



House of Commons
Environmental Audit Committee

**Environmental change
and food security:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Second Report**

**Fourth Special Report of Session
2023–24**

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Environmental Audit Committee

The Environmental Audit Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by His Majesty's Ministers; and to report thereon to the House.

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Fourth Special Report

The Environmental Audit Committee published its Second Report of Session 2023–24, [Environmental change and food security](#) (HC 312) on 8 December 2023. The Government response was received on 12 March 2024, and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee published its report 'Environmental change and food security' on 8 December 2023. The report included 29 specific recommendations.

The Government has responded to each recommendation in turn, noting that in some areas the relevant policy is devolved and so approaches may differ across the UK.

Recommendation at paragraph 46: *Since food security depends on some degree of imports, it is vital that environmental harms are not exported abroad. That is why it is so important to get the UK's trade deals right on food and the environment. We welcome the Minister's desire to demonstrate global leadership on food production and the environment. The Government must show its leadership by upholding standards for the environmental impacts of food production in its trading relationships with other countries. It should publish a statement on climate and biodiversity standards for food production, equivalent to its promised statement on animal health. Its commitment to incorporate climate scenario analysis into trade models by 2025 should be matched by biodiversity scenario analysis.*

The Government is committed to upholding our world-leading environmental standards including through our trade relationships with other countries.

We have a wide-ranging programme of work underway to raise global ambition for sustainable agriculture through our bilateral free trade agreements, our multilateral trade policy approach and supported by our diplomatic efforts. This includes increasing collaboration on environment through our trade agreements, publishing comprehensive environmental impact assessments for those trade deals, and taking leadership on trade and environment objectives at the WTO.

Our top international policy priority, as set out in the Integrated Review, is to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss. The 2030 Strategic Framework for International Climate and Nature Action outlines how the UK will deliver our global vision tackle climate change and halt and reverse biodiversity loss. We are keen to continue to show our global leadership on these issues including through research and analysis.

Recommendation at paragraph 66: *Given the increasing volatility in food supplies, not just due to extreme weather, but also due to the recent geopolitical and health crises we have experienced, the Government should publish its food security report annually rather than every three years as it has currently committed to. The fact that many of*

the measures included in the food security report are already published annually only lends more support, in our view, to the argument that the food security report ought to be published every year.

Food security is a key government priority. The Prime Minister recently announced that the government will introduce an annual Food Security Index to underpin the three-yearly UK Food Security Report (UKFSR). This will present the key data and analysis needed to monitor how we are maintaining our current levels of self-sufficiency and overall food security.

We will publish the first draft of the Food Security Index during the second UK Farm to Fork Summit this Spring. The requirement for an annual Food Security Index will be put on a statutory footing when parliamentary time allows.

These annual publications will complement the longer UKFSRs which will continue to be produced at least every three years. While many of the measures in the UKFSR are indeed published annually, some are not. The UKFSR has been designed on a three-year cycle to complement existing reporting and allow for a more holistic assessment that considers longer-term trends.

Recommendation at paragraph 67: Defra collaborates with other Government departments and with industry on food security issues, but this work is neither sufficiently co-ordinated nor long term. The Government should establish a cross-government, cross-sector food security body to bring together all the actors in the food system to examine and make policy recommendations on long-term food resilience and environmental issues. While much food policy is devolved, some areas that affect food security, such as trade, are not devolved; and many farms straddle territorial borders. Therefore, the cross-government body should also involve the devolved administrations. The body could be in the form of a Food Resilience Forum but must take a long-term view. One responsibility with which this platform could be tasked would be to conduct forward-looking reviews in specific markets to inform investigations ahead of, rather than during, a crisis.

The Government Food Strategy, published in June 2022, sets out a whole-of-government approach to support a resilient, healthier, and more sustainable food system that is affordable to all. Defra is the lead government department for food supply, climate change, and biodiversity and has well established ways of working, including extensive, regular, and ongoing engagement across-government and with industry. The Food and Drink Sector Council brings together senior leaders across the whole agri-food chain to work in partnership with government to collaboratively address the longer-term risks and opportunities facing the sector, strengthening collaboration between industry and government at all levels, including with Ministers and other government departments.

Defra holds regular engagements with the Devolved Administrations (DAs) on relevant policy development relating to EFRA matters including food security and trade. This includes consulting on Free Trade Agreement negotiation and implementation, and Defra's interactions at the World Trade Organisation, ensuring that DAs are consulted on the development of trade policy positions.

Recommendation at paragraph 68: The fact that the Government currently only has an "aspiration" for half of public money spent on food to be produced within the local

area or produced to higher environmental standards is a missed opportunity. The Government should turn its ambition on public procurement into setting a target and should set mandatory environmental standards for publicly procured food.

