



Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

Baroness Hayman of Ullock
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

T: +44 (0) 3459 335577
E: correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk
W: gov.uk/defra

Baroness Sheehan

Environment and Climate Change Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

9th March 2026

Dear Shaista,

I am writing to provide an update on the Government's ongoing negotiations with the European Union on a new UK-EU Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement. This concerns the preparatory work underway to ensure that businesses across the agrifood sector are ready for the changes expected to take effect from mid-2027.

The EU remains the UK's largest trading partner for food and agricultural products. However, current trading arrangements continue to present significant friction for businesses – particularly small and medium sized enterprises – due to duplicated certification requirements, border checks, and the administrative costs these impose.

The agreement under negotiation is designed to address these issues directly. It will make the movement of plants, animals, food, and related goods easier, more predictable and considerably less costly. It will strengthen supply chains and reopen access to certain EU markets, including for goods such as seed potatoes, particular shellfish products and certain meat preparations, which have faced longstanding export barriers. This will be done while maintaining high standards across animal health, plant health, and food safety.

Once negotiations conclude, we want businesses to benefit from the deal as soon as possible. We are aiming for business readiness by mid-2027.

Businesses of course need clarity, time, and support to prepare. The agreement will require alignment with relevant elements of EU SPS legislation, and this may necessitate operational changes for businesses whether or not they currently export to the EU. These changes could include adjustments to processing methods, certification and labelling requirements, IT systems, and other aspects of compliance and assurance. We are committed to providing timely, sector-specific guidance as soon as negotiations allow.

To that end, we are today publishing details on which legislation is in scope of the agreement, the broad changes this will entail, and the sectors that will therefore be impacted. We are also stating clearly our ambition for businesses to be able to benefit from the deal in mid-2027.

We know some sectors will need more time and support to prepare than others. That is why we are also launching a Call for Information so businesses can tell us what help they

need. We will use that information to co-design and deliver support and guidance with businesses through to mid-2027. This will be done in conjunction with a new stakeholder advisory board.

In the immediate term, we are encouraging businesses to take simple preparatory steps, such as engaging with their trade associations, familiarising themselves with the broad areas of expected alignment, and signing up for Defra email alerts. These early actions will support a smoother transition and help businesses take full advantage of the expected opportunities from the agreement.

We recognise your Committee's interest in ensuring that major policy changes of this kind are delivered transparently, proportionately, and with due regard for the impacts on producers, processors, retailers and consumers.

We will of course continue to keep you updated as further milestones are reached – including for example as legislation to underpin the deal progresses, and as negotiations look to conclude over the summer.

Finally, you may wish to be aware that in addition to writing to you, the Secretary of State is making a Written Statement to ensure all parliamentarians are kept up to date. I will also be hosting a drop-in session for Peers on Wednesday 11th March from 16:00-17:00 in Committee Room 3. You would of course be very welcome to join.

Thank you for your continued scrutiny and engagement on this agenda.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suella Brabman', written in a cursive style.

BARONESS HAYMAN OF ULLOCK

MINISTER FOR BIOSECURITY, BORDERS AND ANIMAL WELFARE