



Food Research
Collaboration

Right Honourable Michael Gove MP
Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

By email, 20th July 2018

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you from the Food Research Collaboration at the Centre for Food Policy at City, University of London, and the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) and Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming – organisations working to achieve improvements in food safety, food production and dietary health via policy and practice.

We would like to highlight the current, unique opportunity to ensure that health and wellbeing are established as desired outputs of agriculture policy, once the UK leaves the European Union. We know there is strong agreement from a broad range of sectors that this opportunity needs to be seized.

We have for many years advocated improved food and farming policies, not only to ensure the safety and quality of our food supply but also to enhance public health and wellbeing. We recognise that following the publication of the Defra consultation document *Health and Harmony*, the rubric of 'Public money for public goods' is likely to be the cornerstone of agriculture policy after the UK leaves the EU.

To explore the grounds for including public health as one of the 'public goods' which should be supported under the new UK Agriculture Act, and cited as a purpose of the Act, we recently ran an expert seminar – 'Public health as a 'public good' from agriculture – to look at some specific public health outcomes that could arise from a new agriculture policy.

It was clear from the evidence presented and subsequent debate that agricultural policy has enormous potential either to support or undermine public health, with significant related benefits or costs to human wellbeing and the economy. We propose that these should be explicitly considered under the rubric of 'goods' or 'benefits'. The following key points from the session are worth highlighting:

- The term 'Public goods' has a narrow definition in economic theory and practice that can seem at odds with the general understanding that it means 'something for the public good'. As 'productivity' is named as a 'public good' in the Command Paper we can assume the narrow definition is not being used; we agree that policy should avoid being held hostage by a piece of economic terminology. The key will be to make sure that public health is explicitly recognised as a beneficial purpose and outcome of agriculture policy.

- Key areas where a public goods rationale can be confidently asserted include:
 - reduction of global antibiotic resistance through measures to reduce use in livestock and fish farming;
 - reduction in national ill-health costs and increased general wellbeing resulting from reduced contribution to diet-related diseases, for example by supporting the transition away from producing sugar and towards an increase in production of fruit, vegetables and pulses; and
 - reduced national ill health from air and water pollution and pesticide exposure related to farm systems.
- There is a public expectation that improvements or changes to farming, food and environment policy after the UK's departure from the EU will take into account key current public health issues such as childhood obesity and diabetes. **Public support for continued payments to the farming sector should rest not only on environmental but also on health outcomes.**

We urge you to make public health a defined object of agriculture policy, stated as such in the upcoming Agriculture Bill. We have a number of progressive and practical proposals for how this purpose can be translated into specific instruments and measures in final policy, and we would very much welcome the chance to discuss this with you and your team.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Yours sincerely,

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