



The Green House, 244-254 Cambridge Heath Road,  
London E2 9DA. Tel: 020 3559 6777  
Website: [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)

Rt. Hon. Amber Rudd MP  
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House  
Tothill Street  
London SW1H 9NA

Thursday 25 July, 2019

**RE: Healthy and accessible food priorities**

**Cc: Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP, Cabinet member with responsibility for no deal Brexit preparations**

Dear Secretary of State Amber Rudd,

Congratulations on your return to the post of Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

I write as the chief executive of Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations and work with many more at local level. Our alliance would like to draw your attention to five key priorities.

The Sustain alliance has a number of interests in your Department's policy making but have three that that we would very much like to see you champion as immediate priorities.

*1. No deal Brexit and a hardship fund*

Sustain's work with our alliance since the EU Referendum in 2016 clearly demonstrates that a no deal Brexit would be have severe implications for our food supplies, food standards and food and farming livelihoods. One third of our food currently comes from Europe and £13bn of food exports goes the other way; disruption in either direction is likely to have a devastating effect.

Over 8 million of our fellow citizens in the UK already live in food insecurity and do not have the means to stockpile or cope with even a short-term disruption in food supply in the event of a no deal Brexit; nor to afford higher prices associated with scarcity or currency fluctuation. Having consulted with our member organisations who provided 3 million emergency food parcels last year and well over 50 million meals from redistributed surplus food, we need to be clear with you that food banks and frontline charities are in no position to respond to increased need, have no money or storage to stockpile food, are often run by volunteers, and many are already over-stretched meeting current need. We believe this is clearly a case for urgent government attention to contingency planning.

Back in February a Cabinet document suggested the Government was considering creating a 'hardship fund' to support those hardest hit by a 'no deal' Brexit, as well as other forms of contingency planning to mitigate food supply disruption. This was confirmed by you in March to the

Work and Pensions Select Committee. We are keen to meet you to discuss these plans. In a letter to the former Prime Minister in March 2019, we particularly asked for:

- Clarity over accountability and powers to mitigate food disruption.
- Clear communication on the challenges ahead, and plans to mitigate risks, including with local authorities and resilience teams, frontline charities and their networks, and public sector institutions.
- Crisis support and funding for regional and local agencies, frontline charities that serve especially vulnerable people, and for public sector institutions such as schools, hospitals and care homes, to ensure food supplies are guaranteed for those most in need.

## *2. Healthy Start Vouchers*

You will know that the Healthy Start scheme provides young and low-income pregnant women, and families on a low income with children under 4 years old, with a voucher for £3.10 per week (or two vouchers for an infant) to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables, cows' milk and first infant formula.

Despite the significant positive impact these vouchers can have on a household's budget and access to a healthy diet, the proportion of eligible people claiming the vouchers has decreased dramatically over the past five years, and varies significantly around the UK. According to data from the Healthy Start Issuing Unit, average take-up was only 64% in England and Wales in 2018. As a result families missed out on an estimated £28.6 million worth of vouchers and free healthy food. In one London Borough, for example, take-up was as low as 54%, meaning over £159,000 of vouchers for healthy food was lost to local families in just one area.

We are calling on the Government to fund a national programme to ensure that midwives, health visitors, GPs and other relevant staff in health, social care and early-years settings actively help all eligible pregnant women and new parents claim their Healthy Start vouchers. We ask you to work with local authorities and the third sector to make sure that no child or expectant mother misses out on this important part of the welfare safety net. We suggest this programme could be funded from the estimated £28.6 million of Healthy Start vouchers that went unclaimed last year.

## *3. Right to Food*

Recognition of the Right to Food in UK law would require all public bodies to take effective measures to reduce inequalities in access to healthy, affordable and sustainable food. Policies across several government departments would have to be assessed for their impact on the progressive realisation of this right, encouraging cross-sector working to address issues of income, health, food quality, prices and food education. Our alliance believes that recognition of the Right to Food in UK law could help eradicate hunger, and support work towards the development of a fair and balanced system for sustainable farming and fishing that works for both food producers and consumers alike. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you.

Thank you for considering this letter and the issues important to the Sustain alliance membership.

Yours sincerely,



Kath Dalmeny

Chief Executive of Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming  
Commissioner on the RSA's Food, Farming and Countryside Commission  
Email: [kath@sustainweb.org](mailto:kath@sustainweb.org)