



**Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs
Committee**

Tuesday, 17 March 2026

Emma Reynolds MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
London
By email

Subject: Implications of the Iran conflict for UK food security and rural communities

Dear Emma,

The repercussions of the conflict in Iran are having a significant impact on global supply chains. We are already seeing increases in the cost of key commodities, particularly oil and gas. With around one-third of global fertiliser supplies transiting the Strait of Hormuz, fertiliser prices are also rising. In addition, reduced shipping volumes through the Red Sea and the diversion of vessels around the Cape of Good Hope are placing further pressures on transport efficiency and costs.

Given these developments, we seek to understand how Defra is assessing and mitigating the impact of these disruptions on areas within your responsibility.

Food security

Our predecessor Committee's [Food Security report of 2023](#) noted that the UK demonstrated resilience in its food supply during recent global shocks, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. While this resilience is reassuring, we remain concerned that the current crisis, affecting global supply chains in different ways, may present new risks to UK food security.

Even where supplies remain stable, increased costs are likely to feed through into food price inflation. As our predecessors highlighted, food security must also include ensuring that households have access to healthy and affordable food. There is particular concern that any price rises triggered by the conflict may not be temporary, and that elevated prices could persist even after hostilities end. This would disproportionately affect low-income households already struggling with high costs.

We would therefore be grateful for answers to the following questions:

- What assessment has the Department made of the risks to UK food supply chains arising from increased fertiliser, fuel, and shipping costs, and what immediate actions are being taken to mitigate these risks?
- What specific steps is the Government taking, both within Defra and across departments, to support low-income households who may face food price increases as a result of the conflict's impact on global supply chains?
- What mechanisms does the Government intend to use to prevent any temporary conflict-related price pressures from becoming embedded in long-term UK food prices once global conditions normalise?

Impact on those living and working in rural areas

We are concerned that rural communities may be disproportionately affected by the economic shocks arising from the conflict. Reports suggest that farmers may be forced to scale back production as the cost of heating, electricity, red diesel and fertiliser rises. The NFU has also warned that domestic production cost increases could fuel further food price inflation. Rising inflation could in turn delay interest-rate reductions, placing additional pressure on businesses already operating on tight margins, including farmers and food processors, by keeping borrowing costs elevated for longer. This is particularly troubling as it is the first time in recent years that farmers in England have faced economic uncertainty of this scale without the Basic Payment Scheme as a safety net.

We have also received reports from across the UK that off-grid rural households reliant on heating oil are experiencing substantial cost increases, with the price of refilling oil tanks having doubled since the start of the conflict. These developments come at a time when many households had only recently begun to see some easing in cost-of-living pressures. We welcome the Government's recent announcement of £50 million to support low-income families who heat their homes with oil; however, we remain concerned that this funding is unlikely to be sufficient to address the scale of the additional costs faced by off-grid rural households as a result of this issue.

In light of these concerns, could you outline:

- What contingency plans does the Department have in place to support farmers facing increased input costs, particularly fertiliser and red diesel, and is additional financial or regulatory support under consideration, given that the Basic Payment Scheme is no longer available?
- What assessment has the Government made of the impact of rising oil and fuel prices on off-grid rural households, and what additional measures, beyond the

recently announced £50 million support fund for low-income families, are being developed to protect these households from disproportionate cost increases?

I would be grateful for your responses to the questions outlined above by Wednesday 1 April.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Alistair Carmichael." The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Rt Hon Mr Alistair Carmichael MP
Chair, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee