

Written evidence submitted by McDonald's (ECL0030)

**Inquiry into Education and Careers in Land-based
Sectors**

November 2023

Introduction

McDonald's UK welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry on Education and Careers in Land-based Sectors. We share the Committee's ambition to facilitate new entrants into land-based industries including people from non-rural backgrounds.

At McDonald's, we are proud of our long history of supporting agriculture in the UK, and we know first-hand the challenges our farmers and suppliers face. Today, our direct spend with UK suppliers is over £1 billion each year, and we wouldn't be able to serve our customers the food they love without the quality, sustainable ingredients that we source from more than 23,000 British and Irish farmers.

1. How can the understanding and awareness of career opportunities in land-based sectors be improved among children and young adults?

In 2021, as part of our ongoing commitment to fostering interest in land-based career sectors among young adults, McDonald's UK undertook a comprehensive survey involving over 1,000 individuals aged 15 to 25 in the UK. The objective was to gain insights into their perceptions of the industry and identify barriers to their entry. Our research showed that 60% of respondents are not even considering a career in agriculture due to negative perceptions. Many expressed doubts about possessing the requisite skills or anticipated job satisfaction, while a significant 64% cited the absence of role models as a pivotal deterrent.

Expanding on our commitment, in 2022, we conducted supplementary research aimed at discerning the strategies that farmers themselves believe will be instrumental in enticing more young people into the industry. The key findings of this research underscore the importance of demonstrating the significance of farming to the country (52%), showcasing the work-life balance is no worse compared to other professions (43%), and highlighting the competitive salary and benefits associated with farming (41%).

Additionally, as part of our collaboration with LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) and the School of Sustainable Food and Farming (SSFF), we produced a report recommending next steps to raise awareness of sustainability in the agri-food industry for young-people. These recommendations include offering experiential learning opportunities to allow young people to experience and learn about sustainable agriculture first hand, including experiencing the supply chain.

3. What more can be done to facilitate new entrants, including those from non-rural backgrounds, into land-based sectors, including those considering a career change?

With two-thirds (66%) of farmers saying the climate emergency is changing the way they farm and a further fifth (22%) needing an injection of new skills to improve their technical know-how, McDonald's is aiming to show young people the variety of skills and jobs that are available and required within the industry.

As part of our Plan for Change, we set a goal to kickstart over 100 careers in food and farming for young people from diverse backgrounds. We recognise that industry-wide transformation must go further than this. In collaboration with LEAF, we have proposed tangible next steps to support people from all backgrounds entering the industry, even those lacking rural roots or familial farming heritage.

One of the key recommendations in the report involves the establishment of a National Competition tailored for 16-18-year-olds, offering multiple pathways for aspiring entrants to join the industry. These pathways would encompass apprenticeships, university programs, and alternative routes, ensuring accessibility for individuals without land ownership or prior family farming experience. This proposition builds upon the success of the LEAF National Competition for 14-16-year-olds, wherein, in 2022, a noteworthy 66% of finalists subsequently applied for or enrolled in land-based colleges or universities.

With a commitment to fostering inclusivity and a global outlook, LEAF recommends the amplifying of voices from around the world and the diverse communities that contribute to the UK's food supply chain. Additionally, our joint efforts emphasise engaging young individuals with varied dietary preferences to advocate for conscious consumerism and the adoption of sustainable food choices.

Furthermore, providing further educational opportunities to people with a strong interest in the farming sector is a priority at McDonald's. This is why we sponsor the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust, a charity organisation whose aim is to bring positive change to agriculture through the development of its future leaders. Through this partnership, students, without any requirement for formal education, have the opportunity to be sent overseas to learn from others and share their brilliant ideas when they return home. Since 1947, Nuffield has awarded scholarships to over 1,000 individuals across the food, farming, horticulture, and rural sectors, enabling them to explore topics they are passionate about.

As part of our partnership with Nuffield, we sponsored Dr Navaratnam Partheeban OBE's Nuffield Project from 2021-22, which focused on encouraging and supporting black and people of colour (BPOC) in agriculture. The objective of the project was to learn how we can understand the barriers and create solutions to encourage BPOC people to enter and thrive in the UK agricultural sector. The report draws on examples from the US recommending that the UK agriculture sector should actively celebrate differences in cultures and faith to highlight the social justice movement and history of BPOC people. Additionally, the report raises that acknowledging and accepting the past, creating positive opportunities for marginalised people, platforming and promoting BPOC people, and creating support networks and systems to help BPOC people be an equal part of the sector is key to making any programme a success.

6. What role should schools, colleges, universities, and local and central government play in promoting and supporting careers in land-based sectors?

We recognise that schools and education play a big role in supporting careers in land-based sectors. We also recognise the importance of raising awareness at school level of the agricultural sector and the career opportunities this path can offer. Organisations like LEAF do the important work of engaging, inspiring and motivating young people through experiential learning, to equip our future generations with balanced and informed insight into food production, farming and the environment.

But we recognise there is more that needs to be done. This is why, in 2021 McDonald's announced a unique partnership with Morrisons, National Farmers Union and Harper Adams University to launch the first School of Sustainable Food and Farming (SSFF) in the UK. The SSFF aims to educate, inspire and empower current and future farmers to achieve net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across the whole of agriculture in England and Wales by 2040, within a sustainable farming and food system.

For the first time, the School brings together recent research and learning on farming using sustainable methods. Based at Harper Adams University in Newport, the School's courses will be designed using the work on sustainable farming and food production by the University through this unique collaboration. The courses will be run by some of the UK's leading experts in agronomy, veterinary practice and nutrition.

7/8. How can more children, young people and adults be provided with opportunities to see the career opportunities in land-based sectors first-hand? Are there examples of initiatives doing this successfully (for example, through initiatives such as Open Farm Sunday) / Are there domestic or international examples of best practice in successfully promoting educational opportunities and careers in land-based sectors?

In line with our commitment to nurturing interest in land-based sectors among children, young people, and adults, McDonald's actively provides immersive opportunities through our Progressive Young Farmers Programme. This initiative grants students a unique chance to delve into the intricacies of McDonald's supply chain during their placement year. They follow the journey of products from the farms we collaborate with, all the way to our restaurants, and have the opportunity to work alongside a diverse array of suppliers, farmers, and stakeholders across the nation. Within this program, Progressive Young Farmers embark on specific projects that enable them to gain a comprehensive understanding of sustainability and technical efficiency within the supply chain, both in food processing and on the farm.

To mark 10 years of our Progressive Young Farmer programme last year, McDonald's launched a campaign to increase diversity within the industry. Working alongside famous faces including AJ Odudu and Hannah Jackson, the campaign challenged the misconceptions young people hold about careers in food and farming and called on the industry to do more to diversify its talent pool. While the last 10 years of the Progressive Young Farmer programme have helped more women enter the industry, McDonald's is going even further by launching its Young Talent Programme with a commitment to kick-start over 100 careers in food and farming for young people from diverse backgrounds by 2030.

Our collaboration with Harper Adams University has contributed to the development of many young farmers but has also highlighted new career pathways within the agricultural sector. Emily Ashworth, a notable example, grew up in North Yorkshire where her family operated a farm shop and an outdoor catering business, shared her perspective on her experience with McDonald's as a PYF. Speaking on her experience, Ashworth said, *"this placement has given me the chance to experience the various roles involved with beef production in the UK, all of which I have found fascinating. The scheme has introduced me to roles that I had never previously considered within the agricultural industry, and it makes me think that if more people get the chance to see even part of what I have, then how many new people would want to work in one of the many jobs that they would have not previously been aware of?"*