



June 2020

Dear Constituents,

I wanted to take this time to talk about the Agriculture Bill votes on the 13th May and the amendments presented to the House of Commons.

Firstly, I would like to provide some background on the Agriculture Bill. It is important to note that the Bill will mean that by the end of 2024 we will have replaced the Common Agriculture Policy with a new scheme of Environmental Land Management. We envisage three components to this. Firstly, there will be a sustainable farming tier which will be open to farmers across the UK and will incentivise participation in farm level measures such as integrated pest management, hedgerow management and soil health. Secondly, there will be a local environmental tier which could incentivise interventions including the creation of habitats, improving biodiversity, tree planting, and natural flood management. Finally, there will be a landscape scale tier which could support woodland creation, peatland restoration and other potential land use changes

Next year, the Government will begin reducing direct payments, but in a progressive way, so that the largest reductions will be applied to the largest payment amounts. This Government stood on a manifesto commitment to guarantee the current annual budget to farmers in every year of the new Parliament, and we have planned a seven-year agricultural transition – giving farmers time to adapt and enabling them to take advantage of the new opportunities that this Bill provides.

I am determined that there will be a prosperous future for British agriculture so we will also introduce new powers to improve fairness and transparency in the supply chain so that farmers get a fair share of the cake and we will introduce grants to help farmers add value to their produce and reduce costs so they can become more prosperous and improve their productivity. There will also be a legal obligation on the Government to produce an assessment of our food security every five years which is now more important than ever.

In the UK, we have built a very special market based on provenance with particular attention to food safety and high animal welfare standards and we have been clear in our manifesto that we will not jeopardise that through trade deals in the future. The Government is committed to striking ambitious new trade deals, but we are clear: in all of our trade negotiations we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards.

Some of the amendments have inherent value and, although support for them thus far is well intentioned, I believe the support for the amendments is founded on a few misconceptions. It is essential that these amendments are defeated as they are detrimental to the Government's policies and negotiating positions, and are not, ultimately in the interests of British consumers and the domestic food producers who supply them.

Red lines are not good in free trade negotiations and it's for the UK population to decide what to eat on the basis of the labelling. We already have the best food standards anywhere and I champion the 'Buy British' campaign. In the amendments proposed, there is no proposal to change our standards, the maintenance of which was what the Manifesto referred to. Encouraging high standards elsewhere is not the same thing and cannot be done by putting ourselves outside of WTO law, so that we are unable to promote liberalising trade or have the respect of others in trade bodies and trade related matters.

For example, if we pass amendment NC2, the effect would be to prevent us from rolling over our existing trade deals e.g. Japan and Canada, since they do not have this term. It will also prevent us from arguing against the EU's "level playing field" in the Brexit trade negotiations, since that is the same thing.

There are huge opportunities for domestic producers in opening new markets for our high-quality produce with innovation, better branding, marketing and free trade. There is great scope for the Government to do more to support new product and market development for it, within existing trade rules and agreements that we should wish to see respected.

Fear of the effect of imports is also not justified, as there are big potential substitution opportunities domestically, dependent on the outcome of negotiations under way, for example, to substitute domestic products for New Zealand Lamb, Irish beef or Danish bacon and butter. There are also big opportunities in the current climate for successful marketing of high-quality domestic products, and encouraging us to champion self-sufficiency and domestic production by eating locally produced food.

It will also not be open season for imports to the U.K. market from the rest of the world, as our negotiators will fight hard for us and can offer zero tariff quota uplifts in various products as well as calibrate opening in other ways, to mean our markets won't be imbalanced.

We should certainly be doing more to reform domestic food market structures to encourage better prices for domestic production, but this should be separate from trade policy, and not confused with animal welfare policy.

It is also incorrect to say that equivalence as mentioned in the amendments is simply what is already in the WTO agreements.

Under WTO law it is illegal to impose animal welfare standards on others. The SPS agreement purposely does not include animal welfare issues (except for measures relating to slaughterhouses, where the UK is not in any case immune to criticism) even based on

equivalence. They are outside the scope of the WTO SPS agreement. A better approach would be to set up an animal welfare dialogue outside of the WTO and trade system, with the first step being to find out exactly where and what practices occur, perhaps identifying opportunities to improve domestically too.

I hope this email provides a thorough and substantial response to the concerns outlined in your email. I am again reassured by the efforts of Ministers to appease fears this week and, importantly, nothing must jeopardise our hand in free trade negotiations and our food standards. As a non-rural MP, I voted with the Government.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact me. Please stay safe and well over the coming months.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Sunderland', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right. The signature is set against a light yellow rectangular background.

James Sunderland MP
Member of Parliament for the Bracknell Constituency
Bracknell, Crowthorne, Finchampstead, Sandhurst and Wokingham Without