



Agriculture Bill: Report Stage Briefing

The following amendments which has been proposed by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee are supported by the CLA, RSPB, TFA, National Trust, NFU, Sustain, The Soil Association, WWF, National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs, Woodland Trust, The Wildlife Trusts, National Sheep Association and Nature Friendly Farming Network.

New Clause 4 would ensure that only food products that are produced to UK standards are imported into the UK and amendment 12 makes provisions for the introduction of a multi annual financial framework for the duration of the agricultural transition period.

New Clause 4

“Import of agricultural goods

(1) Agricultural goods may be imported into the UK only if the standards to which those goods were produced were as high as, or higher than, standards which at the time of import applied under UK law relating to:

- (a) animal welfare
- (b) protection of the environment, and
- (c) food safety.

(2) “Agricultural goods”, for the purposes of this section, means:

- (a) any livestock within the meaning of section 1(4)
- (b) any plants or seeds, within the meaning of section 15(6)
- (c) any product derived from livestock, plants or seeds.”

This new clause ensures that in any future trade deals that the UK Government strikes with countries post Brexit any imports of agricultural products must meet UK environmental and animal welfare standards.

In many trade deals agricultural is often used as a bargaining chip to secure preferential access for other sectors or negotiations stall as the issue is considered too difficult to resolve. This must not be the case in any post Brexit trade deals. Faced with such a situation UK farmer would be unable to compete with cheaper imports putting the viability of many farm businesses under threat.

Key points

UK farmers will be unable to compete with cheaper food products which are imported from abroad having been produced at a lower standard.

The UK should seek to be a champion of high-quality products produced to leading environmental and animal welfare standards.

The Select Committee is right to warn of the risks of rushed free trade deals with new markets that result in an overall lessening in our world leading standards. We must avoid a situation where future trade deals mean the UK allowing in products produced using practices that have been long abolished in the UK. UK trade policy should be to promote our high standards, which produce high quality products, rather than shift any negative impacts elsewhere.

Amendment 12

Clause 36, page 27, line 29, at end insert:

“(2) No payment may be made under this Act unless the Secretary of State has made regulations in accordance with subsection (3) to implement a multiannual financial framework setting out the sums available under Parts 1 and 2 of this Act during the agricultural transition period.

(3) Regulations made under subsection (2) shall be made before the beginning of the agricultural transition period and shall be subject to affirmative resolution procedure.”

Key points

Given the Government’s ambitions for environmental and public benefit delivery sufficient investment is required for the long term.

Farmers and landowners are already making financial commitments for beyond 2022 without any certainty over future funding arrangements.

We strongly welcome the guarantee to maintain the existing budget through to 2022. This has provided much needed certainty to farmers and landowners whose business plans are frequently made for the long term. However, clarity on future funding is now urgently needed with farmers making financial decisions and commitments for far beyond 2022 linked into things such as infrastructure projects, machinery and diversification.

Farmers and land managers are vital to delivering environmental improvements such as a coordinated water management policy and good soil health. Profitable farming and high-quality food production can go hand in hand with delivering public goods but it requires long-term business planning backed by the certainty of guaranteed investment.

Without certainty on what funding will be available post-2022, and how it will be spent, rural businesses are unable to plan for the future with confidence on how a new scheme will form part of their business and investment plans.

The group wholly support introducing a commitment via this amendment for a long-term budget through to the end of the agricultural transition period. We do however believe that this should go further and a multiannual budget should become an established part of government planning to provide farmers and landowners with the confidence that the industry will be supported by future governments in the years ahead.

Attached are statements from the organisations supporting this amendment on why the issue of long-term funding is important to their membership.

Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

Good land management, and profitable farming delivering a healthy environment requires long-term planning. The CLA fully supports Government's aspirations for a productive farming sector that also provides a range of public goods for society, but politicians must recognise that delivery of new policies in the Agriculture Bill will require change and investment by farms and landowners. Greater certainty on longer-term funding intentions will help provide the confidence needed to make these changes.