The Government buying standards for food and catering services (GBSF) already set non-regulatory requirements for the buying, cooking, and serving of food in central Government departments, HM Prison and Probation Service, NHS hospitals, and the armed forces in England. In summer 2022, Defra consulted on a suite of updates to public sector food and catering policy to better reflect regulatory changes, government priorities and the latest scientific evidence. These proposals included modernisation of the GBSF and comprised a target for food produced “locally” or to “higher environmental production standards” (HEPS) to make up 50% of food spend. However, we are bound by the non-discrimination principles of domestic and WTO procurement obligations, which prevent the favouring of local procurement. Additional consultation proposals were to increase the HEPS target from the current 10% of food spend to 20% and update the food waste and kitchen and catering equipment standards to improve sustainability outcomes.

The Government response to the consultation and the updated standards are due to be published shortly.

Recommendation at paragraph 69: Preventing and reducing waste at all stages in the food chain should be a central component of the Government's food strategy, as this is a quick win compared to other actions to maintain food security in the face of environmental change. The Government should publish a strategy for preventing and reducing waste in the food system. This should include targets and timescales, not just for reducing wastage of food itself but also for reducing the waste of resources that go into producing food, such as fertiliser and water.

Government strategy on preventing food waste can be found in *The waste prevention programme for England: Maximising Resources, Minimising Waste* published in 2023. It sets out how government tackles food waste reduction in a holistic matter reducing food waste across the supply chain and in the home.

The UK is an international leader on tackling food waste. We are fully committed to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 target, which seeks to halve global food waste at consumer and retail levels by 2030. We fund the Courtauld Commitment 2030, a voluntary agreement with industry to tackle food waste in the supply chain. Through Courtauld, we support The Food Waste Reduction Roadmap, which provides the tools and guidance for businesses to reduce their food waste. Courtauld 2030 and The Roadmap take a whole chain view and include primary production. Household food waste forms the largest percentage of UK food waste. Tackling this, we support businesses to help citizens reduce their waste through improved labelling for instance as well as fund behaviour change initiatives such as *Love Food Hate Waste* and Food Waste Action Week. We regularly monitor and evaluate the progress of these interventions.

To support farmers to utilise more of their produce and reduce food waste at the farm gate, the Prime Minister recently announced funding to stop good, fresh farm food from going to waste just because of its shape or size. We will provide £15m funding, to redirect that surplus into the hands of those who need it.

Recommendation at paragraph 70: ***We welcome the Government's ambitions to boost the UK seafood industry, a sector which is currently heavily reliant on imports. But significantly more detail is required on how it will do so in an environmentally sustainable way. The Government must publish concrete proposals for improving the contribution of UK seafood to food security, setting out clearly how its proposals will improve rather than harm the natural environment.***

The UK is introducing a world class system of fisheries management, which draws on the best available science and the expertise of our fishermen to ensure our fish stocks are healthy and sustainable long into the future. This new system will be underpinned by Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) – blueprints for how best to manage fish stocks.

FMPs are our flagship policy for moving away from the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and are the key commitment in the 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan for delivering sustainable fisheries. They will set out the policies and measures to help manage fishing activity to restore and/or maintain fish stocks at sustainable levels. The Joint Fisheries Statement lists 43 proposed FMPs.

On 14 December 2023 Defra published the first five FMPs for important species such as crab and lobster, bass and scallops. Attention is now turning to beginning to implement them. Alongside this, we are drafting the next five FMPs for English waters, which will be published by the end of 2024 (with the Flatfish FMP we consulted on last year).

In July 2023, the Government published consultations on proposals to expand the use of REM and reform how we manage discards in England. We are currently considering the responses to both of those consultations and will publish government responses in due course.

These reforms will play a crucial role in achieving the goals in our Environmental Improvement Plan and the UK Government's Food Strategy, helping to improve food security as well as levelling up some of our much-loved coastal towns and communities.

Meanwhile we are providing funding aimed at supporting the long-term future and sustainability of the UK fisheries and seafood sector, such as through the £100 million UK Seafood Fund. Round 3 of the infrastructure pillars of the fund, which is currently open for applications, provides £2 million in grants to trial new, greener engines, and £4 million to support projects for the UK's catching sector that make improvements to boats, at ports and in health and safety. So far, over £950,000 in grants have been awarded to fishers for new or replacement engines to support fleet modernisation.

Recommendation at paragraph 85: ***The Government should list all the areas in which it intends to establish baseline metrics and tools for food sustainability. These should include but may not be limited to soil health, carbon sequestration, biodiversity net gain, and carbon credits. It should publish a timetable for when each metric will be in place.***

Defra considers a broad range of environmental metrics across our work.

On measuring GHG emissions and removals on farms, we aim to support existing carbon calculator tool providers to harmonise their underlying methodologies, so their outputs are consistent and comparable, and their ability to serve different customer needs is

maintained. Defra has commissioned the British Standards Institution to develop Nature Investment Standards which will help drive consistency of measurement methodologies for natural carbon above ground, below ground, and in marine environments.

The statutory biodiversity metric for biodiversity net gain (BNG) was laid before Parliament at the end of November 2023, and the metric package has been published ahead of commencement of BNG. The purpose of this metric is for calculating biodiversity value, using habitat as a proxy. We will review and update the statutory biodiversity metric on a 3–5-year basis, following consultation.

National soil monitoring under the Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) Programme began in 2022. Up-to-date and comprehensive soils data is a priority of the programme; provisional updates will be produced from 2024 contributing to a comprehensive baseline for soil health by 2028.

Recommendation at paragraph 86: ***Only once national baseline metrics are in place, the Government should consult on mandatory carbon and biodiversity food reporting, as it is already doing for health metrics. The methodology for such reporting must account for the nutritional content of food.***

DSHC's health strand of the Food Data Transparency Partnership (FDTP) will enable food and drink companies to voluntarily demonstrate progress on the healthiness of their sales. Transparent and consistent data will incentivise businesses to most effectively demonstrate nutritional improvement in the foods and drinks that they offer and thereby supports efforts to drive the food system to be healthier.

Defra's sustainability strand of the FDTP is not currently planning to introduce mandatory environmental reporting for food and drink companies. The framework for non-financial reporting in the UK is overseen by the Department for Business and Trade (DBT). DBT is currently considering the creation of UK Sustainability Disclosure Standards which will set out corporate disclosures on the sustainability-related risks and opportunities that companies face.

Recommendation at paragraph 87: ***The Government should also consider compulsory reporting of waste by all food businesses as part of the waste prevention and reduction strategy that we recommend.***

Government consulted on improved food waste reporting by large businesses in England and published a response in July 2023. The new Secretary of State has decided to look again at how best to secure the benefits of food waste reporting, including mandatory measures for large businesses. We now intend to gather further evidence and re-consider all the options using the latest available data in order to retake the decision in the next four to six months.

In the meantime, we are supporting initiatives to increase the numbers of businesses measuring their food waste and signing up to the Food Waste Reduction Roadmap, working closely with key industry trade bodies and individual food businesses.

Recommendation at paragraph 94: ***We welcome the targets that the Government has set to establish a soil health indicator; provide a methodology and tools for measuring soil health; publish a baseline map of soil health by 2028; and bring 60% of soils in***

England into sustainable management by 2030. We recognise that measuring soil health is highly complex, and recommend that the Government explore a suite of indicators taking into account different biological, physical, and chemical factors among others. The Government must provide clear guidance for farmers with a realistic set of science-based benchmarks that they can use to measure the health of their soils accurately and affordably.

National soil monitoring under the Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) Programme began in 2022. Up-to-date and comprehensive soils data is a priority of the programme; provisional updates will be produced from 2024 contributing to a comprehensive baseline for soil health by 2028.

Defra is developing a national soil health indicator, using NCEA data, to help monitor national trends in soil health. It will use data on soil characteristics (physical, chemical, and biological) and land use to show how different soils are contributing to different ecosystem services as a measure of soil health. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee published a concept model in June 2023, and we intend to develop a more comprehensive model by 2025. Defra will publish a progress report on the development of the indicator by June 2024.

Defra will also publish clear guidance on soil monitoring for farmers alongside information that will enable farmers to benchmark the health of their soil.

Recommendation at paragraph 106: The Government must set stronger targets for reducing water demand. We support the Climate Change Committee's recommended target of no more than 100 litres of water per person per day.

The Environment Improvement Plan 2023 launched our Roadmap to Water efficiency in new developments and retrofits. The roadmap has 10 new actions that government will take forward and deliver over the next decade, this includes action 7), to: Review the Building Regulations 2010, and the water efficiency, water recycling and drainage standards, considering industry competence and skills. We will consider mandating a new minimum water efficiency standard for new homes in England of 105 litres per person per day and 100 litres per person per day where there is a clear local need.

In the October 2023 Autumn Statement, the Government publicly committed to a spring consultation, to allow local planning authorities to introduce tighter water efficiency standards in new homes. As well as setting out that in areas of serious water stress, where water scarcity is inhibiting the adoption of local plans or the granting of planning permission for homes, it is encouraged that local planning authorities work with the Environment Agency and delivery partners to agree standards tighter than the 110 litres per person per day that is set out in current guidance.

Recommendation at paragraph 107: A huge amount of water could be saved by more effectively facilitating the transportation of water from wetter to drier parts of the country. The Government, in collaboration with the devolved administrations, should develop a policy mechanism to transport water more easily and quickly from places where water is plentiful to more water-stressed places.

Informed by the National Framework for Water Resources, which sets out the need for strategic regional water resources planning, water companies and collaborative regional

groups have been developing their long-term plans to secure water supplies in England. This is supported by a joint regulator team – the Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development and a £469 million investment to properly investigate the water resources infrastructure that are required in their plans, including strategic water transfers.

As set out in the Intergovernmental Protocol, Defra and the Welsh Government already collaborate on water resources management. There are already long-established transfers of water from Wales to England. One of the biggest is the transfer from the Elan Valley reservoirs to supply Birmingham.

In Scotland, river systems such as the Tweed and Tay already transport water from West to East under gravity. Aqueducts and pipelines supplement natural river systems and transfer water under gravity in the central belt for drinking water supply purposes. However, water is extremely heavy and therefore costly to transport or pump. Whilst some areas, such as Fife, already depend on pumped water, water efficiency and leakage control will remain the most effective (and lowest carbon) means to achieving water security.

Recommendation at paragraph 108: ***Technologies that pinpoint the use of water offer much promise to irrigate farms in a more efficient in targeted way and should be used more widely. While the Water Management Grant can be used to pay for water efficiency projects, this funding will benefit only a very small proportion of farmers in England. The Government must develop a specific policy mechanism to promote and roll out precision irrigation across the UK farming system. In designing and monitoring the uptake of this mechanism, the Government should mitigate against efficiency paradoxes and report on the impact on water usage.***

Under the Farming Investment Fund, we have now launched two rounds of the Water Management grant, which provides capital grants of between £35,000-£500,000, which can include the purchase of best practice irrigation equipment as well as the construction of on farm reservoirs. We are now intending to launch a third round of the grant in Autumn 2024. We will seek to promote the efficient use of water in future rounds to ensure we are supporting the most up to date commercially available technology. The Farming Equipment and Technology Fund also provides smaller capital grants for specific items of equipment, including remote soil moisture sensing, digital weather stations and irrigation sensors, the guidance for the third round of this scheme was published on 20th of February, applicants will be able to apply within two weeks. For 2024 we are introducing two additional application windows so there will be more opportunity to apply.

Recommendation at paragraph 109: ***We welcome the Government's goal to increase water storage in the agriculture and horticulture sectors by two-thirds by 2050. We also welcome the Government's work on reviewing abstraction licenses and its call for evidence on the planning barriers to small reservoirs. However, food producers clearly feel that the Government is not doing enough nor moving fast enough. To reach its target of increasing water storage by two thirds by 2050, the Government needs an implementation plan that considers and removes barriers in a holistic way, namely: funding, planning, and abstraction.***

As set out in the Plan for Water, the Government is committed to increasing the water storage capacity for the agriculture and horticultural sectors and addressing barriers faced by farmers, growers and other land managers in constructing irrigation reservoirs.

Over two rounds, Defra has allocated £20 million in grants to assist farmers & growers with the costs of constructing irrigation reservoirs through the Water Management Grant. The Government's support will continue to drive investment in this vitally important policy area into and through 2025. We also intend to launch a third round of the grant in Autumn 2024.

The Government is also currently analysing the evidence submitted as part of a call for evidence on planning barriers to small reservoirs, to consider the next steps.

Finally, as part of our goal to improve the abstraction licensing system, Defra has been working with the Environment Agency (EA) to expedite the provision of abstraction licences for grant-funded irrigation projects. The EA has also appointed a dedicated specialist and introduced an 'enhanced pre-application service' to support applicants through the process.

Recommendation at paragraph 112: ***Poor quality water for farmers affects our food security, and so steps must be taken to reduce the water pollution that the agriculture industry itself causes. We reiterate our recommendations on water pollution caused by agriculture, from our report on Water Quality, that the Government should:***

- ***Commission a five-yearly appraisal of catchment-wide nutrient flows;***
- ***Establish a presumption against granting planning permission for new intensive livestock units where the proposed development would exceed the catchment's nutrient budget, unless there are more robust mitigations in place;***
- ***Intensify work to inspect and remediate large animal slurry stores;***
- ***Independently evaluate the risks to human health and the environment of spreading sewage sludge, and***
- ***Assess and mitigate the risk of microplastic pollution from sewage sludge. We ask that in its response to this report, the Government includes an update on the commitments it provided in response to those recommendations.***

The Government is working to meet our legally binding target to reduce agricultural pollution to 40% by 2038. Our work to achieve the target includes water environment modelling and monitoring to detect pollutants and nutrient flows across catchments.

