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From Rt Hon Jim Paice MP
Minister of State for Agriculture and Food

Thank you for your email of 9 January chasing a reply to your letter of 14 September on behalf of your constituent [REDACTED] about the impact of climate change on agriculture in the UK and the herbicide Glyphosate. I am sorry for the delay in replying, unfortunately we do not have a record of receipt of your previous letter.

A sustainable food and farming industry is the first priority in Defra's business plan – this means enhancing its competitiveness and resilience while addressing its impacts on the environment.

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing agriculture. Defra is investing £12.6m on research to improve our understanding of greenhouse gas emissions, so that we can target the most effective actions for mitigation at farm level. In addition, Defra has also funded research to assess the impacts of climate change on agricultural production and its impacts on the environment, which informed the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) that was laid before the House on the 25 January 2012. The CCRA will be followed by the National Adaptation Programme (due for publication in 2013) that will set out Government proposals and policies for addressing the risks identified in the CCRA.

Crop production is under constant threat from pest, diseases and competition from weeds. Defra funds research to underpin crop protection using holistic approaches, from the development of resistant varieties to managing the crop and margins to reduce pest and disease incidence.

To promote innovation in agriculture, the Government is investing up to £90m over 5 years in the Sustainable Farming and Food Innovation Platform (£50m from Technology Strategy Board, £30m from Defra and £10m from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council). This initiative will provide match funding to industry for technological research and development, in areas such as sustainable crop and livestock production,

waste reduction and management, and greenhouse gas reduction – the first call, on crop protection, received £13.6m of Government funding.

Climate change, both mitigation and adaptation, is an overarching objective of Environmental Stewardship, an agri-environment scheme jointly funded by Defra and the EU under Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy. With over 54,000 agri-environment agreements in place covering nearly 67% of available agricultural land in England, this is one of our most important tools for increasing the resilience of habitats, species and ecosystems. Many existing agreements already contribute to mitigation and adaptation, and from spring 2010, 15 new or revised scheme options have been made available which can help with adaptation such as providing landscape benefits, making farm businesses more resilient, and enabling habitats and species to adapt.

The Campaign for the Farmed Environment is a unique partnership between industry, environmental groups and the Government, which aims to encourage farmers and land managers to voluntarily adopt important land management practices that will benefit the environment. Launched in November 2009, the Campaign has agreed to meet a number of stretching national targets by 2012. Although set up to benefit biodiversity, farm wildlife and resource protection, the Campaign supports climate adaptation and many of the measures being promoted will help build resilience to climate change, such as retaining uncropped land, putting in buffer strips and using fewer inputs.

I turn now to your constituent's concerns about glyphosate. Active substances such as the herbicide glyphosate which are used in plant protection products (essentially agricultural and home garden pesticides) must be approved in accordance with European Union (EU) legislation, to ensure that they meet modern standards of safety for people and the environment. The assessments are carried out by rapporteur member States on behalf of the EU, on the basis of a comprehensive dossier of scientific data. They are peer reviewed by member States, more recently under the auspices of the independent European Food Safety Authority. Substances which are considered to meet the required standards are approved, usually for ten years. At the end of that period, they must be reviewed again to determine whether they continue to meet the required standards, taking into account any changes to those standards in the meantime and relevant new data which have become available since their last approval.

The current EU approval of glyphosate is due to expire in December 2015. It will be subject to a detailed re-assessment of the scientific data which will include consideration of all relevant studies and will take into account findings published since the substances were last approved. A decision will then be taken either to renew the approval or not. If approval is renewed, products which contain glyphosate will be separately re-assessed, to confirm that they too continue to meet the required standards of safety. If approval is not renewed, those products will have to be withdrawn from the market.

We are aware of recent reports which suggest that a new plant pathogen has developed in genetically modified crops treated with glyphosate. There is no evidence that the long-term use of glyphosate in arable rotations in the UK (where no genetically modified crops are commercially grown) or other member States has resulted in any such problems in the EU. It is, however, difficult to comment further on these reports, because they have not been published in a peer-reviewed journal with all the information that would be needed for a proper assessment of their significance. I understand that the European Commission has asked the author of these reports, Professor Huber to provide his supporting data for

assessment, which could be undertaken separately or as part of the exercise for renewal of its approval.

Yours are

Jim

RT HON JIM PAICE MP

