

From: Greg Hands MP <handsg@parliament.uk>

Sent: 22 July 2020 23:12

To: tracy@tracyworchester.org.uk

Subject: Message from Rt Hon Greg Hands MP (Case Ref: GH14612)

Dear Ms Worcester,

Thank you for contacting me about amendments to the Agriculture Bill.

The Agriculture Bill will allow ambitious new land management schemes to be introduced in England, based on the principle of public money for public goods. This means that farmers and land managers who protect our environment, improve animal welfare and produce high quality food in a more sustainable way can be rewarded. The Bill will help farmers to stay competitive, with measures to increase productivity and to invest in new technology. I am pleased that transparency in the supply chain will also be improved to help food producers strengthen their position and seek a fairer return from the marketplace.

The new Environmental Land Management (ELM) system will bring in a new era for farming, providing an income stream for farmers and land managers who protect and preserve our natural environment. For the first time, farmers and land managers will be able to decide for themselves how they can deliver environmental benefits from their businesses and their land, and how they integrate this into their food, timber and other commercial activities. Organic farmers will therefore be well placed to benefit from ELM due to the environmental benefits they produce, such as increased biodiversity and improved soil quality, which contribute to the delivery of these goals. The Bill will allow us to reward farmers who protect our environment, leaving the countryside in a cleaner, greener and healthier state for future generations.

On the topic of labelling, the Government has committed to a serious and rapid examination of what could be done in the UK market to promote high standards and high welfare goods. Any scheme could not be devised until we have completed the transition period and would need to recognise World Trade Organisation (WTO) obligations.

British consumers want high welfare produce, and if our trading partners want to break into the UK market, they should expect to meet those standards. The manifesto I stood on was clear that in all trade negotiations, our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards will not be compromised. The Government will stand firm in trade negotiations to ensure any deals live up to the values of our farmers and consumers.

I am pleased that all food coming into this country will be required to meet existing import requirements. At the end of the transition period, the Withdrawal Act will convert all EU standards into domestic law. This includes a ban on using artificial growth hormones in both domestic and imported products, and nothing apart from potable water may be used to clean chicken carcasses. Any changes to these standards would have to come before Parliament.

I am also pleased that the Government has agreed in principle to establish a Trade and Agriculture Commission. By forming this Commission, Ministers can ensure close engagement with the agriculture industry to help inform, shape and guide agricultural trade policy, so that this is recognised throughout our trade negotiations. Once the Commission has finished its work, it will produce a recommendatory report in line with its terms of reference that will be presented to Parliament by the Department for International Trade.

The Government is already engaging with the agricultural sector as part of its trade discussions, including the National Farmers' Union. My Ministerial colleagues share my determination to ensure our future trade agreements will deliver benefits for our brilliant farmers and food producers. I have attached a copy of the Secretary of State for International Trade's letter to the President of the National Farmers' Union outlining the formation of this Commission for your reference.

That said, I voted alongside the Government against new clauses one and two. The UK already imports food from countries such as Canada, South Africa and Japan through preferences in existing free trade agreements – none of these agreements require those countries to follow domestic UK production standards.

The amendments would have put up new trade barriers and prevented the Government from being able to agree fair and mutually beneficial trade deals. Indeed, forcing all our trading partners to produce to UK domestic standards would only result in fewer export opportunities for our own farmers. In addition, the amendments, if implemented, would have caused real challenges for developing countries and our Commonwealth partners, as for them it would be particularly difficult to align with UK domestic production standards.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Greg Hands

The Rt Hon Greg Hands MP | Member of Parliament for Chelsea and Fulham | Minister of State for Trade Policy

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