We are also aware livestock farming can contribute to excess nutrients and therefore have several measures in place. These include the National Planning Policy Framework, under which planning permission should be refused if significant harm to biodiversity from a development cannot be avoided or mitigated. Further, a Habitats Regulations Assessment may be necessary before planning consent for intensive livestock units impacting protected Habitat Sites. Local Planning Authority mitigation and Natural England advice may also be required.

Supporting farmers to best utilise organic manure to reduce nitrate, phosphorus and sediment pollution is another Government priority. Reflecting its importance, we have committed over £200m on infrastructure and equipment grants to help livestock farmers in England tackle pollution from slurry.

The Government continues to review the regulatory framework for sludge spread to land in order to protect human health and the environment. We are making use of the best available evidence including through the water industry's Chemicals Investigations Programme. Further, under proposals in the current Water Industry Price Review, we are collaborating with water companies on microplastics investigations, two of which focus on sludge specifically.

Recommendation at paragraph 113: ***Currently, nutrients are being lost through leaching into waterways when they could be used to help grow crops. The Government should develop, in collaboration with the devolved administrations and the food and farming supply chains, effective means to transport by-products such as nitrates and phosphates to parts of the UK where they are needed for farming. The Government should monitor the impact of these means on water quality.***

The Government is aware of the benefits of reducing nutrient leaching and recycling nutrients where needed. We are therefore supporting farmers to reduce loss of nutrient to the environment in line with existing regulatory requirements. This includes grants for slurry separators, which separate slurry into liquid and solid fractions. Slurry Separators make slurry easier to transport, ensure better management of crop nutrient requirements, and increase storage capacity. They also allow for further treatment, including recycled manure solid cattle bedding.

We are also developing an updated Nutrient Management Planning Tool for farmers and growers. This will ensure farmers can get automated fertiliser recommendations based on their crop requirements. The tool will drive good practice around organic nutrients, helping ensure they are used in the right place at the right time and support compliance with the regulations.

In 2024, we will launch a £25m competition to drive innovation to help farmers manage plant and soil nutrients. The Farming Innovation Programme Nutrient Management theme will harness the opportunities more effective management presents. This will increase resilience, reduce input costs, and improve productivity as part of a more circular economy for nutrients.

Recommendation at paragraph 142: ***The Minister committed to a publication timetable for the Land Use Framework of this year. We expect the framework to be published no later than the last sitting day in December of 2023 and we expect the framework to balance competing demands on UK land and to integrate fully food security as a central principle. The framework must set out how land will produce food in a way that supports the resilience of our food system while adapting to and mitigating climate change and biodiversity loss. Where feasible, land should be shared to help meet multiple objectives including food production, carbon sequestration, restoring nature, and growing energy crops. The framework must show evidence of having been co-produced with those who are affected by it. Finally, it must also evidence how productivity within existing uses can be improved without negative environmental impacts.***

The Land Use Framework will be published in 2024. The Framework will build on the insight from the House of Lords Land Use in England Committee's inquiry and support delivery of the full range of Government commitments through multifunctional, resilient, and productive landscapes. We are seeking to deliver as much as we can on our limited supply of land, to meet our ambitious targets and commitments to improve the environment, deliver Net Zero and support food security.

We intend to facilitate land use transitions within the land area of England through a range of levers encouraging multiple benefits from land and driving improvements in agricultural productivity. Defra have been engaging with relevant groups during the development of the Land Use Framework, including other Government departments, devolved administrations, and academics.

Recommendation at paragraph 143: *The success of the Government's forthcoming Land Use Framework is dependent on its harmony with the English planning system. The Government should publish guidance, under the National Planning Policy Framework, to encourage planning authorities to manage applications for land use changes which affect food security on an expedited basis.*

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act introduces a package of planning reforms including the introduction of new National Development Management Policies and updates to the National Planning Policy Framework. Defra is working with DLUHC to ensure that we carry out the commitments made in the UK Food Strategy and Farm to Fork Summit to make the approval of new controlled environment horticulture businesses a priority for councils, and to ensure that the National Planning Policy Framework fully reflects our shared food security and climate and environment ambitions.

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out clearly that local planning authorities should consider all the benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, when making plans or taking decisions on new development proposals. Where significant development of agricultural land is shown to be necessary, planning authorities should seek to use poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.

