

Pilgrim House
Old Ford Road
Aberdeen
AB11 5RL

Alistair Carmichael MP
Chair of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

18 July 2025

Dear Alistair

SPS-VET AGREEMENT

It was a pleasure to see you at the launch of Our Food 2024 in Westminster this week, when you mentioned your meeting with our Chief Executive Geoff Ogle. Thank you very much for agreeing to meet with Geoff, and on the back of that meeting I thought it might be useful to write to you with further reflections from my perspective as FSS Chair.

While FSS is an independent body and directly accountable to the Scottish Parliament I am very conscious of the political dynamics, the sensitivities and challenges in delivering the SPS agreement. Nonetheless, we also have a legal responsibility to ensure that food and feed is safe and that we protect the interests of consumers. In our discussions, FSS Board believe there is much to be gained from an SPS agreement as it has the potential to make a significant difference to food and drink businesses in Scotland and will enable a more efficient, less costly means of exporting to the EU. All of that is a welcome development. However, it is important that there is recognition that we must also ensure that we have an effective regulatory framework underpinning the agreement in order to provide adequate assurance to not only our own population but also the EU (and indeed other countries we export to).

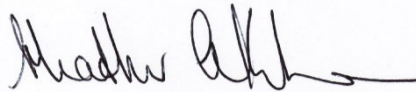
As you know, food and drink is fully devolved and I therefore wanted to reinforce from our perspective the importance of ensuring that there is an effective four countries approach and engagement. Bringing the agreement into effect - and the ambitious timescales we are hearing - will have a significant resource impact on FSS given the amount of legislative work that rests with us and indeed our counterparts in the other administrations. I have no hesitation in saying our relationship with Defra is generally positive but when under pressure, there is a risk going forward that engagement and

collaboration is sacrificed because of timescales. It was clear from your speech at the FDF event, that EFRA will do what it can to support the UK Government in its ambition to deliver the SPS agreement, but it is also important that collaboration is effective with the devolved administrations too.

As the Chair of FSS, I have no problem in affirming our commitment to working collaboratively, and I would hope that our generally positive relations can be maintained in what is going to be quite challenging task. There is much to sort out before we get into the detail, but I would hope we can establish and build an effective four countries approach from the “get go” on SPS given the degree of shared interest in making this a success.

A copy of this letter goes to Angus Robertson, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Mairi Gougeon Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Islands, Jenni Minto, Ministers for Public Health and Women’s Health and Geoff Ogle FSS CEO.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heather Kelman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heather Kelman
Chair