



Wales Office
Swyddfa Cymru

Ref: 041SOS26

Rt Hon Stephen Kinnock MP
Secretary of State for Wales
Ysgrifennydd Gwladol Cymru

E: Correspondence@ukgovwales.gov.uk

Ruth Jones MP

Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee
House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
SW1A 0AA

7 September 2026

Dear Ruth,

Thank you for your letter of 21 July 2026 regarding contaminated land, food produce and transparency with the public in Wales. Food safety is an important issue, particularly where there may be implications for children's health, and I welcome the work being undertaken to examine these matters. Please see the responses to issues raised in your letter set out in the paragraphs below.

Testing

- 1. Does the UK Government intend to establish a coordinated four-nation approach to testing children in areas with historical industry such as metal mines? If so, please set out how you intend to work with Welsh Government to establish a standardised approach.**

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) works closely with the Devolved Governments on a range of health protection matters, including environmental health issues. However, arrangements for testing children for lead exposure are a devolved responsibility. The UKHSA is not currently aware of any plans to establish a UK-wide, four-nation approach to testing children for lead exposure in areas with a history of industrial activity such as metal mining.

The UK Government will continue to engage with the Welsh Government and other Devolved Governments on health protection matters where appropriate, while respecting devolved responsibilities in this area.



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Food Produce

2. Why is such a small amount of food tested every year, and why for example, do we not have a standardised lead threshold for testing eggs?

Responsibility for food safety in Wales is devolved to the Welsh Government. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is a non-ministerial government department responsible for protecting public health in relation to food in Wales. It is responsible for developing food and feed safety, hygiene policy and providing independent advice to Welsh Ministers. The FSA also monitors developments in science and technology, commissions research, and provides surveillance and regulatory oversight.

Lead is present naturally in the environment, which means that food cannot be kept completely free of lead. Regulatory maximum levels have been established for the foods that contribute most to dietary lead exposure and are regularly reviewed to ensure they remain appropriate for protecting public health. Maximum levels are not set for every food. Where no specific maximum level exists, general food law still requires that food placed on the market must be safe. There is currently no specific maximum level for lead in eggs, but action can still be taken where there are concerns about food safety.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is currently undertaking work to improve the evidence base on lead in food. This includes a survey of lead levels in food produced in areas with elevated geochemical lead associated with historical mining activity. The work will help improve understanding of potential consumer exposure to lead from locally produced foods and inform any future consideration of risk management measures. Current evidence indicates that exposure can vary significantly depending on local environmental conditions and production practices.

3. What support can the UK Government offer to farmers if their food produce or livestock is at risk of contamination?

As noted above, food safety is devolved. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) in Wales is responsible for developing policies, or assisting the development of policies, relating to food and feed hygiene and safety, food standards and composition and other related consumers interests such as food labelling. It does this through independent advice to Welsh Ministers, Welsh Government officials, and through advice, information or assistance to any public authority such as local authorities.

Food businesses, including farmers, are responsible for ensuring that food placed on the market is safe and compliant with relevant legal requirements. Where



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contamination risks are identified, relevant government bodies and regulators may provide advice or take regulatory action, depending on the circumstances.

In relation to lead, the FSA has previously worked with the National Farmers' Union to provide guidance aimed at reducing lead contamination in livestock and limiting the entry of lead into the food chain. Existing advice highlights the importance of managing known sources of contamination and taking appropriate mitigation measures where risks are identified.

Responsibility for contaminated land and remediation sits with the relevant environmental and local authority bodies in Wales rather than the FSA. Where contamination is linked to historic mining activity, support and regulatory action may involve local authorities, environmental regulators, and the Welsh Government, depending on the circumstances. The FSA's role is to assess food safety risks and provide evidence-based advice to protect consumers.

Transparency with the Public

4. Does the Government have any plans to undertake joint work with the Welsh Government to establish a thorough, but proportionate, communication strategy with these communities?

The public require access to clear, credible, and accessible information in order to make informed decisions about metal mine pollution. Through the Wales Metal Mines Programme, a Welsh Government-funded initiative jointly delivered by the Mining Remediation Authority and Natural Resources Wales, stakeholder and community engagement provides important opportunities for the public to ask questions, challenge evidence, and both contribute and learn from local knowledge. Through mechanisms such as public meetings and site visits, early and ongoing engagement helps to build understanding and awareness. It also enables effective signposting to those organisations best placed to provide the most relevant and authoritative information.

Individuals and communities affected by metal mine pollution can be supported through a combination of environmental remediation, public health measures, and community engagement. At a practical level, this includes reducing exposure by remediating contaminated water and land, monitoring environmental quality, and providing clear public advice on risks linked to food, water and land use. This requires a multi-agency approach, recognising organisations with differing relevant statutory remits, including local authorities.

The aim of the Wales Metal Mines Programme is to reduce the water pollution from metal mine sites in line with Welsh Government and Natural Resource Wales's wider



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aim to minimise pollution. This work includes mine water treatment schemes and diffuse pollution measures, including surface water management and erosion controls. Through the Programme, the Mining Remediation Authority undertakes extensive community engagement which provides important opportunities for individuals or communities to ask questions, challenge evidence, and both contribute and learn from local knowledge. It also enables effective signposting to those organisations best placed to provide the most relevant and authoritative information e.g. local authorities for contaminated land matters.

I welcome the Committee's continued scrutiny of these issues and the contribution this makes to improving our understanding of the challenges faced by affected communities. Should you have any further questions, my office would be pleased to assist.

Yours sincerely,

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