Recommendation at paragraph 144: *The questions of whether less meat and dairy should be produced in this country, and whether Britons should eat less meat and dairy, are emotive and personal. They cut to the core of our cultures and our identities and have the potential to be polarising. We heard a range of strong opinions. Many argued that people living in the UK should aim to cut down the amount of meat and dairy they consume, and the Climate Change Committee is clear in its advice that across the country meat and dairy consumption should reduce by 20% by 2030 and by 35% by 2050 in order to achieve the Government's net zero target. Others, however, pointed to the ecological benefits of grazing livestock. We are keenly aware that many people's livelihoods in this country depend on livestock farming. That is why we also recommend supporting those farmers who wish to transition to new business practices where necessary and ensuring that their options for producing food in an environmentally sustainable way are commercially viable and culturally considerate.*

The Government's preferred approach to supporting consumers to make sustainable food choices is to support sustainable food production practices and high-quality British produce, whilst maintaining people's freedom of choice.

We recognise the contribution to greenhouse gas emissions made by the livestock and dairy sectors. However, well managed livestock also provide environmental benefits such as supporting biodiversity, protecting the character of the countryside, and generating important income for rural communities.

Achieving the net zero target is a priority for Government, and we are developing a range of policy measures, all with the aim of enabling farmers to optimise sustainable food production and reduce emissions from agriculture.

For example, Defra has committed to develop a harmonised methodology for farm carbon calculators and set out how farmers will be supported to measure and understand their emissions.

Furthermore, the Food Data Transparency Partnership's work on health and environmental sustainability metrics for food will help enable healthier and more sustainable diets.

Recommendation at paragraph 145: *In its Land Use Framework, the Government, informed by the evidence we have received for our inquiry, should set out whether the UK can continue production at current levels, or should seek to increase domestic food production to enhance food security, while also meeting its targets on net zero and biodiversity. To do so it should publish alongside the Land Use Framework its methodologies for calculating how these potentially conflicting objectives will be met.*

The Government committed to broadly maintain the current level of food produced domestically in the Food Strategy White Paper, published in June 2022. The Land Use Framework will support delivery of the full range of Government commitments through multifunctional, resilient, and productive landscapes.

Our Environmental Land Management Schemes will ensure our long-term food security by investing in the foundations of food production: healthy soil; clean, plentiful water; and diverse, resilient ecosystems.

Recommendation at paragraph 146: *In addition to our recommendations on public procurement, we recommend that the Government should publish national guidance on sustainable diets within the next twelve months. The Government's plans for a strong food curriculum in schools should include science-based education about the environmental impacts of food production, including food waste. The Government's work on UK consumer seafood habits should explore how to encourage consumers to eat a wider variety of more sustainable species.*

Government advice on a healthy, balanced diet is encapsulated in the United Kingdom's national food model, the Eatwell Guide. The Eatwell Guide incorporates messages around sustainability, which were tested during consumer research, such as the message to choose sustainable fish. We know that adherence to the Eatwell Guide has been shown to improve both health and environmental outcomes (Scheelbeek et al 2020) with appreciably lower environmental impact than the current UK diet (Carbon Trust 2016).

Given that most people in the UK do not currently follow a diet in line with government dietary recommendations, improvements in population dietary intakes in line with the Eatwell Guide would go a significant way to meeting sustainability targets.

This government also wants pupils to be healthy and well nourished. We encourage a healthy balanced diet and healthy life choices through school funding, legislation and guidance. The standards for school food are set out in the requirements for school food regulations 2014 and help to ensure that schools provide children with healthy food and drink options, and to make sure that children get the energy and nutrition they need across the school day. Schools must serve protein every day and meat must be served on three or more days each week. Beyond this, schools may provide meals based on plant-based proteins every day, if they choose to do so.

Schools remain responsible for their school meals service and how and where they choose to buy their produce, however we have committed to support schools to drive up their sustainable practices on food. Schools can voluntarily follow the Government buying standards, which include good advice around sustainable sourcing. In addition, the 'get help buying for schools' service has free guidance and advice to help state-funded schools to buy goods and services efficiently and compliantly.

Through the cooking and nutrition strand of the Design and Technology curriculum, from ages 5–14, pupils are taught how to cook and apply the principles of nutrition and healthy eating. They are taught where food comes from, to understand seasonality, to know where and how a variety of ingredients are grown, reared, caught and processed, and to understand and apply the principles of nutrition and health.

