



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt. Hon. Mark Spencer MP
Minister of State for Food, Farming and Fisheries

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

T: +44 (0) 3459 335577

E: correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk

W: gov.uk/defra

Sir Robert Goodwill
Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee,
House of Commons,
London, SW1A 0AA

15 March 2023

Dear Sir Robert Goodwill,

At the oral session I attended on 24th January as part of your inquiry into Food Security, I said that I would write back to the committee on the following points:

1. Whether DEFRA will commit to publishing the UK food security report annually.

Answer: We are committed to publishing the report every three years and have no plans to increase their regularity. The UK Agriculture Market Monitoring Group monitors UK agricultural markets including price, supply, inputs, trade and recent developments on an on-going basis, and we engage closely with industry on both immediate and longer-term issues.

2. Whether the Prime Minister will personally chair a food security summit at No. 10 Downing Street and, if so, when?

Answer: We will organise a summit on food security later this year. More details will be confirmed in due course.

3. What Defra is doing to tackle retailers making excess profits during a cost-of-living crisis.

Answer: The financial accounts of the six largest UK grocery retailers (Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Aldi, Morrisons, and Lidl) for the 2020/21 accounting year indicate that all six retailers experienced a decline in underlying profit margins during that period. Publication of the annual financial accounts for the major supermarkets covering all of 2022 should therefore provide a more detailed picture for an assessment of profit levels pre-pandemic and post-pandemic. Profit levels will be influenced not only by the passing on of energy and food supply-chain costs, but also by other factors such as the percentage of a supermarkets sales which come from higher-margin non-food products, the extent to which it might also own stores in other countries, and the number of people it employs.

4. What is the timing for the publication of the land use framework that will reflect Defra's objectives for English Agriculture, the environment and net zero?

Answer: In the Government Food Strategy, we committed to publish a Land Use Framework for England in 2023. The Framework will help to inform how we manage trade-offs and will support the delivery of resilient, multifunctional landscapes, which will be dependent on the local context and needs.

5. Whether the Departments for Education and Work and Pensions will undertake a cost-benefit analysis of providing universal free school meals and of providing free school meals to all children in a household claiming universal credit, so we can see an exact cost-benefit analysis of both those options.

Answer: Increasing the threshold to all pupils in households in receipt of Universal Credit would increase the number of pupils eligible for FSM to around 50% of all pupils, some in households with incomes exceeding £40,000 per year. Funding for this expansion, including knock-on costs for funding based on FSM-eligibility, would quickly run into billions of pounds.

Whilst the Department for Education thinks it is right that provision is aimed at supporting the most disadvantaged, we will continue to keep all free school meal eligibility under review, to ensure that these meals are supporting those who most need them.

I trust that these responses answer any outstanding questions and I look forward to meeting you again in the future.

Yours sincerely,



Rt. Hon. Mark Spencer MP