



**Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs
Committee**

Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
London
By email

23 April 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

Work of the Department hearing on 26 March

We are writing to thank you and the Permanent Secretary for appearing before the Committee on 26 March. There are a number of points on which you offered to write to my Committee, and others where we would like to request further information. These are set out below.

Given my Committee's recent evidence sessions on flooding preparedness and veterinary shortages, I will write to you separately on points relating to those subjects raised during our hearing in due course.

Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) scheme

The SFI scheme has now received over 15,500 applications. Defra has previously committed to providing this Committee with quarterly updates on applications to the SFI, but this commitment has not yet been fulfilled.

We would be grateful for this commitment to be met, and for the information provided to us to include data on the diversity of farm types, including size and location, the proportion of applications that have been made for tenanted land, and any other analysis that has been conducted on take-up of the ELM schemes.

We are happy for you to provide the first of these updates in your response to this letter.

House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

efracom@parliament.uk
020 7219 1119
Social: @CommonsEFRA
www.parliament.uk/efracom

Avian influenza

The Department has recently announced that all birdkeepers in the UK will be required to join a register. We would be grateful if you could confirm:

- When the Department expects legislation to be implemented in terms of flock owners registering with the database?
- What assessment the Department has made on how these measures will enable it to effectively tackle diseases including avian influenza and Newcastle disease?

We would also be grateful for an update regarding development of a vaccination strategy for avian influenza, as discussed in the recent hearing.

The Food Security Index

In his speech at the National Farming Union (NFU) conference in February, the Prime Minister committed to placing publication of the annual Food Security Index on a statutory footing. Could you please confirm when this will occur, noting the limited time available in this Parliament, and the key data and analysis the Department plans to use to inform the Index.

Food allergy labelling in restaurants

My Committee raised the issue of food allergy labelling in restaurants. You stated this would be discussed with the relevant Minister from the Department of Health and Social Care, and a fuller response would be provided on the progress of Owen's Law. We would be grateful for an update on this important matter in response to this letter.

Changes to the minimum salary threshold for a skilled worker visa

My Committee raised concerns around changes to the minimum salary threshold for prospective overseas employees to be allowed into the UK, and the potential impact on recruitment and retention for key sectors such as public health, meat hygiene, and companion and farm animal practice. We highlighted that under the skilled worker visa system, the occupation specific thresholds are raised to the median salary threshold, which for a vet working full time would equate to £48,100. Could you confirm in your response when and how the Government will reexamine salary thresholds on a case-by-case basis.

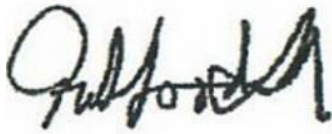
Bathing water testing

We raised concerns about sewage alerts, and monitoring and testing of bathing waters, and welcome that during our session the Department noted it is "bringing more transparency and more data through" on these issues. We would be grateful if the Department could set out:

- The steps the Government is taking to ensure that alerts are consistent, accurate and driven by scientific analysis?
- The plans in place to increase testing and monitoring of our bathing waters, particularly linked to storm overflows, so that individuals can be provided with more certainty about safety to enter?

We would appreciate a response to this letter no later than 17 May, 2024.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rt Hon Sir Robert Goodwill', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Sir Robert Goodwill MP
Chair, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee