



Dear Minister

## UK Oilseed Rape Production

In January this year, the NFU sent a policy proposal to Defra with the aim of stabilising oilseed rape area and consequently production in the UK, protecting the crushing and plant breeding industries, farmers and the environment through the retention of such a key arable crop. The proposal follows the decision of Defra Ministers to remove neonicotinoid seed treatment that controls cabbage stem flea beetle, which has the consequence of making much OSR production impractical and uneconomic. We believe that the loss of this key arable break crop has such economic, agronomic and environmental impacts that it requires mitigating action by Government, working with the industry.

Our proposal is a short-term policy aimed at bridging the gap until a longer term, sustainable solution can be found. This future solution may be based on some of the extensive research that is currently being undertaken and would be significantly aided by access to advanced technologies, such as new breeding techniques. The Prime Minister Boris Johnson himself, on the 24 July 2019 said, *“let’s start now to liberate the UK’s extraordinary bioscience sector from anti genetic modification rules and let’s develop the blight-resistant crops to feed the world”*.

Before the neonicotinoid ban, oilseed rape was once the largest break crop in the UK arable rotation and is hugely important as an early, open flowering crop for pollinators. Since the ban, the UK oilseed rape crop area has significantly fallen because there is no alternative to control cabbage stem flea beetle. I am sure the government recognises the importance of flowering crops for pollinators, bees, birds, beneficial insects and for wider rotations as part of the more sustainable IPM approach. However, oilseed rape is now a high-risk crop for farmers to establish, and increasingly farmers cannot afford to take the risk to continue growing oilseed rape without short term support.

The loss of oilseed rape is not simply an agricultural issue; the consequence would also be seen in reduced UK oilseed crush capacity, which has been communicated to you by the industry. Therefore, a solution is desperately needed to bridge the gap before effective remedies for cabbage stem flea beetle are found.

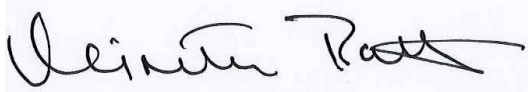
As well as producing vegetable oil for the food sector, the meal (after the oilseed has been crushed the remaining part of the black seed) is an important product for the animal feed sector. The UK is in deficit for domestic feed protein and the meal cannot be substituted by other domestic protein crops. Without it, users will seek imported protein crops, like soya, with the key importers being South America, sometimes indirectly contributing to deforestation and other negative consequences of less-regulated production.

We are also frustrated to see imported oilseed rape, treated with the same plant protection products now banned in the UK, taking the place of UK oilseed. This is a stark example of UK standards not being respected in our trade import policy. Would the British consumer expect this in their shopping basket, in light of all the debate surrounding not only bees and pollinators but also equivalent food standards of post-Brexit imports? We are asking you for support to ensure that the consumer has sustainable supplies of homegrown British rapeseed oil.

The importance of food security and indigenous supply has never been more important. The challenge of cabbage stem flea beetle and the destruction it brings to our oilseed rape crops has reached a critical point, where damage to members and industry may not be recoverable.

We recognise that we are currently in unprecedented times with the battle that the country is facing, and the struggles this presents to you as a government, but we do hope to discuss our oilseed rape support proposal with you by phone or remotely in the near future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Minette Batters', written on a light blue background.

**Minette Batters**  
**President**