

OPEN LETTER TO THE UK GOVERNMENT

SUPPORT FOR FARM TRANSITIONS AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

To:

Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Cc:

Rt Hon Lord Zac Goldsmith, Minister of State for the Pacific, International Environment, Climate and Forests, and Animal Welfare

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Mrs Tamara Finkelstein, Permanent Secretary at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)

Mrs Emily Miles, Chief Executive Officer of the Food Standards Agency (FSA)

Mrs Jane King, Chief Executive Officer of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB)

Mr Ian Gambles, Chief Executive Officer of the Forestry Commission

Mrs Mariana Spain, Chief Executive Officer of Natural England

Dear Rt Hon George Eustice MP,

We are writing to request that the Government provides support to farmers that enables them to transition away from animal agriculture and to the production of arable crops, pulses and produce for human consumption, or reforest and rewild their lands for carbon sequestration. As the UK prepares to host the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP26 next year, we must lead by example, recognising animal agriculture is a leading greenhouse gas emitter, and supporting those farmers who wish to shift their production to less environmentally harmful practices. Given the rapid growth of the plant-based alternatives market in recent years, this is an exciting opportunity for UK farmers to enter this burgeoning new market.

However, contrary to this, the Government is currently using taxpayers money to support the UK dairy industry's "Milk Your Moments" campaign encouraging people to purchase more dairy products.¹

The campaign itself is costing £1M, however, £500,000 of that has come from the UK Government.² During a crisis where charities are having to fundraise to provide food to the most vulnerable people, our taxpayers' money has been spent on social media and TV ads shoring up the struggling dairy industry, a response which is neither sustainable nor responsible. In fact, the UK taxpayer has spent more money on this campaign than the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), a levy board funded by farmers and growers.

We are very aware of the fact that the dairy industry is struggling, right now during the COVID pandemic, but also already before this crisis. We certainly also know that we need farmers and farming. Thus, we are closely working with Refarm'd, a startup that helps dairy farmers transition to plant-based milk production, and Farmers For Stock-Free Farming (FFSFF), an organisation in Scotland offering resources and support to farmers so they can shift towards more sustainable agriculture. Both Refarm'd and FFSFF want to ensure that farmers are able to keep their livelihoods in agriculture but do so in a way that is more beneficial for them, the animals and the planet. FFSFF has additionally recently written to the First Minister and Cabinet Secretaries to ask for subsidies to be redirected to help farmers transition out of animal farming.

But farmers often lack the funds, resources and skills required to shift to a new type of production and cannot make this change without government support. We are calling on the Government to help farmers implement our proposed changes to protect animals, the environment, farmer's livelihoods and the wider

society by allocating funds to assist farmers transition to plant crop production.

We are aware that the forthcoming Environmental Land Management system is meant to ensure that farmers are paid for delivering environmental services (tree planting, flood mitigation, habitat creation, etc.) and improved animal welfare.³ These environmental services should also explicitly imply supporting diversification and farm shifts.

In its 2017 report, the Vegan Society proposes a tax on animal farming which accounts for the environmental and health implications of animal farming, which would also facilitate reaching the goal of net-zero emissions from farming by 2040.⁴ This tax could be deducted from animal farming subsidies and/or be used to support farmers to shift. This is a very important step in the right direction; however, this tax should not be the only solution to support farm transitions

The best way to help animal farmers transition to plant-based agriculture is by the Government helping cover the cost of the transitions. Since the Government is already using tax money to subsidise the farming industry, it is this money - our money - the Government should redirect to support farm transitions. We demand a reform of how our money is spent to help farmers either transition to plant-based agriculture, to diversify their production to produce more crops for human consumption or to rewild and reforest their lands instead.

There is a future that exists more harmoniously for all of us, where taxpayers money is spent more effectively and fairly, where animal suffering is significantly reduced, where the environment is better protected and where farmers' livelihoods are more secure. And together, we can make that future a reality.

We thank you very much for taking our concerns into consideration and would be grateful for a chance to discuss our proposals more in-depth with you via a virtual meeting (or in-person meeting once it is safe to do so again) at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Ed Winters, Co-founder and Co-director Surge

Co-signatories:

Geraldine Starke, CEO Refarm'd

Dr Alex Lockwood, University of Sunderland

Alexandra Clark, Operating Partner, S CAP

Isobel Hutchinson on behalf of Animal Aid

Ofek Ron, General Manager, Vegan-Friendly UK

Dr Shireen Kassam on behalf of Plant-Based Health Professionals UK

Toni Vernelli on behalf of Veganuary

Derek Sarno, co-founder of Wicked Kitchen

Annexe: Environmental data, economic statistics and case studies

Whereas in most sectors the bulk of income is constituted by sales of goods and services in the market, for the farming sector over half of total farming income comes from subsidies. In fact, every single year, billions of pounds are given to animal farmers in the UK to keep them afloat. Under the still existing (but soon to be replaced) Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) British farmers get £3.4B a year in subsidies.⁵ We may see the price of milk in a supermarket and believe it to be cheap, but this is a false economy, as the price to the taxpayer is tremendous.

