

Open Letter to the UK Government on Support for the Dairy Industry

To: Mr George Eustice, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Cc: Mr Rishi Sunak, The Chancellor and Treasury

Dear Mr Eustice,

We the undersigned understand that representatives of the UK dairy industry, namely the National Farmers Union (NFU) and The Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF) are pressuring the government to step in with financial support for their industry, due to collapsing demand from the foodservice and hospitality sectors. This is amid a growing 'crisis' causing some farmers to start dumping cows' milk.

Whilst we sympathise with all small UK businesses during this challenging time and appreciate the vital role that food producers may play, with regards to national food security, it is important to maintain perspective. The UK dairy industry is clearly in decline and has been experiencing a recent but significant drop in consumer demand. There are now [fewer than 9,500 dairy farms in the UK](#) compared with 13,000 10 years ago, and it has been predicted there will be fewer than [5,000 by 2025](#).

On the other hand, the UK market for dairy alternatives [has grown by 150% in 6 years](#). Plant-based business is positively booming.

Whilst we appreciate the need to support farmers, we shouldn't collectively keep artificially propping up a failing industry with public funds. We would instead like to see support for a progressive transition over to more sustainable, healthier and planet-friendly, non-animal-based agriculture or into other sustainable forms of land management. We strongly believe that financial assistance should be focused on supporting farmers to move to this more sustainable and compassionate alternative.

[Recent analysis](#) of data from [this 2018 study](#) shows that a litre of oat milk needs about 48 litres of water to produce, compared to over 600 litres of water to produce one litre of cows' milk. Land use per litre is more than 10 times higher for cows' milk versus plant-based alternatives, and carbon emissions per litre of plant milk are substantially lower too.

Dairy cows are big users of water, and according to the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board ([ADHB](#)): 'Milk is composed of nearly 87% water and lactating dairy cows need at least 60 litres each per day with some high yielding cattle needing up to 100 litres.'

A [2010 report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations](#) found that the production, packaging and transportation of cow's milk emits 4 per cent of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions. This is staggering. It goes on to state:

'In fact, lactating cattle are the main source of greenhouse gases among all livestock and poultry. These emissions include methane that builds up in a cow's digestive tract and is then burped out or emitted from its manure. Carbon dioxide and nitrous

oxide are also released from any land cleared for feed crops. Fertilisers used to grow feed further add to the greenhouse gas emissions.'

The dairy industry has devastating consequences for both animals and the environment. Negative welfare impacts on dairy cows include lameness, mastitis, metabolic disease, acidosis (from consuming concentrates instead of natural grazing), nutritional deficiencies, stress, and poor body condition. Intensive breeding and artificial selection over time has led to an animal whose vast nutritional needs simply cannot be met by grass alone. Feed for dairy cows is often supplemented with environmentally destructive soybean meal imported from overseas for example, which in turn is driving the destruction of the Amazon. This is far from a public good. At a time when the public understanding of these impacts is higher than ever, and British consumers are increasingly looking for alternatives, public money should not be used to support this industry. Doing so would run counter to the UK's ambitions to reduce agricultural emissions and restore biodiversity.

While it has long been known that animal farming increases the risk of zoonotic diseases, the current crisis is reinforcing negative public attitudes towards the dairy industry. The crisis has also highlighted fragilities in the UK food supply chain, addressing these would be a more responsible use of public funds.

The UK currently imports around [three quarters of our fruit and vegetables](#) which puts it in an increasingly precarious position, due to future fallout of climate change, the current pandemic and uneasy future of international trade arrangements. Would it not make more sense to encourage increased UK plant-based agriculture, growing more land-efficient crops especially in light of the recent uplift in demand for healthy and sustainable plant-based foods? For example, beans and pulses are very efficient crops to grow in Britain. Oats grow perfectly well in the UK climate and [oat milk is a thriving product with shoppers buying £36m worth last year](#). This quote from The Grocer (food industry publication) states that 'The Swedish brand Oatly said its UK sales had increased by nearly 90% to £18m in 2018 and were expected to exceed £30m this year.'

We therefore urge you to seize this opportunity to provide farmers with the financial assistance they need to move away from the cruel and environmentally damaging dairy industry, to embrace sustainable plant-based agriculture or diversify to other means of sustainable land management instead. In addition, animal agriculture plays a central role in the causation of emerging diseases, so now is the time to stop funding it.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our concerns.

Signed,

Isobel Hutchinson, Director, **Animal Aid**

Elisa Allen, Director, **PeTA UK**

Louise Davies, Head of Campaigns, Policy & Research, **The Vegan Society**

Dr. Kristof Dhont, PhD

Peter Egan, Actor and Activist

Pru Elliott, Head of Campaigns UK, **The Humane League**

Juliet Gellatley BSc, Dip DM, Dip CNM, Founder and Director, **Viva**
Nicola Glen, UK & IE Spokesperson, **Eyes On Animals**
Dan Graham, Chair & Trustee, **Vegan Organic Network**
Jo Kidd & Terry Thompson, **Vegan Organics Kent**
Claire Palmer MSc, Founder, **Animal Justice Project**
Abigail Penny, Acting Executive Director, **Animal Equality**
Professor Joachim Stoeber, PhD



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