

Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP
Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF

Sent by email

14th December 2023

Dear Minister,

Evidence base for the Farming Transition

The announcement of winning projects from the second round of Landscape Recovery on 29th November showed everything that the Farming Transition can be. The confirmation of habitat restoration funding, for farmed landscapes from Cornwall to Hadrian's Wall, shows the huge potential for food production and nature recovery to be delivered side by side.

But, whilst congratulating you and your team for this progress, we are compelled to highlight that Landscape Recovery, despite representing the highest value for money option for delivering climate and nature goals, received just £25m of the £2.4 billion farming budget.

This scale of ambition falls well short of what is needed for climate and nature. Scale of need [analysis](#) commissioned by the Wildlife Trusts, the RSPB and the National Trust has shown an urgent need to increase the most environmentally effective Environmental Land Management spending in order to meet the Government's environmental goals.

We remain unconvinced that the Government's current focus on expanding the Sustainable Farming Incentive, offering free choice options which in some cases require minimal environmental interventions from farmers in order to qualify for the funding, is the best way to achieve this.

We want to engage with Defra on this and seek an open conversation about how 2030 goals can best be reached. The publication of the Department's evidence base for the Farming Transition, showing how current ELM actions will add up to the scale and pace of change needed to reverse declines in farmland biodiversity by 2030, would help us to understand the current approach and engage constructively with it. We would also appreciate confirmation of how [regulatory gaps](#) arising from the removal of cross compliance will be swiftly addressed, especially for hedgerows. Confirmation of next steps, following the 'protecting hedgerows' consultation held this summer, is urgently required.

Our organisations remain keen to work with you and your team to implement our shared farming policy goals. We hope that you will agree to share the evidence base for the current Farming Transition approach, and to a roundtable meeting to discuss that evidence in detail, to enable such joint working.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, we look forward to your response.

With best wishes for Christmas.

Yours sincerely,

Harry Bowell, Director of Nature & Land, National Trust
James Cooper, Head of Government Affairs, The Woodland Trust
Professor Alastair Driver, Director, Rewilding Britain
Alice Groom, Head of Sustainable Land Policy, The RSPB
Vicki Hird, Strategic Lead on Agriculture, The Wildlife Trusts
Matthew Orman, Executive Director, Sustainable Soils Alliance
Shaun Spiers, Executive Director, Green Alliance
Alec Taylor, Head of Policy (Production), WWF-UK
Will White, Sustainable Farming Coordinator, Sustain
Richard Benwell, CEO, Wildlife & Countryside Link

Replies can be sent to matt@wcl.org.uk and swilliams@green-alliance.org.uk

CC:

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Jonathan Baker, Deputy Director of Future Farming and Countryside, Defra