



The APPG on
Vegetarianism and Veganism
C/O Christina Rees MP office
House of Commons
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The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House,
17 Smith Square,
Westminster,
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5th April 2018

Dear Mr Gove,

We are writing on behalf of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Vegetarianism and Veganism which formed last year to discuss issues facing vegetarians and vegans. In October, the group met to discuss the environmental impact of the livestock industry.

In the meeting we heard how the livestock industry accounts for at least 14.5% of all greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions globally, the same share as the transport sector, and how farming is the number one sector for incidents of water pollution. Whilst there is work to be done to reduce emissions across all sectors, the agricultural sector is still struggling to make any significant breakthroughs towards tackling climate change. In the last two years the UK power sector has already made the reduction in emissions (25%) that the agricultural sector is projected to make in next thirty-five (New Economics Foundation, 2017).

By 2050, global demand for meat and dairy is predicted to account for almost all of the global annual GHG emission budget, 20 GtCO₂e of the 23 GtCO₂e (Chatham House, 2015). Despite the livestock industry's large GHG burden, public awareness of the negative impacts of livestock production is still very low, which we appreciate can make action challenging for policy-makers.

Methane warms the climate much faster than CO₂, so tackling methane emissions in the livestock industry could help stop runaway climate change. One surprising fact that emerged from the meeting was that if the world switched from beef to beans, we could free up an area the size of Argentina – and re-wilding this land could have a massive impact on carbon capture, for example (Harwatt, 2017). Such a dietary shift should be far more palatable than living with the catastrophic effects of climate change. Furthermore, advances in food technology have made pulse-based meat alternatives more 'convincing' than ever before.

Brexit provides an opportunity to look at the system of farm subsidies, and the meeting's speakers raised the question of why we are subsidising such an environmentally damaging sector. Antony Froggatt suggested the creation of a subsidy system that takes into

consideration environmental externalities, and that this would be in line with the UK's *Clean Growth Strategy* (Chatham House, 2015).

You have been critical of the failings of the Common Agricultural Policy in the past, and have called on the UK to be global home of the highest environmental standards with a Green Brexit, and we at the APPG would like to help to achieve this. To this end, farmers could be rewarded for growing sustainable, environmentally-beneficial crops like legumes, through the development of a Protein Aid Scheme or similar. These subsidies would directly support the growing of protein crops through a direct payment per hectare of land under cultivation.

There was general consensus at the meeting that a relatively simple way to reduce the agricultural sector's impact on the environment would be to encourage more farmers to plant sustainable crops that have a positive impact on the soil, for instance legumes with their role in fixing-nitrogen. If UK diets are to be sustainable, healthy, affordable, and ethical, then it is clear that protein crops represent a win across all these dimensions. Policies that encourage both the production and consumption of plant proteins could be the focus of a new domestic agricultural policy.

Support from the government in terms of research and development could help grow our vital pulse sector. Canada used to be on par with the UK in the production of plant proteins, but now exports twenty times as much, and this can be attributed in large part to government investment.

Another way to support UK plant protein producers would be to improve public procurement rules to encourage all public-sector canteens to prioritise the serving of UK plant proteins. On average, vegans have half the carbon footprint of those who consume meat (Scarborough, 2014). Providing and promoting vegan options in all public-sector canteens across the UK would also have a positive impact in reducing one's personal carbon footprint, as well as helping reduce the carbon footprint of the public sector.

The UK can be at the forefront of countries leading the way for sustainable and healthy food systems – inspiring not a race to the bottom in standards, but acting as a role model for other countries to follow.

In your role as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, we kindly ask that your department looks into:

- introducing policies to encourage farmers to grow sustainable protein crops for human consumption;
- giving agriculture equal footing with other high-emitting sectors when setting reduction targets and mitigation strategies;
- making it a requirement to include at least one vegan option, and prioritising the serving of UK-grown plant proteins such as pulses, in public institution procurement plans;
- creating a Protein Aid Scheme to directly support the growing of sustainable, environmentally-beneficial crops like legumes.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Christina Rees MP, Chair of the APPG

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