



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Dear Meg,

Thank you for your email of 17 July on behalf of your constituents, about the impact of a US-UK trade deal on food standards. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

The Agriculture Act will enable us to transform the way we support farmers. In England, funds released as a result of the phasing out of legacy subsidies will fulfil our manifesto pledge to be re-invested into a roll out of our future farming policy. This will be centred around support aimed at incentivising sustainable farming practices, creating habitats for nature recovery and establishing new woodland and other ecosystem services to help tackle challenges like climate change. We will support farmers to produce high quality and nutritious food in a more sustainable way and improve transparency in the supply chain to help food producers strengthen their position at the farm gate and seek a fairer return from the marketplace. We will help them to reduce their costs and improve their profitability, and help those who want to retire or leave the industry to do so with dignity, and to create new opportunities and support for new entrants coming in to the industry. Further information is available in the Government's agricultural transition plan document at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-transition-plan-2021-to-2024>.

The UK Government will not compromise on our standards. Our manifesto is clear that in all of our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards. We remain firmly committed to upholding our high environmental protection, food safety and animal welfare standards outside the EU and the EU Withdrawal Act will transfer existing EU food safety provisions, including existing import requirements, onto the UK statute book.

These import standards include a ban on using artificial growth hormones in domestic and imported products and set out that no products, other than potable water, are approved to decontaminate poultry carcasses. Any changes to existing food safety legislation would require new legislation to be brought before this Parliament.

The UK's food standards, for both domestic production and imports, are overseen the by the Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland. These are independent agencies and provide advice to the UK and Scottish governments. They will continue to do so in order to ensure that all food imports comply with the UK's high safety standards. Decisions on these standards are a matter for the UK and will be made separately from any trade agreement.

Parliament plays an important role in scrutinising our trade policy. We have provided extensive information to Parliament on our negotiations, including publishing our objectives and economic scoping assessments prior to the start of talks. At the end of negotiations, we will lay the final agreement text in Parliament alongside an explanatory memorandum and a final impact assessment. In the case of Japan, the US, Australia, New Zealand and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership we will also work closely with the International Trade Committee and International Agreements Sub - Committee, so those committees may produce an independent report on those deals.

We introduced a section to the Agriculture Act to bolster parliamentary scrutiny of free trade agreements, by introducing a new duty for the Secretary of State to report to Parliament on whether, or to what extent, commitments in new Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), relating to agricultural goods, are consistent with maintaining UK levels of statutory protection in relation to environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards. These reports will need to be laid before new FTAs may be laid in Parliament for ratification. This was approved by both Houses of Parliament and forms part of the Agriculture Act 2020.

We also announced that the Trade and Agriculture Commission would be put on a statutory footing, through the Trade Bill, to place farmers at the heart of our trade policy. It will produce a report on the impact on animal welfare and agriculture of each free trade deal the government signs after the end of the EU transition period on January 1 2021. This report will be laid in Parliament before the start of the 21-day scrutiny period under the terms of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act.

The Commission, set up in July, will continue with the report it is currently producing, which will advise on:

- Trade policies the Government should adopt to secure opportunities for UK farmers, to ensure that animal welfare, food production and environmental standards are not undermined and to identify new export opportunities.
- Advancing and protecting British consumer interests and those of developing countries.
- How the UK engages the World Trade Organization to build a coalition that helps advance higher animal welfare standards across the world.
- Developing trade policy that identifies and opens up new export opportunities for the UK agricultural industry – in particular for Small and Medium sized Enterprises – and that benefits the UK economy as a whole.

The Commission published an interim progress report on 5 November, and the full report will be published in February 2021 and presented to Parliament.

All parts of the UK should be proud of our world-leading food, health and animal welfare standards and we will not lower our standards as we negotiate new trade deals.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need further information.

Yours sincerely,



VICTORIA PRENTIS MP