

Stop the spread of factory farms: Three asks for MPs

Briefing for the Mass Lobby against factory farming 19 October 2026

Summary

Expanding factory farming, as the Government plans to do, would make the UK's food system less resilient, not more. It would make us more dependent on imported feed, more exposed to global supply shocks, and worsen pollution, at the very moment we need the opposite. It is contrary to warnings from the National Audit Office, the Government's own national security assessment and Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee. We urge MPs to support a different approach.

- **Industrial livestock production is undermining food resilience.** More than half the cereals used in the UK go to animal feed, and intensive livestock depends on imported soy and fertiliser, just as harvests fall and there are growing risks to global supply chains.

- **Other routes to growth would serve rural communities better.** Investment in horticulture, pulses, higher-welfare farming and locally owned processing would strengthen food resilience, farm incomes and rural economies.
- **We are calling for the Poultry Sector Growth Plan to be redesigned** around farmers and food resilience; industrial livestock units to be reclassified as industrial development in planning law; and statutory catchment nutrient budgets to bring pollution within legal and safe limits.

Until these reforms are in place, we support a moratorium on new and expanded industrial livestock units. The policy proposals outlined below apply to England, but measures are needed in all UK nations.

Food security

The government's own officials warn that the food system is not ready for the shocks that we know are coming. The National Audit Office concluded in September that Defra's actions "have not been sufficient" to make the food supply chain resilient to disruption, noting that domestic production depends heavily on imported fertiliser and feed. The Government's [national security assessment](#) concludes that the UK "does not have enough land to feed its population and rear livestock" and that "animal farming at current levels is unsustainable without imports". [More than 180 food experts and organisations](#) have warned that we cannot rely on food supplies in the way we have become used to, and we are in "a new era in which food supplies will be disrupted" and "food can be weaponised". Expanding input-dependent food production - like industrial livestock - moves in the wrong direction.

- **Domestic harvests should feed people first.** [Defra figures](#) show 55% of the wheat, barley and oats used in the UK goes to animal feed, including 70% of barley. The [2025 UK barley harvest](#) was the lowest since 2012 and the 2026

harvest is set to be worse. Quite simply, in the context of falling yields and an environmental crisis we need some of that land and grain back to feed people and recover nature. Plant-based foods like peas produce roughly twice as much protein per unit of land as poultry meat.

- **Imported feed.** Soy from South America makes up 18% of UK animal feed. British chicken and pork can only be nominally described as domestic produce, and each new intensive livestock unit locks in decades of import dependence.
- **Fossil-fuel inputs.** Feed crops rely on fertiliser made from natural gas, and sheds need continuous heating and ventilation, exposing producers to energy price shocks.
- **The need to rebuild genuinely domestic production:** Home-grown vegetable production is falling. We now grow just 53% of the vegetables we eat, down from 63% in 2003. Domestic fruit just 16%.

Good growth in every postcode, not global consolidation

In his [first statement to Parliament as Prime Minister](#), Andy Burnham committed to giving people and places “ownership and control”, saying that “from that control over their destiny comes change and growth”. Food and farming should be a key test of these commitments. Growth built on farmers having a fairer share of profits, co-operatives, local processing, shorter supply chains and public procurement keeps ownership and value in rural communities.

Factory farm expansion does the opposite. [A handful of vertically integrated processors](#) control the UK poultry and pork sectors. Moy Park is owned by [Pilgrim's Pride](#), [majority-owned by the Brazilian meat corporation JBS](#); Avara Foods is a joint venture with US agribusiness Cargill. Under the prevailing contract model the integrator decides the animals used, the feed and the price, while the farmer carries the capital risk.

The Poultry Sector Growth Plan has been influenced by these interests. It is one of the Government's first industry-led

sector growth plans, and [minutes of the Farming and Food Partnership Board](#) record that the founder of 2 Sisters Food Group (the UK's largest industrial chicken producer) attended to “lend his expertise to the commissioning” of the plan. Yet the industry's own senior executives [warned this month](#) that food companies are relying on “quick-fix crisis management” rather than taking action that would build resilience, because decisions are dictated by short-term profit motives and targets. Despite this they are involved in developing these policies.

In August, [revised national planning policy](#) gave “substantial weight” to food production in planning decisions, [following industry lobbying](#), without defining how planners should ensure food production is sustainable. [More than 20](#) organisations, including River Action, the RSPCA, the Soil Association and The Wildlife Trusts, have urged Angela Eagle to reject the Poultry Growth Plan, arguing it lacks a rationale or clear evidence, and hasn't been subject to public consultation.

Pollution of air, water and climate

- **[The chicken meat industry produces around 3.5 million tonnes of litter a year](#)**. Most is spread on land, either directly or after being processed in a biodigester. In the right amounts, this waste can act as a fertiliser, but overuse is seeing excess nutrients wash into rivers. The Government has announced plans to remove the Renewables Obligation Certificate which supports poultry litter incinerators due to inappropriate public spending. As a result, an additional 600,000 tonnes of poultry litter will be directed towards land. While incineration is an inappropriate use of poultry litter, there is no plan for how to ensure this significant amount of litter is used appropriately and in a way that does not cause environmental harm.
- **[Only 14.3% of England's surface waters are in good ecological status](#)**. Parliament's [Environmental Audit Committee](#) found agricultural pollution affects 40% of water bodies and recommended a presumption against new intensive livestock units that would exceed a catchment's nutrient budget. The Environment Act target requires a 40% cut in nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution from agriculture by 2038, yet Defra's [delivery plan](#) concedes that “limited progress” and has been made and pushed targets back.
- **[Agriculture produces 89% of UK ammonia](#)**, which forms secondary fine particulate pollution (PM2.5), which is linked to heart and lung disease and early deaths. [A new investigation](#) estimates that air pollution from the 1,200 largest pig and poultry farms in England and Wales costs the public £131 million a year and causes over 1,000 lost years of life due to premature death
- **[The Climate Change Committee's Seventh Carbon Budget pathway](#)** requires meat consumption to fall by 25% by 2040 and 35% by 2050. Climate change is already affecting UK food production. [Analysis by the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit](#) found the UK was on course for its worst cereal and oilseed harvest since records began in 1984, after England's warmest June and driest July on record.

Recommendations

1. A poultry plan for farmers

The Poultry Sector Growth Plan should not proceed in its current form. We are calling for a plan that:

- guarantees fair farm incomes for higher-welfare poultry, with [fair dealing rules](#) like those planned for eggs;
- does not increase poultry numbers, but funds transition to lower-intensity, higher-welfare and agroecological production and diversification into horticulture and mixed farming, so no farmer is left with stranded assets;
- supports more and better rural jobs through diversified farms and local processing;
- is published in draft for consultation, with an assessment against Environment Act targets.

The Horticulture Sector Growth Plan should be the Government's flagship, with a production target for fruit, vegetables and protein crops such as peas, beans and pulses. Fruit and vegetables should make up 41% of our diet but are only [7% of UK farm output](#).

2. Reclassify industrial livestock units in planning law

The largest intensive livestock installations are classed as agriculture under [section 336\(1\) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#), a 35-year old definition that predates the rapid expansion of the intensive livestock industry. The Environment Agency already regulates large pig and poultry

units as industrial installations, yet in planning they benefit from policies meant for low-impact farming.

We are calling for section 336(1) to be amended so that keeping poultry or pigs above the existing permitting thresholds (40,000 poultry places, 2,000 production pig places or 750 sow places) counts as industrial activity for planning, through the Clean Water Bill or the next planning legislation. Proposals would then be directed to suitable locations and assessed for cumulative impact, while planning could be simplified for horticulture and other sustainable enterprises. Ministers should confirm that planning support for food production does not include industrial livestock units.

3. Statutory nutrient budgets for every catchment

In line with the [Sustainable Nitrogen Alliance](#) and the Environmental Audit Committee's recommendation, we are calling for statutory nutrient budgets in the new framework for agricultural water regulation and the Clean Water Bill:

- a budget for every river catchment, set to deliver Environment Act, water quality and air quality targets, within a national nutrient strategy;
- farm-level balance sheets, so that nutrient management plans required under the Farming Rules for Water are delivered in practice;
- no new or expanded livestock activity in a catchment that exceeds its budget.

Common questions

How will these proposals help farmers? Industrial expansion boosts processors' profits while squeezing farmers and degrading the soil and water farming depends on. A fair deal for farmers, and support to grow the foods we need, is the route to resilience.

Intensive poultry provides affordable protein. More cheap industrial meat has not led to a reduction in UK hunger: Over the time that industrial farming has expanded, food insecurity and diet-related ill health have both risen. "Cheap" meat is actually passing on costs to other communities, future generations and taxpayers, including £131 million a year in air pollution damage. Redirecting public support could make pulses, vegetables and higher-welfare meat affordable for everyone.

Isn't more capacity needed to improve animal welfare? The Government's [animal welfare strategy](#) supports a move to slower-growing breeds and lower stocking densities, requiring

more shed space. But higher welfare standards can be achieved in our existing infrastructure, and fewer birds would be consistent with our climate and nature commitments.

Won't this lead to more imports from abroad? UK consumption of meat has risen as more has been produced. Rising demand for chicken is being driven by aggressive marketing and the spread of fast food. We eat more meat than is recommended for health, and production and consumption need to shift together. British farmers are rightly expected to meet legal welfare standards, which are wrongly not then imposed on many overseas producers. The UK Government should introduce legislation to ban the import and sale of animal products produced from farming practices that would be illegal under the UK animal welfare laws. If a farming method is too cruel for British farms, it's too cruel to be imported.

Upcoming opportunities for MPs:

- **Monday 19 October:** Mass Lobby Day and deadline for tabling questions for Defra's questions session on 22 October.
- **Wednesday 21st October, 9.00am:** The first joint meeting between the Farming APPG and the Water Pollution APPG will focus on the Poultry Growth Plan, with presentations from academic researchers and experts. Taking place in Portcullis House Room M.
- **Thursday 22 October, 9.30am:** Environment, Food and Rural Affairs oral questions. Please consider tabling questions on this topic, for example: "What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the risks of a poultry growth plan to UK food security, given the dependence of poultry production on imports?" or "What assessment has the secretary of state made of the likely risks of poultry expansion to UK rivers and air quality"
- **Wednesday 28 October:** Autumn Budget. Please raise investment in horticulture and farmer-led production, not factory farming, in the debates that follow the announcement.
- **Next Defra oral questions:** not yet scheduled but next session is likely in late November or December.
- **Friday 4 December:** second reading for Tim Farron's Water Regulation Bill. Please encourage, attend and support the reclassification of agriculture for planning purposes, and nutrient budgets.

Throughout the period

- **Clean Water Bill.** Announced in the King's Speech on 13 May. The Government says it will create a single, stronger water regulator and consolidate and strengthen agricultural pollution rules, building on the January 2026 water white paper. As of 12 October it has not been introduced. Please support the inclusion of catchment nutrient budgets and the planning status of industrial livestock units.
- **Early day motions.** There is currently no EDM on the Poultry Sector Growth Plan or a moratorium on the growth of industrial livestock. Consider tabling one.
- **Written questions.** E.g. question when the Poultry and Horticulture Sector Growth Plans will be published, what is being done to tackle industrial livestock expansion in polluted catchments and support horticulture, Defra's response to the National Audit Office report which said that the UK was unprepared for food supplies running out.
- **Westminster Hall debates.** Consider applying for a debate on eg: UK food security and dependence on imported feed; reframing the Poultry Sector Growth Plan; nutrient pollution in river and coastal habitats.
- **All-party parliamentary groups.** Relevant groups include the APPG on Water Pollution, Agroecology for Sustainable Food and Farming, Animal Welfare, and the APPG for Food Security (which advocates for the egg, pig and poultry industries).
- **Horticulture growth plan.** No publication dates have been announced for horticulture or poultry plans. Please write to the Defra ministers to request updates, changes, and further information on these plans.