The CLA will support any new free trade deals which grow and boost UK trade, however, in seeking these trade deals it is imperative that an equivalence of standards is met in order to prevent undercutting the UK market by the introduction of products that meet lower environmental or animal welfare standards.

National Trust

The National Trust cares for a quarter of million hectares of land in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and has 1,800 agricultural tenancies. Along with other organisations in the Greener UK coalition, we believe the Agriculture Bill should place a duty on Ministers to set long term, multi-annual budgets that reflect the scale of financial need associated with the Government's policy objectives. The Bill should also specify the timeframe over which these budgets would be set, and provide a means by which funding would be allocated between the four countries of the UK. If the government wants farmers to get on board with its new system of land management – where land managers are paid to deliver the public goods that underpin sustainable, long term food production - it must provide the certainty and security of long-term funding, backed by first class and first-hand advisory services which are properly resourced. We would also like to see safeguards added to the Bill to protect British farmers from being undermined by cheap imports that don't conform to UK standards.

National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs

Young farmers envisage a progressive, dynamic exporting industry that offers attractive and viable career routes for young people. To help make this vision a reality we need to be able to plan and invest in our future. We need long-term political financial certainty to ensure that our intended long-term investment is a realistic option. We want, and need, the Agriculture Bill to establish a multi-annual budgetary framework to provide that certainty and viability for the next generation.

Woodland Trust

There is a much-heightened awareness of the important role that trees play in society and of the need to significantly increase planting rates in this country. The Woodland Trust wishes to see a far more integrated approach to land management that enables the many benefits of trees at a variety of scales – from larger scale planting to smaller agro-forestry initiatives – to be realised for the benefit of society. It therefore broadly welcomes the Agriculture Bill and particularly its move towards the payment of public money for public goods.

It is essential however if the Bill is to fulfil its potential - and we are to achieve the increase in tree cover that enjoys such strong cross-party support – that the Bill is amended to provide a long-term funding mechanism. Land managers need to have confidence in the new system that sufficient support will be forthcoming to back them in delivering key public goods like more resilient and biodiverse habitats, flood alleviation and healthy soils.

The Wildlife Trusts

The Wildlife Trusts believe that nature is vital to our long-term economic prosperity and our individual wellbeing, but the natural world is in decline. Urgent action is required - and agriculture policy is vital to this. The Agriculture Bill represents a unique opportunity to put in place the measures needed to support nature's recovery. It should ensure that substantial government funds are allocated to the creation of new and expanded habitats for wildlife with appropriate provision of public access. Crucial to the success of the Government's proposed new Environmental Land Management Schemes will be guaranteed long-term funding, set at the level required to deliver its ambition to leave the environment in a better state for the next generation.

National Farmers Union (NFU)

Whilst not on the face of the Bill itself, the NFU welcomes the government's commitment to maintain cash total for farm support funding until the end of this Parliament (expected in 2022, but possibly sooner). Longer term we believe that the current levels of public investment in agriculture should be maintained.

We believe that the Agriculture Bill should establish a multi-annual budgetary framework that provides certainty for farmers and allows them to plan and invest for the future, under clause 33 (Financial Provision). Budgetary cycles should be independent of the parliamentary cycle to reflect the need for long term planning and investment and to avoid the agricultural budget becoming politicised and subject to annual discretionary spending decisions. There should be scope within the Bill for ministers to "carry over" any monies left unspent at the end of a particular budget year for spending in subsequent years.

Tenant Farmers Association

Creating a domestic agricultural policy for the first time since the 1970s is a significant opportunity. Linking with the Government's 25-year plan for the environment, we have a unique platform to build long-term resilience and sustainability for farm businesses, the wider rural economy and the landscape and biodiversity supported within the farmed environment. For 40 years we have relied upon the budget arising under the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy with its own multiannual budget over 5 to 7-year periods. As we leave the EU and create our own policy we must maintain the discipline of planning public expenditure within a multi-annual, budgetary process. We welcome the commitment to maintain the budget within agriculture until the end of the Parliament, but it is essential that thereafter there is a robust, multiannual budgeting process to give farming the confidence to invest in productivity and the production of non-market public goods.

