

British farming and domestic food production matter. British farmers supply over 60% of the nation's food and are the foundation of the country's largest business sector – food and drink; we are central to the rural economy, providing over 470,000 jobs and we protect and enhance the nation's countryside and wildlife, managing over 70% of the UK's land.

I am writing on behalf of the 55,000 farmers and growers which the NFU represents across England and Wales. Farmers like me, who are proud of the food and drink we produce, the high welfare standards we meet and the way we care for the land we farm. And we believe, with the right ingredients and in partnership with all politicians, we can deliver more for the country in the future.

However, farming is now at a crossroads. As the industry potentially most affected by the decision to leave the European Union, we now have a unique opportunity and responsibility to shape the future of British farming, food production and the countryside we all value so highly. Get it right and the rewards can be huge; get it wrong and we could see the decimation of Britain's ability to feed itself and to care for our iconic landscapes. The next leader of the Liberal Democrats has a critical role in helping parliament avoid a hugely damaging 'no deal' Brexit. Farming businesses need the reinvigorated influence they can bring to bear on Parliament and the executive to highlight the enormous economic damage this would entail for our food and farming sectors, the wider economy and the people of the UK.

Of course, avoiding no-deal and achieving the right outcome from Brexit remains a huge priority for farm businesses; but we also want to work with the next leader on a broader range of issues, to seize the opportunities the future holds. Below, I set out three key policy areas where we can work together to future-proof British farming, continuing to supply a safe and affordable supply of British food grown to world leading standards while protecting and enhancing our treasured countryside.

Firstly, we need a Brexit that creates the right conditions for British farming to thrive. This means ensuring as free and frictionless trade in agri-food goods as possible with our principal EU market, working towards a regulatory system that is designed for the specific needs of UK farm practice, developing an immigration system that maintains access to the seasonal and permanent workforce required by UK growers, farmers and the wider food chain, and ensuring our international trade respects, and doesn't undermine, our own high domestic production standards.

Secondly, we must invest in sustainable growth through a future agricultural policy which supports farmers as food producers and acknowledges the strategic importance of domestic production in guaranteeing our food security, whilst also improving productivity, resilience and stability in the sector. We have an opportunity to create a more transparent and open food supply chain, one which continues to uphold and enhance standards and safety for consumers at home and abroad.

And thirdly, we need a policy environment which supports and enhances our environment, countryside and rural communities. Farming is already making great progress in this area and we stand ready to make a full contribution to the UK becoming net zero by 2050; the NFU has a commitment for British farming to do so by 2040. Our farmers are up for this challenge which will also need clear and ambitious government commitment to more productive and efficient farming, through investment in better, more sustainable infrastructure and technology. We also need a new focus on the blight of rural crime and help in addressing the challenges of social exclusion and mental health in agriculture.

As a candidate in the Liberal Democrat leadership election, I am asking you to rise to these challenges and pledge your support for farming and commit to a positive future for domestic food production and the high standards associated with it. I welcome your views on the challenges I've set out above and I invite you to meet with me to discuss how we can work together in the future.