

26th October 2020

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about food standards and future trade deals.

I fully recognise the importance the public attach to the UK's high standards of food production, and the unique selling point it provides for our farmers, whose high-quality produce is in demand around the world.

I know that in trade negotiations the Government will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety standards, which is why I believe Amendment 93 made to the Agriculture Bill in the House of Lords is an unnecessary potential source of duplication and confusion. I would also like to assure you that the Government will not compromise on matters relating to the health and wellbeing of our children during trade negotiations.

Without exception, all animal products imported into the UK under existing or future free trade agreements from all trading partners, including the EU and others, will have to meet our stringent food safety standards, as they do now. These standards have been built up over many years and have the trust of the public and the world. I know the Government will not adjust those standards to secure trade deals. The standards will be based on science and decided by the UK alone.

I am pleased that the Government is engaging with the agricultural sector, including the National Farmers Union, as part of its trade discussions. The government has established the Trade and Agriculture Commission as well as trade advisory groups, ensuring that British farmers, businesses, and consumers will play a central role in the nation's trade policy. It is encouraging that Ministers share my determination to ensure our future trade agreements will deliver benefits for our brilliant farmers and food producers.

I welcome that the Government is establishing a Trade and Agriculture Commission - a move supported by the National Farmers' Unions in England, Scotland and Wales, as well as Northern Ireland's Ulster Farmers' Union.

The Commission will ensure close engagement with the agriculture industry to help inform, shape and guide agricultural trade policy. It will be independently chaired by food safety expert Tim Smith, a former Chief Executive of the Food Standards Agency. Within a fixed term the Commission will consider trade policies that the Government should adopt to secure opportunities for UK farmers, producers and exporters. The Commission will also ensure the agriculture sector remains competitive and that animal welfare and environmental standards in food production are not undermined. When its work is concluded the Commission will produce a report, which will be presented to Parliament by the Department for International Trade.

The second part of the Government's plans on childhood obesity, published in 2018, introduced firm commitments to tackle the problem head-on. This strategy established a target to halve childhood obesity by 2030.

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Rt Hon Alok Sharma, MP for Reading West

I am pleased that the Government is now taking steps to ban unhealthy food adverts on television and online before 9pm, to reduce the likelihood of children seeing them. Further, a short consultation will be held on whether a ban on online adverts for unhealthy foods should apply at all times of the day.

Regarding the relationship between trade agreements and health outcomes, there is no evidence to suggest that a free trade deal with the United States, or indeed any other country, would lead to an increase in child obesity in the UK.

The health and diets of our children is at the heart of the Government's commitment to the high food standards that protect and benefit British farmers and consumers, and which will not be compromised in any trade negotiation.

I hope this response has provided some clarity and reassurance.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Alok Sharma MP