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

The RSPB welcomes the Government's intention in the Agriculture Bill to use public money to secure public goods, but these often take years to realise. For example, restoring peatland habitats to provide clean drinking water, carbon storage and reduce flood risk for communities can take decades. And as a long-term industry, farmers need certainty over the funding available if they are to engage in a future policy with confidence. At present, the Agriculture Bill is silent on this key issue. To provide confidence in the Government's proposed reforms, the Bill must include a mechanism that secures long-term funding for farmers and land managers so that they have sufficient support to deliver the public goods we all

depend upon. This amendment would provide certainty about the scale of funding available during the seven-year transition period between 2021 and 2028, enabling farmers to engage in a future public goods payment with confidence.

Sustain: The Alliance for better food and farming

The Agriculture Bill is the first major UK legislation on agriculture in 50 years, and the Sustain alliance wants to make the best of this opportunity to influence UK farm policy and practice. This is made especially urgent due to the need for the UK to take decisive action on farm livelihoods, working conditions, public health, animal welfare, biodiversity, environmental protection and climate change. These amendments are absolutely key to both protect and enhance the welfare, environment, food and employment standards we expect in farming and to provide finance to ensure a long-term future for both farmers and the public goods they provide – from wildlife protection to public health outcomes.

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

WWF want to see productive agricultural systems that improve the health of soils and rivers, help tackle climate change, and conserve and enhance habitats and species. The Bill is the most significant legislation on agriculture in almost 50 years and with over 70% of the country being farmland, its implementation will greatly affect the future of landscapes across all the nations of the UK. The Bill and accompanying Policy Statement can only be realised however, with committed long-term sustainable funding.

National Sheep Association (NSA)

NSA represents sheep farmers from across the country. Our concern is that the sheep sector is going to be one of the hardest hit by our exit from the EU both in terms of trade and the Agriculture Bill. Sheep farmers need the stability of a long-term funding commitment. Their business decisions are long term endeavours and the decisions they make will be informed by stability they can see. NSA would like the treasury to commit a long-term budget to accompany the Bill, which stands regardless of the political, economic and environmental turbulence and ever-changing Governments. Sheep farmers play a huge role in providing public goods. Where it comes to providing landscapes and environmental features for the public good, the work that farmers put in will lead to long term and permanent changes. Farmers will require committed and long-term funding to support these changes, they should not run the risk of losing support according to political changes.

Soil Association

The Agriculture Bill is an opportunity to transition the food and farming system to one that protects and restores nature, provides a fair living for producers, and helps improve public health. Many farmers already deliver public goods, but the farming methods proven to deliver the greatest benefits to soil health, wildlife, or climate mitigation are still not mainstream. The Bill should provide comprehensive support to allow farmers to move from decades of overreliance on agrochemicals and fossil fuels to a more ecological approach across all land. That should include more organic, alongside other agroecological approaches, such as agroforestry, pasture-based livestock, and low input mixed farming which is why these amendments support others the Soil Association is also proposing relating to agroecological farming. A long-term budget beyond 2022, at least matching current levels, is essential, alongside a focus on agroecological, farmer-led R&D. A multi-annual budgetary framework is vital to allow farmers to plan and invest for the future where food production and nature conservation go hand in hand.

Nature Friendly Farming Network

The Nature Friendly Farming Network represents farmers and members of the public from across the UK who have come together to champion a way of farming which is sustainable and good for nature. Farming requires long term thinking and timeframes so that farmers can make future land management plans and run sustainable businesses. NFFN would like to see the government commit to publishing multi-annual funding frameworks in advance so that farmers will be able to plan ahead with more certainty. This will help to encourage farmers who are currently uncertain to transition towards the new system of public money for public goods and reflects the fact that many of these public goods and environmental benefits may take years to realise.