

# Scottish Affairs Committee

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From the Chair, Pete Wishart MP

Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Fourth Floor, Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
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16 October 2019

Dear Theresa,

Thank you for the Government's response to the Committee's Report on *the future of Scottish agriculture post-Brexit*. I am pleased that there are areas of policy such as future funding principles and common frameworks where there is a large amount of agreement between the Committee and Government and wanted to thank you for the positive and constructive tone of your response. I hope therefore you will not mind if I press for a bit more detail in some of the areas covered in the response.

## Agricultural funding

I welcome the commitment from the Government that future distribution of agricultural funding within the UK will be based on an objective criteria that reflects the individual circumstances of each country and acknowledges the social and environmental benefits farming provides. This will be critical in ensuring that farmers and crofters operating on the most challenging types of land are appropriately recognised and I hope will result in a sizeable increase in Scotland's share of agricultural funding.

While I understand the Government view that **the proportion of each country's** LFA is an "inappropriate measure" for allocating future agricultural funding within the UK, the Government has not provided an alternative proposal. In our Report we acknowledge that LFA is not perfect as it relies on outdated mapping and **doesn't** appropriately distinguish between areas of land that are less favoured or more favoured, however the evidence we received showed it as one of the fairest ways to calculate funding and the only method which will reflect the fact that **Scotland has over half of the UK's** most challenging farmland.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Affairs Committee, [The future of Scottish Agriculture Report Paragraph 6](#), 2019

If the Government does not plan to use LFA as a basis for determining each nation's share of agricultural funding, can you share with us the methodology you do intend to use to make these decisions, and how this will reflect different changes each nation faces, including different quality of land. If the Government is not currently in a position to share these proposals, I ask you set out the timetable for making this decision and what provisions there will be for consulting the sector on your preferred methodology.

### Domestic No-Deal tariffs

I appreciate that the Government has sought to strike a fine balance between the impact on consumers and producers when preparing its temporary no-deal tariffs and welcome the extra detail this response provides on **the Government's** decision-making process. However, I am disappointed that the Government has not acted on the evidence presented in our Report that the proposed tariffs on agricultural products will provide significantly less protection for farmers than the current EU tariff regime.

Since we received your response, the Government has demonstrated that it is listening to feedback from stakeholders, and on Tuesday 8 October announced tariff alterations affecting HGVs, bioethanol and clothing.<sup>2</sup> If the Government is therefore able to make alterations to support these industries, I urge it to listen to the farming sector and reconsider **the UK's** proposed agricultural tariffs. The National Farmers Union have warned that failure to do this will have serious ramifications for businesses and consumers across the UK.<sup>3</sup>

The **Government's** response also does not provide additional detail on the former Secretary of State's comments to the Committee in June that Defra has made provisions in its budget to provide financial support to farmers and crofters to minimise **the impact of the EU's high** agricultural tariffs on exports in the event of no-deal. I would therefore be grateful if you could, as a matter of urgency, provide more detail about the nature of this financial support, which EU tariffs it will offset and how businesses will be able to access it. Given how close we are to the current Brexit deadline, farmers urgently need information about the Government's plans in this area.

### Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme

In our Report we concluded that the Government's Seasonal Workers Pilot was insufficient to meet the demands of the agricultural sector in Scotland, and that its allocation of 2,500 workers needed to be increased to 10,000 next year. I am encouraged to hear that the Government will be closely monitoring the Pilot and remain open to the idea of operating a version of the scheme on a permanent basis post-2020. While I understand that this work is

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<sup>2</sup> Department for International Trade, [Temporary tariff regime updated](#), 2019

<sup>3</sup> NFU, [NFU responds to Government tariff review](#), 2019

on-going, I would be grateful if you could provide more information about how the Government will be assessing the success of the pilot and ensure that the Committee is kept updated on this work.

### Geographical Indications

**I am pleased that the Government shares the Committee's view that geographical indications** have been crucial in protecting the provenance and quality of many iconic Scottish products. I therefore appreciate the fact that this response provides more detail on what Brexit means **for UK GIs registered in the EU and welcome the Government's commitment that they will** support UK GI holders in reapplying for EU GI recognition if they are removed by the EU. With this in mind I would be grateful if you could write to the Committee and expand on what support you will provide producers.

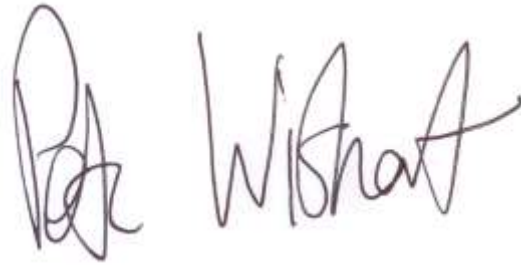
### Agricultural Common Frameworks

I welcome the firm commitment from the Government that agricultural common frameworks will not be imposed upon the devolved administrations but instead agreed by consensus and will provide each administration with the flexibility to develop agricultural policy suited to their own unique circumstances.

However, while progress has been made on the governance of these frameworks, we are yet to see a draft example of what an agricultural framework will look like and a timetable of when they will be agreed by the devolved administrations & subsequently published. With a no-deal Brexit still a possibility, it is imperative that the Government speed up this work and ensure common frameworks are in place for all eventualities. I would therefore appreciate it if the Government could set out when it expects to start publishing draft agricultural common frameworks.

Thank you again for the positive way the Department has engaged with the Committee during this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized first name 'Pete' followed by the surname 'Wishart'.

Pete Wishart MP  
Chair, Scottish Affairs Committee