



Mr George Eustice
Ms Victoria Prentis
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
House of Commons,
London
SW1 0AA

19.05.20

Dear Mr Eustice,

Further to our previous letter to you dated 21.03.20 and your subsequent response, we have followed the progress of the Agriculture Bill through Parliament with much interest. We note that the amendments which were put forward for inclusion were not adopted. We understand that the Bill is not a trade agreement but a document that concentrates on sustainable food production to feed our country for the future, on the basis of public money for public good. When we finally withdraw from the EU at the end of this year, existing EU law preventing food imports from inferior production processes and animal welfare is due to be incorporated into UK law. Can you please confirm this law will be fully adopted by the UK Government, effectively slamming the door to hormone-treated beef imports onto our shores.

As previously mentioned, one of our main concerns at the moment is food security. Bearing in mind recent experience, it is a problem that the Government appears to be taking less seriously than we would like, or than is sensible. Mid pandemic, there are still food shortages in the supermarkets. Imagine a scenario where we have a situation which forces us to close our borders for any length of time. As you will be aware, in excess of 2000 trucks a day come in from Europe to feed our country; in less than ten days shelves would be empty of the majority of fresh food. We have seen the effects of panic buying - reason does not seem to come into decision making, and experiences from recent weeks are only likely to worsen the effect, which would also ensure a shortage of long life food – pasta, rice, flour, sugar. Never has home-grown and home-produced food been more important than it is now. It is vital that strong and stable frameworks are put in place to protect Britain's home producers, ensuring that we can meet a greater level of demand internally should it be required. We would be interested to hear how the Government intends to ensure future food security for our country in the event of a major incident such as Coronavirus.

We note with interest the provision contained within the new Agriculture Bill for a Government-led survey to assess food security. We understand that the Government are duty bound to provide an analysis of statistical data every five years to measure the country's level of food security. Do you agree that it would be sensible to carry out an objective baseline study as the Bill is introduced, thus allowing the performance of the Bill to be compared to a benchmark at its first five-year analysis? In this way, any potential food security issues which may arise can be identified, and corrective measures taken while the problems are in their infancy, rather than a further five years down the line. Whilst we appreciate everyone is very busy at the moment, both with Covid-19 and Brexit, the opportunity to carry out this baseline study is time-critical, and should not be delayed.

Please respond in due course, and we look forward to a meeting as soon as possible as we start to unwind lockdown.

Yours sincerely,

Neil Shand
Interim CEO
National Beef Association