



The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP  
Secretary of State  
Dept for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs  
Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

**FROM THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE**

Our ref: MB/gt/1530  
Email: [gill.thompson@nfu.org.uk](mailto:gill.thompson@nfu.org.uk)  
Direct line: 02476 858586  
Date: 14 November 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

On behalf of NFU members, I wanted to thank you for joining us on Back British Farming Day to celebrate the very best of British agriculture. Across the country, British farmers not only produce high quality, environmentally and climate-friendly food, but also play a central role in our rural communities. Therefore, I was delighted you could meet our inaugural Community Farming Hero regional winners, who represent the ways in which farmers go above and beyond, all while producing our food. During the event, I was also heartened to hear that food security will be one of the Government's priorities moving forward.

As you know, the Prime Minister attended a hustings at the NFU's HQ in Warwickshire over the summer, where he made a number of commitments to support domestic food production and address the challenges posed by food security. I welcomed the Prime Minister's pledge to:

1. Establish a **new food security target**, including a statutory duty to monitor and report on domestic food production levels annually.
2. Chair a UK-wide annual food security summit at 10 Downing Street, in partnership with the NFU and industry stakeholders.
3. Introduce a new target for **public sector organisations to buy 50% of their food locally**.
4. Use the powers in the Agriculture Act to ensure that **supply chains are made fairer**.
5. Review planning rules to **ensure that high-quality farmland is sufficiently protected**.
6. Make **farmers a priority in all future trade deals**...[and] build on existing support mechanisms to help farmers export to the world's emerging markets.
7. Reintroduce the role of the **UK Rural Advocate** and increase representation of farmers at all levels of government.

The war in Ukraine has exacerbated pre-existing inflationary and supply chain pressures, which will have lasting consequences for the scale of UK agricultural production. With fertiliser prices doubling, feed and fuel prices rising, and the variable role of the weather, combined with withering market volatility, farmers face increasingly high risks, and their businesses are extremely exposed. We must build on the Government food strategy and ensure domestic food production has statutory recognition for its contribution to economic growth and our food resilience and security.

In addition, if we are to be serious about domestic food production, we must have access to the labour required to pick, pack and process high quality, affordable and sustainable food for the nation. Currently, there are business critical seasonal worker shortages, particularly within the horticulture sector. In the first half of 2022 alone, at least £22 million worth of fruit and vegetables were wasted, directly because of such gaps in the workforce. It's good news that the Seasonal Workers Scheme is guaranteed to 2024, though the number of visas falls short of what is needed to prevent further crop losses and a continued fall in UK production. I also welcome Defra's independent review into labour shortages. I hope, together, we can continue to make the case to the Home Office to take action on the issue.

The huge spikes and uncertainty in energy prices since the end of 2021 have had significant cost implications for primary producers. The NFU welcomes the arrival of the Energy Bill Relief Scheme (EBRS) which will protect businesses from a 'mega-spike' in energy costs this winter. To offer material support to food production though, longer term measures are needed that match the lead-in times associated with production and give business confidence to plan and grow.

Alongside these challenges, English farmers are facing significant change to agricultural policy, with the removal of direct payments to farmers in England, as part of the Agricultural Transition Plan (ATP). We welcome the aims of the ATP, to support productivity and sustainable farming. However, we need more detail on how it will achieve this, and specifically how the various elements of Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) will provide the economically secure platform to underpin sustainable and resilient food businesses.

The NFU stands ready to work with your department to fulfil the Prime Minister's and your commitments on domestic food production and food security. We must have the right policies in place to give food producers the ability to plan ahead with confidence, so they can continue to produce high quality food, alongside protecting and enhancing the environment.

British farming can offer solutions to many of the challenges we face as a nation and while we are ambitious to deliver, that ambition must be matched with certainty about the future. Therefore, I look forward to hearing your plans to ensure food and farming businesses have the tools and resources needed to thrive.

Yours sincerely,



**Minette Batters**  
President