

House of Commons Agriculture Bill: Briefing for MPs

Ping Pong stage 1st October 2020

This briefing sets out the reasons why Sustain and partners are supporting four key amendments at the ‘consideration of amendments’ stage of the Agriculture Bill. Farming is intersectional and touches on various aspects of our society: food, environment, public health, jobs and livelihoods, and many others. The amendments below are fundamental for creating some of those links. By voting for these amendments, we are asking you to back British farming, be climate champions, and protect children’s health. We would be more than happy to answer any queries you have (links to the [Report Stage Bill](#), [all Bill debates and papers](#)).

Due to the importance of these amendments to British farmers and the public, we ask that Members of Parliament (MPs) vote to retain these crucial amendments in the Agriculture Bill. Sustain also supports amendments which Greener UK back, including on setting a regulatory baseline and on a duty on the government to take into account the country’s Environmental Improvement Plans (EIP) when setting priorities for financial assistance schemes

Agriculture Bill priority amendments

(Numbers refer to Lords amendment paper <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-01/0191/200191.pdf>)

Amendment 12 and NC 16

- **Clause 35 and New Clause after Clause 42 on food standards:** these amendments states the “**requirement for agricultural and food imports to meet domestic standards**”. This will ensure that British food and farming standards are protected within trade deals. This will include animal health and welfare, protection of the environment, food safety, hygiene and traceability, and plant health. We believe you can support this amendment because:
 - It requires the Secretary of State to obtain Parliamentary approval of the process with which standards are determined, something not currently available despite the new International Trade Committee and the Trade and Agriculture Commission which are only advisory.
 - This is an important amendment which has the clear backing of the British people, evident in a number of public opinion polls over recent months.
 - The legality of the amendment is not in doubt – the WTO provides a baseline for settling trade disputes *in the absence of a bilateral or multilateral* trade agreement. A trade deal agreed by two or more countries sets new rules and the UK government could use these to agree bespoke approaches to regulating imports as outlined in the amendment. Much depends on the will of a government to protect those standards.

Amendment 17 NC

- **New Clause on climate targets:** this amendment requires the Secretary of State to set clear targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector in line with the Paris Agreement

target of net-zero emissions by 2050. Importantly, it states that government must provide an interim target for 2030 and lay before Parliament a strategy of policies which will deliver on that target. Sustain and partners would like Defra to implement a clear policy pathway that will support farmers into whole farm agroecology and agroforestry farming approaches which would provide climate and nature outcomes. Through peer-reviewed literature, these approaches have proven to be productive, support climate change mitigation and adaptation, and increase biodiversity across farming landscapes.

Amendment 9 NC

- **New clause after Clause 17 on the National Food Strategy:** this amendment requires that the Secretary of State lays before Parliament a strategy of how the government will implement recommendations from the National Food Strategy. That will include measures to improve food production sustainability, support for production and consumption, and improving dietary health and reduce obesity. We are keen that the Agriculture Bill has a specific public health purpose.

Amendment 18 NC

- **New Clause on the Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC)** whilst we support the intention of this amendment which strengthens the TAC in its ability to make recommendations on safeguarding British food and farming standards in trade negotiations, it needs amending to widen its membership.
 - The key requirements of the Secretary of State within this amendment are the following: that an initial report of recommendations from TAC is laid before Parliament within three months of the Bill becoming an Act; that individual TAC reports on each international trade agreement are laid before Parliament prior to it being signed; and, that a motion is moved in both Houses of Parliament to consider recommendations for the relevant trade agreement before it is signed.
 - **Sustain wants to see the membership of TAC strengthened so that it better represent the broader food, farming, environment, public health, and animal welfare interests. We urge MPs to table an amendment.**

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Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional, and local level. www.sustainweb.org