



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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From the Chair of the Committee

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
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14 September 2021

Home Secretary

EFRA Committee inquiry into labour shortages in the food and farming sector

I am writing to express my Committee's deep concern about the labour shortages currently affecting the food and farming sector, and to urgently request information about the steps your department is taking to address the critical issues of food supply and security.

We have noted with alarm reports of a 100,000-person shortfall of HGV drivers, and of livestock remaining on farms due to labour shortages in the meat processing industry. The British Poultry Council has informed us that this issue has led to the "biggest ever cutback in UK poultry meat production", and their member businesses have been forced to cut back weekly chicken production by 5 to 10 per cent. This has become visible in a lack of availability of certain products which in some cases has caused food outlets to close. This is an additional burden for the hospitality sector which is already struggling with labour shortages.

The Committee's December 2020 Report, "The UK's new immigration policy and the food supply chain", flagged concerns about the availability of sufficient overseas labour across all skill groups. In its April 2021 response, the Government said that "Defra and the Home Office have been working closely with other government departments and industry organisations to scrutinise all relevant data which helps us better understand the impacts of these changes in real time", work which would "inform any future policy decisions in this area".

We therefore request that you update us on any current or planned steps to alleviate the problems being faced by businesses in the food supply chain at your earliest convenience. If these issues persist, we are concerned that risks to the availability of some foodstuffs and to stable food prices might crystallise further, and the viability of some businesses could come into question. We will examine any changes to policy as part of our new Inquiry, "Labour shortages in the food and farming sector". We would like to invite you to give evidence before the turn of the year to discuss these important issues.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.



Yours Sincerely

Neil Parish MP
Chair of the Committee