Recommendation at paragraph 197: *To achieve the diversity needed for a resilient food system, the UK must produce food through a variety of different farming methods spanning a spectrum from a return to more traditional methods, to agroecology, to the latest in cutting edge technology. We welcome the Government's commitment to identifying research priorities for innovation in food production, and its consultations on precision breeding and methane suppressing feed products. We recommend that within the next six months the Government publish its priorities for agricultural innovation research and development—referring to our list of suggested topics—and ensure that these areas are backed by appropriate funding. This will provide clarity for researchers, industry, and investors.*

The Farming Innovation Programme (FIP) is designed to be industry-led and reflect the research priorities identified by the farming sector. Government recognises that broader strategic funding goals are important. As such, Fund 2 of the FIP, which brings together agri-food businesses and researchers to address more fundamental R&D, targets funding into themes set by Defra. These are focussed on transformative solutions to sector-wide challenges that will impact productivity in the long-term (e.g. Net Zero and how to decarbonise agricultural and horticultural systems).

Recommendation at paragraph 199: *As well as having environmental benefits, urban horticulture offers potential health and wellbeing benefits and employment opportunities in local communities. The Government should take steps to encourage the availability of green and grey space for urban horticulture, particularly in deprived communities, and to upskill communities in growing knowledge, beginning with the school curriculum.*

The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that planning policies and decisions should:

- Aim to enable and support healthy lifestyles, for example through the provision of access to allotments
- Recognise that some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for food production
- Ensure that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees in developments, such as parks and orchards

Localism Act 2011 enables communities and parish councils with the right to register a building or piece of land as an 'Asset of Community Value' if the asset's principal use furthers their community's social wellbeing or social interests and is likely to do so in future.

Recommendation at paragraph 200: *Controlled environment agriculture has the potential to provide a fresh year-round supply of foods that are usually imported and to minimise the environmental impact of the production of such foods, so long as it can use renewable energy wherever possible. We welcome the Government's plans to review the planning permission process to support new developments of vertical farms but are disappointed that the Government's decision not to bring forward a horticulture strategy means that there will be no strategy for controlled environment horticulture. The Government should explore ways to grow the controlled environment agriculture sector in an environmentally responsible way, such as through its Land Use Framework and its Environmental Land Management schemes, as well as through the business rates regime.*

The Controlled Environment Horticulture sector is an innovative and dynamic industry, so whilst strategies can be useful, they are also a snapshot of the time they were written. Our regular engagement with growers helps us understand and respond to the issues most important to the sector, including the on-going ones but also the critically emerging ones too. The Farm to Fork Summit demonstrated the benefits of this agile approach, allowing Controlled Environment Horticulture to be a key focus and demonstrating Government's commitment to supporting the sector in any way it can.

Defra is working across Departments to explore a range of ways to support and grow the sector, addressing issues around energy security and planning approvals. For example, the Industrial Energy Transformation Fund was recently widened to include Controlled Environment Horticulture businesses and support them in the transition to net zero. We are very aware that action and interventions are required to support the Controlled Environment Horticulture sector in other ways, so we are working with Government colleagues on major issues such as labour, supply chain fairness, business rates, grid connectivity, science and innovation, climate resilience, food security, plant health and many others.

Recommendation at Paragraph 201: *The Environmental Land Management schemes offer an opportunity that must not be missed to achieve the three pillars of adapting our food system to environmental change, mitigating the environmental harms caused by our food system, and slowing climate change and biodiversity decline in general. We do not think the Government should take for granted that food security is a public good, particularly given that farmers have encountered more extreme weather and rising costs since ELMs were first initiated. Any decline in food security has profound implications*

across society. The Government should designate food security as a public good and incorporate food security and environmental goals more explicitly in the design of the Environmental Land Management schemes.

The Government has committed to broadly maintain the current level of food we produce domestically. This includes sustainably boosting production in sectors where there are post-Brexit opportunities, including horticulture and seafood. Food production and environmental improvement can and must go hand in hand. We already ensure our environmental schemes support food production, for instance actions in Sustainable Farming Incentive support the creation of flower rich buffers which help pollinators who in turn help crops, and our soil management actions ensure farmers are supported to reward in the foundations of food security – health and resilience soil.

The Agriculture Act 2020 also imposes a duty on the Secretary of State to have regard to the need to encourage the production of food by producers in England and its production by them in an environmentally sustainable way when framing any financial assistance scheme. In addition to ELM, the Farming Investment Fund and the Farming Innovation Programme will further help to improve farm productivity in line with the Government commitment on food security set out in the food strategy.

Recommendation at paragraph 202: The initial reaction from the latest iteration of the Sustainable Farming Incentive appears to show that the Government has listened to farmers' concerns and made the offer more attractive. However, to enable more effective scrutiny of whether that is the case, the Government should publish regular data on the uptake of all three Environmental Land Management schemes, with a long-term view towards publishing data on the environmental outcomes achieved by the schemes.

