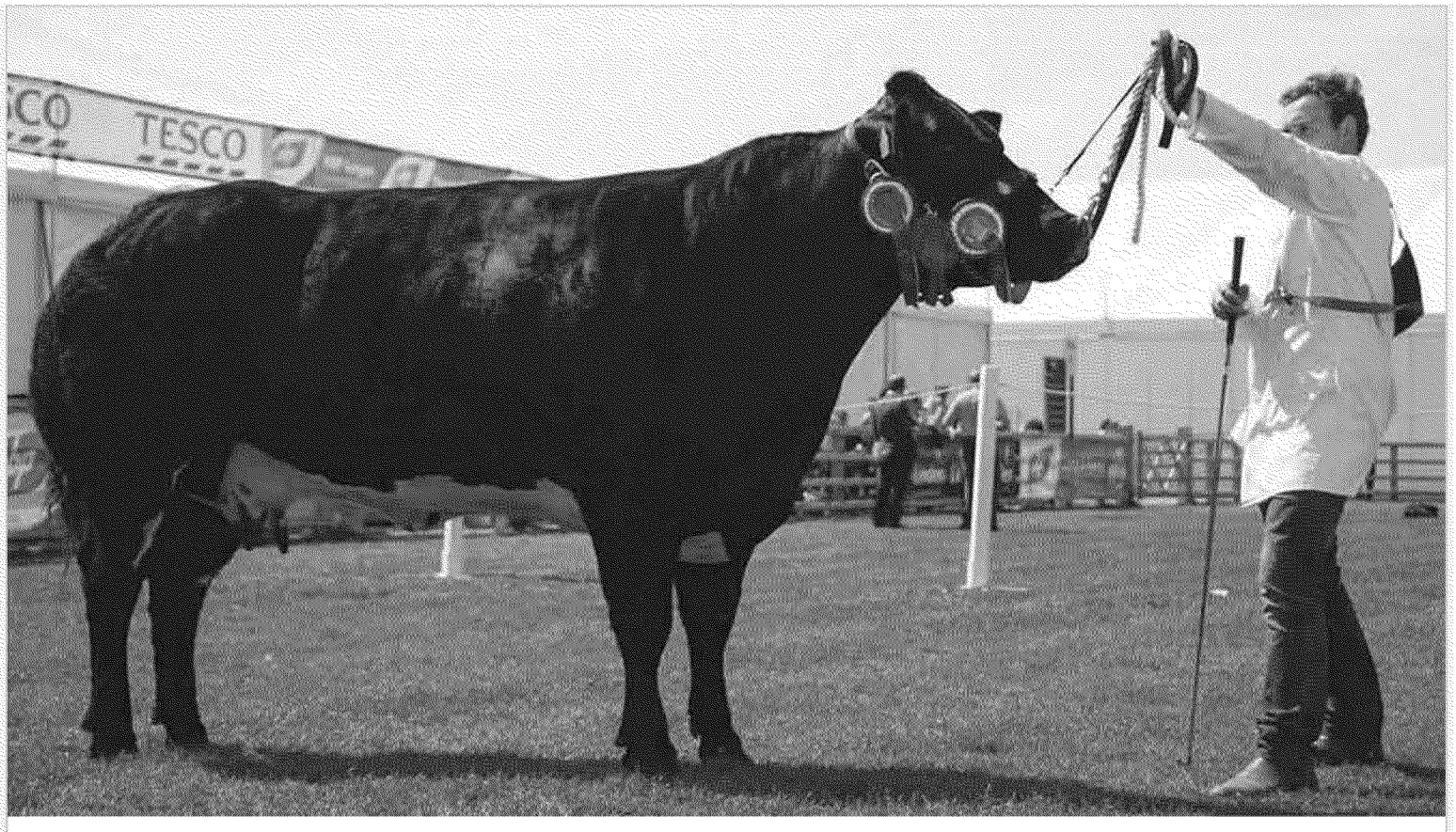

HISTORY MADE IN BEEF RINGS AT BALMORAL SHOW

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A full round-up of the livestock judging results from Balmoral Show.