Dairy in the UK has been oversupplied for a long time now, even before COVID.⁶ The dairy market is shrinking and it goes against fair business principles to keep propping it up.⁷ On top of the ongoing struggles this industry has faced, during this crisis, around 300 dairy farms that produce 1M liters of milk each day have been affected.⁸

Stopping the consumption of dairy milk does not mean stopping the support for farmers. Oat milk, for example, can be easily produced in the UK and oat production in the UK has gone up in recent years.⁹ Oat milk sales increased by 71% in the UK in 2019 and a report last year showed that 23% of Britons are now using plant-based milk alternatives. This was coupled with a 6% decrease in dairy consumption in the 16 - 24-year-old age category, where only 73% now drink cow's milk. Overall, there has been a 50% reduction in liquid milk consumption per capita in the UK in the past 50 years.¹⁰ When purchasing UK-made oat milk rather than trying to export these oats, we can support UK oat farmers and support a product that is healthier for the planet, healthier for humans and doesn't involve exploiting animals.

Moreover, according to a study conducted by the Scottish Government in 2019, farmers who diversify into non-traditional farm uses on average have an additional £19,600 in income per year than farmers that don't diversify.¹¹

A 2020 Mutual Diversification Report by the National Farmers' Union (NFU) concluded that 65% of farmers in England have already diversified, reporting an additional income of £740M in 2018-2019. The NFU has additionally put together a very comprehensive report outlining how farming could achieve Net Zero emissions by 2040. One solution mentioned in this report is improving land management and changing land use to capture more carbon in soil and vegetation.¹² These improvements should imply transitioning pasture land to the production of crops for human consumption (when suitable), especially high protein crops, for example via a Protein Aid Scheme, which has been suggested in a report from the Vegan Society.¹³ This scheme would offer financial support, access to land for new farmers and training to farmers who want to grow protein crops for human consumption.

Ireland's €3M Protein Aid Scheme introduced in 2015 is a good example of how such a programme could work in the UK. In Ireland, with this scheme protein crops are eligible for €250-280 per hectare, a support that - according to agricultural minister Simon Coveney - allows for a "more consistent supply of Irish grown protein". In 2015, this scheme led to a 300% increase in the production of protein crops. Like in the UK, Ireland also has areas with heavy soil, which limit the cultivation of protein crops. Nonetheless, this protein scheme has worked in Ireland and so it can also be successful in the UK. In general, production of protein crops could capture carbon, bring back nitrogen into the soil and decrease soil erosion.¹⁴

According to a 2019 report by the Harvard Law School, if all current cropland in the UK was repurposed to grow crops for human consumption we could "provide more than the recommended protein and calories for each person in the UK"¹⁵, a conclusion also DEFRA supports.¹⁶

In Scotland, 50% of the cereals grown are for livestock feed.¹⁷ However, this land could work perfectly to produce these or similar crops for human consumption, i.e. these farmers could easily shift from producing cereals for feed to producing cereals or other crops for humans. The Scottish Government has set aside

£62M for tree planting and £40M for the Agricultural Transformation Programme for a low-carbon, sustainable agriculture under which diversification and farm transformations could fall.¹⁸

Farm shifts away from animal farming towards plant-based crop production and diversification don't only help farmers increase their income nor reach net-zero emissions from agriculture. A long-term study from the School of Natural and Environmental Sciences at Newcastle University concluded that removal of grazing can also significantly increase wildlife, especially bird species richness.¹⁹

A farm worth mentioning as an example of how veganic organic agriculture can work in the UK is Tolhurst Organic. This farm produces around 120 tonnes of vegetables every year using stockfree methods and operating almost fully as a closed system. They don't need to import fertilizer nor plants produced on other farms, which reduces energy inputs. Their energy usage mainly comes from the fuel for their machinery, tractors and delivery vehicles totalling about 2,030 litres or 5 litres per family they supply per year. As far as electricity is concerned, they use about 6,400 units per year, about the same as the average household. They estimate their yearly carbon footprint to be 8 tonnes, which equals the footprint of the average house in the UK. Compared with conventional produce found in most grocery stores, Tolhurst Organic is 90% more efficient.²⁰

On top of all the positive environmental outcomes listed above, transitioning to plant-based agriculture can also benefit society in general. Research from Oxford University concluded that eating meat no more than three times a week would prevent 31,000 deaths from heart disease, 9,000 deaths from cancer and 5,000 deaths from strokes each year. And that saves our precious NHS £1.2B each year.²¹ Furthermore, if we stopped eating animal products altogether tens of thousands of more lives would be saved, as well as millions of pounds for the NHS. Not to mention the billion land animals and billions of marine animals who are killed each year for the animal products we eat in the UK.

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