

ELIZABETH TRUSS MP

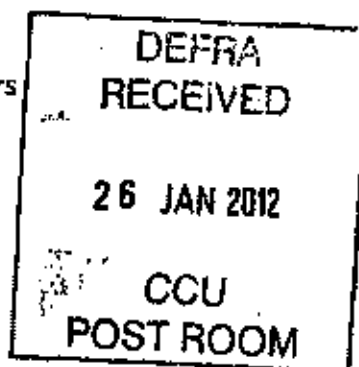
Constituency Office:
The Limes
32 Bridge Street
Thetford
Norfolk IP24 3AG
Tel: 01842 757 345



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Westminster Office:
House of Commons
Westminster
London SW1A 0AA
Tel: 020 7219 7151

The Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR



Dear Caroline,

23 January 2012

Last week I held a Farming Forum in my constituency at The Jolly Brewers, Shouldham Thorpe which was attended by arable and mixed farmers and other professionals involved in food production. This was the third such event I have held since becoming a Member of Parliament. I have set out the concerns that were raised below. I would be very grateful if you could address them so that I can go back to the group with answers to the points they raised.

Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

- Many farmers agreed that the current proposals do not place enough emphasis on production and food security, which should be the primary objective of CAP. It was felt that the proposals do not sufficiently incentivise UK production or competitiveness.
- The "greening" of Pillar 1: additional requirements for receiving direct payments, including the requirement to maintain an "ecological focus area" of at least 7% of farmland, were felt to be inappropriate and disadvantageous for the UK. Farmers expressed the view that the UK is already considerably more ecologically diverse than many other European countries. Concerns were raised about duplication between Pillars 1 and 2, given the environmental targets set by Natural England under the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme. The requirements were felt to be overly complicated, particularly those on crop diversification, risking problems with implementation as seen with the Single Payments Scheme.
- Several farmers advocated a broader definition of "greening" to include water, waste and energy. Rewards for such measures, including using less energy in production, would benefit the UK and deliver greater environmental benefits.

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- The cap on payments to larger farms was predicted to have a distorting effect on those farms affected because the value of directly paid labour can be deducted before the cap takes effect but this is not the case for labour contracted out. The cap would therefore force businesses away from labour contracted out, which may be more efficient.

Other points

- A wider point was made about the importance of maintaining water supply in East Anglia as a long-term planning issue for Defra and the Environment Agency. Intensive crops where Norfolk and the UK are strong relative to other countries are suffering due to under-investment in reservoirs and water storage. This will have knock-on effects for the supply chain.
- Support was voiced for strengthening producers in the supply chain through groups like producers' associations.
- Many expressed support for agricultural biotechnology which has the potential to increase efficiency and food production. One farmer drew attention to the fact that although high level scientific research is being conducted, more practical application of new techniques is needed through technology transfer. Additional skills in the industry would help achieve this.

Elizabeth Truss MP