The Government presently publishes regular data on spend, uptake, and outcomes relating to the Environmental Land Management schemes. This includes the Secretary of State's annual report providing information about the financial assistance given over the previous financial year, the most recent of which was published in September 2023; the regular Agricultural Transition Plan update, the most recent of which was published in January 2024; and Defra's new Find Farm and Land Payments Data service, which will go live in February 2024. Defra will continue to publish information through such routes, as well as through less formal routes such as Defra's farming blog.

Recommendation at paragraph 204: Farmers should have access to support from accredited advisers, to transition their businesses and adopt best practices to improve the resilience of our food system while adapting to and mitigating environmental change. This support should include knowledge and skills exchange between researchers, agri-tech developers, and farmers, to enable take up of technological innovations. Farmers should be able to access advice and practical support that is tailored to their local area. Existing networks such as the Linking Environment and Farming network, and the new Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture and What Works Centre, have potential to deliver this support. The Government must ensure that small farmers have access to advisory services that are free to use. It should monitor take up of advice services by farms of all sizes.

We are mandating industry recognised standards as part of the SFI funding offer to ensure farmers receive quality assured, specialist expertise that they need to implement

nutrient management and integrated pest management actions. Over 18,000 farmers have received business advice through the Farming Resilience Fund and we will continue to fund free business advice until March 2025 to help increase profitability and deliver on environmental outcomes, access carbon audits and natural capital assessments. We are supporting feasibility and planning for more complex activities with targeted financial support, and are working with relevant arms-length bodies (ALBs) to develop the roles of Defra group ALB advisers to improve local join up and consistency. This will enable them to aid understanding and uptake of funding opportunities in their local context, supported in tandem with the improved facilitation fund to provide farmers with joined up access to expertise, advice and support.

Recommendation at paragraph 205: *New technologies can help to reduce the climate impacts of food production, prevent waste, and grow certain foods domestically for which the UK over-relies on imports. We agree with the Government that this is an exciting area. However, it is vital that emissions associated with these new technologies do not outweigh the environmental cost of importing the same product. The Government should publish a strategy for technological innovation in food production, which should set out robust plans for trialling new technologies, understanding their net emissions, establishing an appropriate regulatory environment, and making technology accessible to farmers, in particular to small farmers.*

We are developing policies to support farmers to improve productivity but in a way that tackles climate change and improves our air, water, soil, and biodiversity, and maintains high animal welfare standards. Food production and environmental protection need to go hand in hand and our agricultural reforms in England are designed to encourage a more sustainable model of farming whilst enhancing the resilience and profitability of farm businesses.

The Government's approach to innovation in farming is underpinned by our Farming Innovation Programme (FIP), which will include opportunities for farmers to trial new technologies on their farm, and the Farming Investment Fund (FIF), which provides grant funding for farmers for equipment and infrastructure.

We recognise that regulation can also be a barrier or an enabler to the adoption of innovative technologies. We recently welcomed the Regulatory Horizon Council's report on the how regulation can unlock the potential of robotics and autonomous systems in agriculture and horticulture. Recognising the diversity of the sector, we are taking a collaborative approach, working across government, with industry and farmers, to explore the recommendations outlined in the report.

Recommendation at paragraph 206: *For farmers to transition their businesses, their options need to be commercially viable. The Government should expand its existing support mechanisms to incentivise take-up of technological innovations in food production, such as for precision irrigation and remote sensing. It should also develop natural capital options through its Green Finance Strategy. Any new incentives should be co-designed with farmers. All technological innovations that have been subsidised by the Government should be monitored closely to understand their impact and to prevent efficiency paradoxes arising.*

Government will continue to track progress of how grant funding for innovation is used.

Under the Farming Investment Fund (FIF), which provides grant funding for equipment and infrastructure, we have launched two rounds of the Water Management grant, which provides capital grants of between £35,000-£500,000 and included the purchase of best practice irrigation equipment as well as the construction of on farm reservoirs. The range of items eligible for funding under FIF is kept under regular review through stakeholder surveys and wider industry co-design.

We are now intending to launch a third round of the grant later in 2024. We will seek to promote the efficient use of water in future rounds to ensure we are supporting the most up to date commercially available technology. The Farming Equipment and Technology Fund also provides smaller capital grants for specific items of equipment, including remote soil moisture sensing, digital weather stations and irrigation sensors, and with guidance for a third published on 20 February 2024. To support faster take up of technology a number of changes are being introduced, which include increasing the maximum grant to £50,000, opening multiple application windows with farmers having three opportunities to apply and increasing the budget to £70 million.

Moving forward on our green finance for nature's recovery agenda requires action across both the public and private sector. We know there is huge appetite from the private sector to invest in the natural environment – but also significant barriers. We are addressing these challenges so that farmers and land managers can develop commercially viable propositions for the sale of ecosystems services.