

Antony Higginbotham MP
Member of Parliament for Burnley



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

22 November 2020

Dear Constituent,

Re: Save our standards

Thank you for taking the time to contact me about food standards and the UK's trade policy.

I stood on a momentous manifesto – it is what got me elected to this great position and is something I am mindful of every day. In that manifesto a clear promise was made – that in all of our trade negotiations, we would not compromise on our high environmental protections, animal welfare and food standards.

This is a promise I remain 100% behind. And I am behind it because we all want to have confidence in the food we eat. I backed the Agriculture Bill because it delivers on this and, as Ministers have consistently said at the Despatch Box in the House of Commons, we will not countenance any watering down of our standards.

Given our large farming community in Burnley though, I have also been engaged in ongoing discussions with Ministers about what more we can do to give public assurance, recognising the concerns raised by them and others. I was therefore delighted to see that the Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC) is now to be placed on a statutory footing, giving farmers a proper voice in UK trade policy, and that Parliament will have greater scrutiny over future trade agreements.

The TAC will have a legal responsibility to produce a report on the impact on animal welfare and agriculture for each new FTA signed by the Government after the transition period has ended. This will be provided to Parliament before scrutiny of the FTA begins – ensuring it informs the debate by giving MPs and Peers independent and expert advice when reviewing the impact of each trade deal on farming.

I do also recognise, however, that there is concern about low-standard food entering the UK and have spoken to Ministers about this. This includes, for example, hormone-fed beef and chlorine washed chicken.

I do not believe that imposing a simple ban on imports that don't meet UK production standards is the right way to go, nor would it support our farmers. It would add barriers to trade and encourage other countries to behave in the same way – shutting our farming produce off from much of the world, including with the EU (as this would require the EU to follow UK rules, which they would not do as we have said we won't do for their rules).

Such a requirement would also damage developing countries who rely on trade with us to alleviate poverty. These countries already meet our food safety standards, and sell into the UK, but do not have the means to meet our production standards.

That said, Ministers have made clear that the Food Standards Agency will continue to ensure that all food imports comply with our high standards for safety, and tools remain at our disposal to protect against countries trying to import products we don't want into the UK. This includes, for example, tariffs, quotas and safeguards.

The enhanced TAC will also provide an important opportunity for farmers and farming groups to feed into FTAs, and give Parliament an expert and independent view of the impact of such agreements on our agricultural sector. This will mean MPs, myself included, will

know before agreeing to any FTA whether it continues to support our standards as it should.

I hope this reassures you of my commitment to keep and build upon the world leading food standards that we enjoy in the UK.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Higginbotham', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Antony Higginbotham MP
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