



Wednesday 3rd July 2019

Dear Andrew

Thank you for taking the trouble to write to me.

You are right to point out that farming and agriculture is at the heart of British life, and I have sought to put it at the heart of my campaign. As Prime Minister, I will be judged on my ability to advance the interests of your members and so I look forward to working closely with you to support farmers and food producers.

Brexit is the most pressing question that you raise and it is the pivotal issue in this campaign. Let me say at the outset that I will avoid No Deal unless there is no other option. I am under no illusions that No Deal would be highly damaging for farmers and the agriculture sector as a whole. I have consistently made it clear that my preference is for us to leave with a better deal that addresses the problems with the existing deal and specifically the backstop. I believe that with my experience of business and government I am the best placed candidate to get that deal. Once we exit the European Union, I will pursue deals that deliver as free and frictionless trade for farmers and land managers as possible. And as a committed and passionate Unionist, I can guarantee that I will never do anything to threaten Scotland's biggest export market, the rest of the United Kingdom.

I have also sought to prepare for the possibility that the European Union refuses to budge by putting forward a comprehensive No Deal plan. As part of that, a "No Deal Relief Programme" would include a £6 billion fund for the fishing and farming sectors who export to Europe, to ease transition out of the European Union while honouring our international obligations. This plan gives us both the best chance of getting a deal but also ensures we are prepared if we do not.

I have listened to your arguments on the uncertainty that your members will face if we have to leave the EU without a deal. My commitment is that I will mitigate the impact of No Deal Brexit on them. Where they have to change their business model, I will guarantee they get the support they need to do so. We will ensure that no family or community is left behind.

I know how difficult it can be to run a business. I built my own company from the ground up over the course of 14 years. It might not have been as difficult as managing the land and producing food, but it wasn't always easy. You can be assured that I would back farmers and the entire business community every step of the way. As the first entrepreneur to become Prime Minister, the central ambition of my government would be to build the most pro-business economy in Europe.

Leaving the EU is a golden opportunity to support farmers across the UK and design a system of farming support that reflects the needs and realities of British farmers. However for three years, Scottish farmers have been left in the dark by the SNP's failure to articulate a coherent policy for future funding. While the UK Government and other devolved administrations have been clear in outlining their proposals to support farmers and land managers, the SNP have remained silent on their plans for the industry. As Prime Minister, I will ensure that the UK Government remains open to working with the Scottish Government to support Scottish farmers and listening to the issues raised by your members. Wherever I can work constructively with the Scottish Government, I will endeavour to do so.

You rightly say that the immigration system should maintain access to both a permanent and seasonal workforce, for example during peak harvest. I have been clear that we need a UK-wide immigration system that recognises the distinct needs of Scottish agriculture, and I have consistently backed the removal of the £30,000 salary threshold. One of my first tasks as Prime Minister would be to work with Scottish Conservative MP colleagues such as Kirstene Hair MP to develop a flexible system that works for Scotland without erecting any barriers within the United Kingdom that could damage our internal market or create unnecessary difficulties for business.

On food production, I would ensure that the UK Agriculture Bill puts the production of high quality British food on the face of the Bill. Farmers cannot be the stewards of the countryside without running successful, profitable farm businesses. I would not lower standards in pursuit of trade deals and I would use every tool to make sure the current standards are protected.

I am happy to confirm my support for more efficient and productive farming including necessary government support. Policy must always be based on sound science, particularly as we explore the opportunities that gene editing can present in reducing our reliance on plant protection products. Science must also guide us when we consider the safety of pesticides. The ability to develop agricultural and environmental policies that suit our own national interests is one of the main reasons why we have to deliver on our promise to leave the EU. Our Environmental Land Management scheme will support farmers to deliver public goods through more efficient and productive practices. This scheme will also support less favoured and upland areas. I am acutely aware that this support will be especially vital in Scotland,

where 85 per cent of land is less favoured, and farmers and land managers are faced with the challenges of remoteness and poor soil quality.

Thank you, again, for writing to me.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeremy Hunt". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

Jeremy Hunt