

Business Statement of Support for the Development of UK Core Environmental Standards

We are a group of leading businesses whose operations depend on the health of the natural world and the ecosystem services it provides such as clean water, healthy soils, and a stable climate, without which we simply could not operate. Tackling existential threats such as climate change and nature loss is imperative for the long-term viability of our businesses. As such, we call on the Government to adopt a bold and forward-looking vision for UK trade that puts the environment and the just transition to a green economy front and centre, alongside other traditional trade priorities.

We want to build strong supply chains that are resilient and respond to the climate and nature crises we see affecting the food and farming sector. Our businesses are already acting through our day-to-day operations. We need the Government to do the same through trade policy – trade deals that ignore commitments to nature protection and restoration undermine both the UK's environmental regulations and the sustainability of its leading businesses.

As a newly independent trading nation, we have a unique opportunity to define a path for trade that embraces and tackles these important challenges that concern both business and the public. At the same time as negotiating new trade deals for the first time in nearly fifty years, the UK is hosting the next international climate conference, COP26, as well as the 2021 G7 summit. Aligning these agendas in 2021 will demonstrate the UK intends to contribute to a green global recovery that accelerates delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals and tackles the climate and nature emergency.

The UK has already demonstrated leadership through its 'public money for public goods' approach to agricultural payments, in setting up the Global Resource Initiative taskforce and in developing a National Food Strategy. The Government has also committed to maintaining its high environmental and food standards, while negotiating free trade agreements with partners across the world. Now it is time to go further.

We strongly support the recommendation of the Trade and Agriculture Commission report that the UK establishes a core set of environmental standards that would apply to both home produced and imported food. We call on Government to:

Immediately take forward a process for determining the UK's core standards, including environmental, animal welfare, and public health standards, applicable to all food sold and produced in the UK.

Both the Trade and Agriculture Commission and the National Food Strategy (Part 1) have come out in support of the development of core standards. A core set of standards created in consultation with the public and based on clear policy goals and scientific evidence would allow the UK to align its trade policies and its environmental ambition. Designing these standards well and applying them fairly to domestic and foreign producers would ensure that they are in accordance with WTO law. This would allow the UK's food and farming sectors to contribute to meeting net zero and nature restoration targets and support sustainable production abroad.

Launching such a process would give UK food businesses - producers, manufacturers and retailers like us - the confidence that our efforts to produce and sell food sustainably are not being undermined by those still operating in ways that are damaging to the environment. As part of a broader trade policy which works for the environment, core standards would enable the UK to "build back better" after the global pandemic, supporting the transition to a greener economy, and provide much needed leadership on this front in its new trading partnerships.

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