



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF
T: +44 (0) 3459 335577
E: correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk
W: gov.uk/defra

Alistair Carmichael MP
Chair, Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Committee
Committee Office
House of Commons
SW1A 0AA

18 June 2025

Dear Alistair,

Firstly, thank you for inviting me to appear before the Committee to discuss the work of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and I am happy to provide the following responses to the queries in your letter of 5 June.

UK- EU SPS deal

Q1. Is the Department considering any form of compensation for businesses and local authorities that have invested significant sums in border control posts and control points?

The SPS Agreement is still under negotiation, so the precise role of existing border posts will depend on the final terms agreed. However, our aim is to ensure new arrangements support smooth trade while maintaining high standards and biosecurity

We will work closely with Competent Authorities, port operators and businesses across the United Kingdom throughout the process to help ensure the transition to these new arrangements is as clear and seamless as possible.

Q2. Could you please clarify when you expect an SPS agreement establishing a 'Common SPS Area' to be concluded, when border restrictions on trade with the EU will be lifted, and when farmers and food producers can expect to see the tangible benefits of the agreement?

Our aim is to start the detailed negotiations as soon as possible, as we want to see businesses benefit from removing barriers to trade.

Q3. What implications would immediate alignment with EU rules have for policy areas where the UK has intentionally diverged since leaving the EU- not only precision breeding, but also animal welfare and other areas of regulatory difference?

The EU have accepted there will need to be a number of areas where we need to retain our own rules. The details of these are subject to negotiation, but we have been clear about the importance of being able to set high animal welfare standards, support public health, and support the use of new and innovative technologies.

Global Trade

Q4. We would welcome further clarification on how a potential SPS agreement with the EU might affect the UK's ability to negotiate, implement, or uphold existing and future trade agreements-particularly in relation to the SPS Chapter proposed as part of the UK-India FTA.

We remain committed to our international obligations. While the SPS Agreement involves having consistent standards with the EU in areas where it makes sense in our national interest, it allows sufficient flexibility to pursue Free Trade Agreements with other countries, such as the UK's recent trade agreement with India.

Q5. Could you provide us details of the assessment made regarding the compatibility of recent and proposed trade deals-specifically with the US and India-with existing UK regulations on UK food safety or animal welfare standards?

We have agreed an ambitious and comprehensive free trade agreement with India that is expected to increase bilateral trade by £25.5 billion each and every year in the long run, with new opportunities for the agri-food sector including products such as whisky, gin, soft drinks, chocolate and salmon.

We have also agreed a landmark economic deal with the US which will protect jobs in the automotive, steel, aluminium, pharmaceutical and aerospace sectors - sectors that employ over 320,000 people across the UK and for the first time ever, this deal will also open up dedicated access for UK beef farmers to the US market.

Nothing in either of these agreements changes the UK's SPS regime or in any way compromises the UK's high food standards. Any agricultural imports from the US or from India will have to meet the UK's high food standards.

In the comprehensive free trade agreement with India, we have also secured commitments to cooperate on animal welfare, a first for India in a trade agreement. No access was given to India on pork, chicken or eggs in line with our commitments to farmers. The Trade and Agriculture Committee will consider the free trade agreement under the Section 42 reporting process.

Q6. What mechanisms will prevent the importation of hormone-treated beef from the US, and who will bear the costs of screening and enforcement?

All beef imports into the UK, including those via the quota agreed with the US, must comply with all of the UK's import requirements, including SPS rules. That means that hormone treated beef will remain banned in the UK and will not be permitted under the economic deal with the US.

The UK already imports hormone free beef from the US through our current systems, and we have systems and checks in place. Nothing has changed in this agreement with regards to how HMG controls hormone-treated beef. Each consignment of beef must have an export health certificate, certified by a veterinarian as compliant with British legislation, including the ban on hormone-treated beef. There are regular checks at the UK border, including taking samples of products to look for any contaminants and drug residues.

Q7. What steps is the Government taking to ensure that substances such as banned pesticides do not enter the UK food system, especially when their use may give

overseas producers a competitive advantage over domestic growers at the expense of environmental and public health standards?

All food placed on the GB market must meet our Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) for pesticides. Whether produce has been treated with a pesticide in GB or in another country, the same consumer safety criteria apply.

If a pesticide active substance is withdrawn from GB use or GB approval is not renewed, the respective GB MRLs will be reviewed. Often this means the MRLs will be adjusted down to the Limit of Detection (0.01mg/kg).

Q8. Are current border testing systems equipped to reliably detect all banned pesticide residues, regardless of when or how they were applied during the production process?

Compliance with pesticide MRLs is monitored through a programme of official testing for residues in food and drink. This provides assurance that food on the UK market complies with our rules and is safe to eat. It is led by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Pesticide residue checks are typically carried out both at the border through the Port Health Authority, and post import, so that imported food faces the same checks as our domestic produce. The official testing programme, led by HSE, involves taking samples of food at supply and retail points. The sampling is risk-based and places a greater emphasis on imported food. Current compliance rates are high, and all results are published online.

Q9. When does the Government expect UK agriculture - and lamb producers in particular - to begin seeing tangible economic benefits from the UK-India agreement?

The comprehensive free trade agreement with India unlocks opportunities for UK agri-food exporters in one of the world's fastest growing markets. UK producers of whisky, gin, salmon, chocolate, biscuits, soft drinks, among others, will benefit from lower tariffs under the agreement. Tariffs on UK lamb will be eliminated by India as soon as the agreement comes into force.

The Government will continue to work with UK producers and exporters to help them realise the benefits of this deal. We have a network of agri-food attachés around the world, including in India, who help farmers access overseas markets.

I trust this response adequately addresses the Committee's concerns and queries.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Steve Reed". Below the signature is a horizontal line.

Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP