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RECEIVED

15 APR 2019

Your ref: JS6069  
Our ref: MC2019/02801/AD

31 March 2019

L To,

Thank you for your email of 5 February to the Secretary of State on behalf of a number of your constituents about the welfare of farmed animals after the UK leaves the EU. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

There has been widespread support for our landmark Agriculture Bill and our new system of 'public money for public goods', which will enable us to use public money to incentivise farmers to achieve and maintain enhanced animal welfare.

The UK has some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world and these standards will not be watered down when we leave the EU. We will maintain our standards for animal welfare and food safety. We will also continue to work with the World Organisation for Animal Health to improve international standards more generally.

We are committed to making sure that any future trade agreements work for consumers, farmers and businesses across the UK, and will not compromise our standards on food safety and animal welfare as part of any future trade deals. The Government will ensure that any new products intended for the UK market will comply with our rigorous legislation and standards.

For example, when importing chicken we will not compromise on animal welfare, food safety or transparency to the consumer. You constituents can be assured that we will continue to uphold our firm commitments to food safety and animal welfare, which are held in high regard the world over, and that both the quality and safety of our products will continue to be paramount when we leave the EU.

With regard to exports of live animals, the rules concerning the commercial transportation of animals are set out in European Council Regulation (EC) 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport. This legislation covers any transportation of animals connected to an economic activity in the UK and the rest of the EU.

The Regulation sets out the strict conditions transporters need to follow, including the need to be authorised as a transporter and if they are carrying out journeys over eight hours, there are additional requirements such as having their vehicle approved to transport the animals they are carrying.

The Government would prefer that there is a trade in meat and meat products rather than the long distance transport of animals to slaughter. In line with our manifesto commitment, we will take early steps to control the export of live farm animals for slaughter as we leave the EU. We are currently considering all of the options, particularly in relation to trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and our obligations under WTO rules.

In line with our manifesto commitment, last year we launched a Call for Evidence on controlling live exports for slaughter and on improving the welfare of animals during transport. The call for evidence was issued on behalf of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations and closed on 22 May.

Evidence has been passed to the Farm Animal Welfare Committee, an independent group of animal welfare specialists whom we have asked to carry out a review of existing transport standards and make recommendations for improvements for when we leave the EU.

We will discuss the results and next steps with the Devolved Administrations. Any UK measure to control live exports needs to be agreed with the Devolved Administrations as animal welfare is a devolved policy issue.

The Government is committed to improving the welfare of all animals, and as we move towards a new relationship with Europe and the rest of the world, we have a unique opportunity to shape future animal welfare policy in the UK to ensure the highest standards in every area.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact the Secretary of State about this important issue.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance with this or any other matters in the future.

With best wishes,

  
**DAVID RUTLEY MP**