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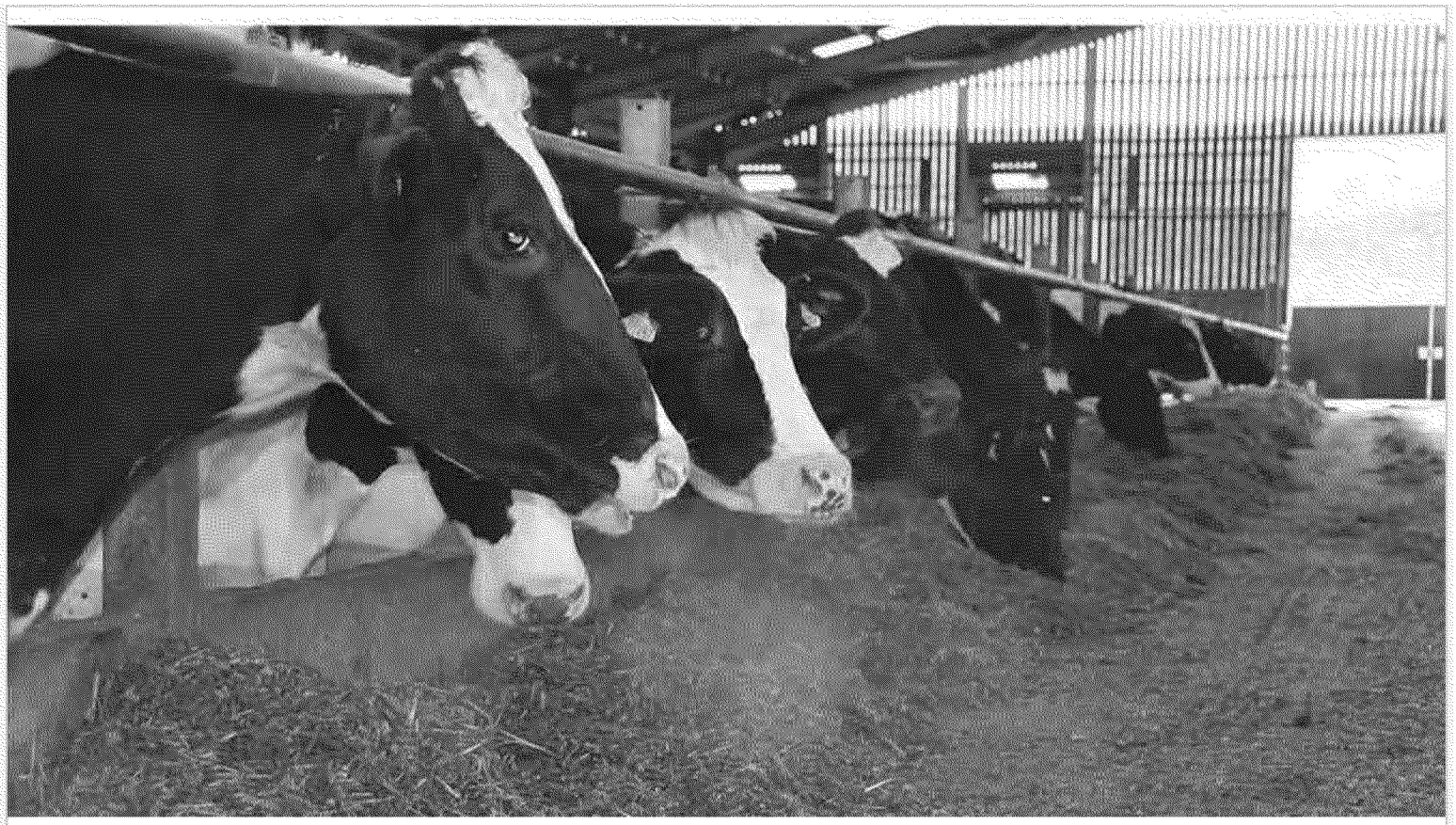

ARLA GM-FREE FEED INCENTIVES OFFER VALUE-ADDED OPPORTUNITIES

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A move by Arla to incentivise farmers to convert to genetically modified (GM) -free feed has been cautiously welcomed by NFU dairy board members.

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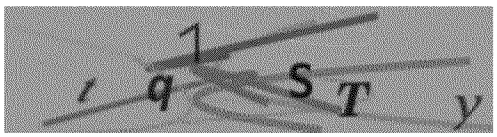

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