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Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP
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Your ref: 01091160
Our ref: MC136107/RJH
3 June 2009

From Rt Hon Jane Kennedy MP
Minister of State for Farming and the Environment

Dear Tessa

Thank you for your letters of 3 April and 22 May to Ed Miliband enclosing a copy of an email you have received from a number of your constituents about the impact of intensive livestock farming on the environment. Your letter was passed to me as the Minister responsible for this policy area and I am sorry for the delay in replying.

The Government recognises that climate change is one of the most serious challenges facing the world today and helping to address this challenge is a key priority for us. The Climate Change Act (2008) makes the UK the first country in the world to have a legally binding long-term framework to cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. The Act requires emissions reductions of at least 80% in the Kyoto basket of greenhouse gases by 2050, and action will be needed across the economy, including in the agriculture, forestry and livestock sector, to meet this target. To strengthen this long-term policy framework, Budget 2009 (announced on 22 April) set a legally binding 34 per cent reduction in emissions by 2020, a new level of ambition for UK climate policy which I very much welcome.

According to the UK Greenhouse Gas Inventory¹, agriculture as a whole accounts for 7% of UK total emissions. This includes significant contributions from methane (38% of UK total) and nitrous oxide (68% of UK total). Direct emissions from the UK livestock sector (sheep, pigs, bovines and poultry) were 3.1% of the UK total emissions in 2006.

While all livestock production is associated with GHG emissions, the more intensive and efficient livestock production systems generally have lower emissions per kilogram of meat or milk produced than the more extensive free range type systems. The livestock sector also has many positive impacts. We have a long tradition in the UK of eating livestock products as part of a healthy balanced diet. Meat and dairy products are important sources of dietary iron, calcium, zinc and other vitamins and minerals. Livestock farming also sustains traditional landscapes and habitats that are rich in biodiversity and provides an economic use for grassland that would otherwise have no commercial value.

¹ UK Greenhouse Gas Inventory 1990-2006, <http://www.ghgi.org.uk>

On the specific issue of soya in animal feed, while imports of oilcake and meal have increased by 5% since 2007, whole soya bean imports for oil production in the UK have declined by a similar amount. Soya oilcake and meal are by-products of oil production whether that be in third countries or within the EU, and there are currently no other mainstream uses for this by-product. So restricting their usage for animal feeds may have no impact on soya bean production, while whatever feed source replaces the soya cake/meal will be associated with its own GHG emissions.

It is also clear that whilst consumers want to be able to make informed choices about what they eat, they are much less receptive to being told by others. We need to recognise that consumers give different priorities to different values. Some will want to support systems that bring benefits to landscapes, biodiversity and rural communities. Others might prefer to choose livestock systems that lead to lower greenhouse gas emissions. Neither is right or wrong.

The impacts of the livestock sector are complex and varied. It is responsible for significant levels of greenhouse gas emissions but sustainable agricultural practices can also provide many positive opportunities for creating and enabling environmental and social benefits worldwide. It is important that each type of husbandry continues to maximise the benefits it delivers and minimise the negative impacts, and that consumers can make informed choices.

In support of this the Government is undertaking a number of activities. We are working directly with the agricultural sector to raise awareness and encourage behavioural change, for example through our Rural Climate Change Forum. We are building greater awareness of climate change among farmers, primarily through the *Farming Futures* communications project which Defra funds. We are promoting the uptake of **anaerobic digestion** by farmers, businesses and local authorities. Budget 2009 announced additional funding of £10 million for anaerobic digestion and waste infrastructure and a continued increase of £8 per tonne per year to the standard rate of landfill tax up to 2013 to encourage investment in sustainable waste management.

We have worked closely with the dairy sector to produce a **Dairy Roadmap** to develop opportunities to mitigate climate change impacts and assess the positive benefits to the landscape and biodiversity of cattle husbandry. A **Beef and Lamb Roadmap** is now being worked on by the industry with Defra support and the newly formed **Pig Meat Supply Chain Task Force**, which I chair, will be working with the industry's Pig Environment Partnership to deliver similar outcomes for the pig sector.

We are also seeking to **influence the priorities and policy approaches of other nations and international organisations** towards addressing climate change in agriculture, forestry and land management, and to promote sustainable agriculture more broadly, working both bilaterally and with our international partners.

Our work is supported by a strong Farming and Food Science Programme. This includes a specific programme of research on agriculture and climate change (around £5m per year), focusing on how to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and how climate change will impact on UK agriculture.

Finally, we are trying to help individuals lead lower impact lives including looking at a number of behaviours – some of which relate to food. Our aim is not to tell people what to eat but to ensure that they have access to information that they can rely on to make informed choices about their diet and lifestyle. Advice on this and other pro-environmental behaviours is available on the DirectGov website:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Environmentandgreenerliving/Greenerlivingaquickguide/DG_064432

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Kennedy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

RT HON JANE KENNEDY MP