

DEFRA Policies: Impact on Farming Communities

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[Matt Vickers](#)

[\(Stockton West\) \(Con\)](#)

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8. What assessment she has made of the potential impact of her policies on farming communities. (907020)

[The Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs](#)

[\(Dame Angela Eagle\)](#)

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While the Conservatives failed to spend £300 million of the farming budget, we are backing farmers with the largest nature-friendly budget in history, and 50,000 farm businesses and half of all farmed land are now managed under our schemes. We

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have today published our initial response to Baroness Batters' recommendations on farm profitability, and we are developing our 25-year farming road map.

[Matt Vickers](#)

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I have met many farmers from my part of the world who have shared with me the horrific consequences of the family farm tax on food prices, on food security and on families who have farmed for generations. This morning's farming profitability review identifies that that is the single biggest issue affecting farm viability. I believe that if the Minister heard at first hand from farmers in my part of the world, she might think again. Will she meet them?

[Dame Angela Eagle](#)

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I meet farmers all the time, and I intend to spend the early part of next year, and hopefully many years thereafter, continuing to do so.

[Ben Goldsborough](#)

[\(South Norfolk\) \(Lab\)](#)

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Merry Christmas to you and your team, Mr Speaker.

Christmas is coming and the goose is getting fat—or it would be if we had not had such a terrible year for avian influenza. The poultry sector is worth £1.5 billion gross value added to our UK economy. As much as I welcome the investment going into Harlow for the national biosecurity centre, will the Minister tell us what action we are taking to make sure that we have more veterinary surgeons located in the area where the problems are being found?

[Dame Angela Eagle](#)

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I pay tribute to the farmers in my hon. Friend's constituency in the awful situation they face. We are closely monitoring the outbreak and have taken action to eradicate disease by putting in place control zones, tracing movements and issuing a proactive housing order. I am more than happy to talk to him about what we can do to ensure that we have the appropriate level of veterinary response. Avian flu is now endemic in the wild bird population, and we will have to get increasingly sophisticated at dealing with it.

[Mr Speaker](#)

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I call the shadow Minister.

[Dr Neil Hudson](#)

[\(Epping Forest\) \(Con\)](#)

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Merry Christmas to you and your team, Mr Speaker.

The Government must enact policies that benefit farming communities. They have a chance to do that now with another critical issue that impacts our farming, food security, animal welfare and biosecurity. A recommendation was made this month by the council of the School of the Biological Sciences to close the University of Cambridge's vet school. I declare my strong personal and professional interest as a graduate of that school and as a fellow of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. We do not produce enough vets in the UK. We face threats to our food security and our biosecurity, both of which vets are pivotal to. The health and welfare of animals depends on vets, as indeed does public health. Will the Government act now to press the University of Cambridge to block this closure proposal and save Cambridge's vet school, for the benefit of animals and people here in the UK and across the world?

[Dame Angela Eagle](#)

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This is a matter for the University of Cambridge, but having visited the veterinary school at Harper Adams University, I am all too aware—as clearly the hon. Gentleman is—of the importance of having enough well-qualified vets in our country. We

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need to ensure that the supply and the opportunities to train are there, but this particular decision is one for the University of Cambridge. I am happy to talk to the university, but I am unsighted on the reasons. If the hon. Member wants to talk to me afterwards, I would be more than happy to hear what he has to say.

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