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Sir Robert Goodwill MP  
Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
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6 September 2023

Dear Sir Robert,

## **EFRA Committee Enquiry – Soil Health**

I would like to thank you and the other members of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee for your time on 18 July 2023. I am grateful to the Committee for their interest in the importance of healthy, resilient soil. As agreed at our evidence session I am following up on the two issues I committed to update you on.

### **Environmental Land Management Schemes Uptake**

We have high uptake in our Countryside Stewardship (CS) and Environmental Stewardship (the predecessor to CS) schemes, with approximately 40,000 agreements currently live. These cover roughly 34% of agricultural land in England, and there are 94% more CS agreements now than there were in January 2020.

We are confident that uptake levels across our schemes will increase further as they continue to be rolled out and new offers are introduced. Examples of the uptake of some of the new schemes we have rolled out include:

- The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) launched in June 2022 and is being rolled out to farmers incrementally, with the full offer being in place by the start of 2025. As of 17 August 2023, 3,285 agreements are live, covering a total hectareage of 693,379. We also currently have 825 farmers involved in our SFI Pilot and 1,892 live Annual Health and Welfare Review agreements.
- Applications for SFI have been temporarily closed so we can get the new and significantly expanded SFI 23 offer in place. We will be introducing 23 new actions and will shortly start accepting applications in a controlled rollout. We are confident that uptake of the scheme will increase further once the SFI 23 offer is made available to farmers.

- Round one of Landscape Recovery selected 22 projects and, collectively, these cover over 40,000 hectares. Round two opened for applications in May 2023 and will take on up to a further 25 projects, depending on the quality of applications. Land managers and landowners have until 21 September 2023 to apply for round two of the scheme.
- At the end of year two, the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme included 2,500 projects (an increase of 1,500 since the end of its first year), supporting approximately 887,000 hectares. The programme can work alongside other schemes offered by Defra, including on the same areas of land where the activity is different.
- In our England Woodland Creation Offer, there are currently 489 live agreements, covering a total area of 3,650 hectares, which will help us meet the government's commitment to at least treble tree planting rates in England by the end of this parliament.

By 2028, we plan to increase the number of agreements in our schemes to 70,000, covering 70% of farmed land and 70% of all farms, so that farmers and land managers can collectively support delivery of our ambitious targets for the environment and climate, alongside food production.

### **Consistency in Household and Business Recycling in England Consultation**

Our Environmental Improvement Plan published earlier this year outlined how we will halve 'residual' waste (excluding major mineral waste) produced per person by 2042. Consistency in recycling for households and businesses, particularly separate food waste collections, is a key measure for helping to achieve this.

The government is committed to implementing consistent recycling for households and businesses. We intend to publish the government response to our 2021 consultation on consistent recycling for households and businesses shortly, which will confirm next steps for implementing the changes. Further updates will be published on the consultation page ([www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consistency-in-household-and-business-recycling-in-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consistency-in-household-and-business-recycling-in-england)).

Yours sincerely,



**Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP**

Submitted September 2023