



16 December 2020

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP  
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Seacole Building, 2 Marsham Street  
London, SW1P 4D

Dear George,

### **UK-EU agrifood trade**

This morning my Committee held a roundtable with representatives from the UK's agrifood sector, discussing their concerns about exporting their produce to the EU from 1 January. I strongly encourage you to watch the session: it was extremely instructive.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Preparedness*

The main message we heard from our witnesses was that the Government is not ready for 1 January, which means that businesses can't be ready either. They don't know what rules will apply, and where guidance has been published it's sometimes contradictory. Without clear, coordinated information from Government it is impossible for them to adjust their practices, which will mean that from 1 January their produce may not be picked up by hauliers in the first place, might be turned around at the border, or, in the worst case, could spoil in vans because of the border delays arising.

#### *Grace period*

In light of this, our witnesses were united in calling for a grace period, lasting at least two months but preferably six, during which all of the new systems would be functioning and industry would have complete clarity on the rules, but nothing would be enforced, so that businesses have time to adjust and the systems can be tested. Given that the Government's negotiations have left the industry with a mere two weeks to prepare at best, this seems like a proportionate request.

#### *Equivalence and listing*

They also highlighted the need for equivalence or listing. These are not new issues – my Committee first raised equivalence in its 2017 report *Brexit: agriculture*,<sup>2</sup> and raised the matter of listing with your Department before one of the previous 'no deal' deadlines –

---

<sup>1</sup> The session is available here: <https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/240a0ee7-9a9d-484a-9465-24da3e4dea29>

<sup>2</sup> Available here: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201617/ldselect/ldcom/169/169.pdf>

which makes it all the more regrettable that they have not yet been resolved. If the EU does not recognise UK equivalence in agrifood matters, the administrative and practical burden for industry is immense. Indeed, unless the UK secures a listing as a third country which can export live animals and animal products to the EU, some of the sectors we spoke with will have the majority of their export market removed overnight. We are aware that these matters are to some extent out of your hands as they are within the EU's gift, but you must be aware of how critical they are to the industry. We hope that you are offering to the EU the necessary assurances.

#### *Export health certificates*

Our witnesses were deeply concerned about the new export health certificate requirements, and the reliance on vets for the process to work. For some sectors and some businesses, the number of certificates needed will increase tenfold. As I'm sure you're aware, there are not enough qualified vets in the UK to cope with that scale of demand; and any attempt to do so risks reducing the vets available to keep animals healthy. Agreement on phytosanitary equivalence with the EU would allow agrifood sites to complete their own certificates, helping to reduce their demand; an electronic system for phytosanitary certificates would also be a significant help to industry. One way or another, Government needs to find a different solution, and quickly.

#### *Tariffs*

Even aside from general alarm at the level of tariffs that would apply to their products in the event the Government does not reach a free trade agreement with the EU, some of our witnesses told us that they are unsure exactly what tariffs would apply in that scenario. We urge you to resolve this uncertainty as soon as possible.

#### *Workforce*

Our witnesses also raised concerns around workforce availability. In addition to the shortage of vets discussed above, some sectors are reliant on a seasonal workforce which usually travels from the EU, while others based in particularly rural areas don't have the local workforce to draw on to fill the new roles. Again, this is not a new issue,<sup>3</sup> but it hasn't yet been adequately addressed.

The representatives we spoke to are keen to make the new arrangements work. They have been heeding the Government's warning to prepare for changes. But their preparation alone is not enough: they need the Government to explain exactly what those changes will be, and to provide the support that farmers and businesses need.

My Committee will return to these issues in the new year, but in the meantime I would be grateful for a response to each of the points above within 10 working days. Perhaps more to the point, my whole Committee also hope to see Government action on each point within that time.

I am copying this letter to the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; and the Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, Secretary of State for International Trade.

---

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 6 of our *Brexit: agriculture* report:  
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201617/ldselect/ldcom/169/169.pdf>

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robn'.

Lord Teverson  
Chair of the EU Environment Sub-Committee