



**Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

Seacole Building, 2 Marsham Street  
London, SW1P 4DF

20<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Attention : **Victoria Prentis MP**

RE: NATIONAL FOOD STRATEGY – Henry Dimbleby report July 2021- THE PLAN:

Dear Victoria

British growers are ready to play their part as the government works towards its goals to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and protect 30% of our land for nature by 2030.

I am writing on behalf of thousands of growers paying a voluntary levy to the Processors and Growers Research Organisation (PGRO), having observed over 15 references to pulses, peas and beans within the National Food Strategy published in July. Clearly, UK pulse growers are deemed a significant part of the future of environmentally sustainable farming systems.

It is right that pulses are recognised as potential sources of nitrogen in companion cropping and in terms of their ability to sequester carbon. Pulses and vegetable legumes provide an ideal introduction, and significant yield boost, to a first wheat crop thanks to the huge and various impacts they have on soil fertility. The many benefits include the deposition of biologically fixed nitrogen and the improvement in soil structure and organic matter content. In addition, they can significantly extend and diversify the crop rotation and, as flowering plants, are attractive to pollinators and biodiversity both above and below ground.

However, investment in research is needed so that pulse crops can help reduce the UK's dependency on imports of different protein sources and enter the human food chain to deliver the health benefits acknowledged in the report.

Whilst reduced meat and animal product consumption is being advocated in the report, it is highly likely that the rate of decline will be gradual due to a lack of UK based technology in food processing and alternative protein development. In addition, consumer resistance to change will pose a significant challenge. As a result, a significant requirement for animal feed protein will remain. Recommending pulses and promoting them as the sustainable alternative for UK agriculture is futile if we are to simply import them for food.

In Europe and the UK, we use more than 1 million tonnes of soybean meal all imported from the US, Brazil and Argentina for animal feed - the latter two sources being controversial areas of land use change and significant negative environmental impact in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and

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deforestation. A proportion of this requirement can be replaced using home grown pulses, now being asked for by major consumers and retailers. Doing so will deliver environmental benefits to UK farms and soils and the world environment.

We already have a history of being able to grow both peas and beans, with UK production ranging from 0.7 million to 1.5million tonnes over the past 10 years, of which 250k to 350k was used domestically. Both supply and demand could be easily doubled if farmers were encouraged to do so via the Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs) and, if properly implemented, the ELMs will reward those farmers who are working to reduce the industry's carbon footprint.

In setting the priorities for the support for farmers in transition, and with the demand for alternative protein sources so high on the national and international agenda, the full potential of pulses should not be lost in any potential confusion around the fact that they are legumes. Not all legumes are the same and care should be taken to ensure that the enormous potential positive impact of pulses should not be lost in the debate.

Yours Sincerely

Roger Vickers

CEO PGRO

Annex 1

#### **Appendix 11**

**“Invest £1 billion in innovation to create a better food system”;** has a clear focus on the need for investment in innovation to create a better food system. Plant based proteins are highlighted as producing 70 times less greenhouse gas emissions than the equivalent amount of beef and from 150 times less land. An urgent case is presented for investment in the alternative protein sector for both the environment and the economy citing recent developments in other countries on a global scale. When it comes to listing the five categories of alternative proteins being discussed, number one on the list is plant-based proteins, specifically from pulses and vegetables. It is recommended that the government invest in this alternative protein sector.

#### **Appendix 13**

**“Strengthen government procurement rules to ensure that taxpayer money is spent on healthy and sustainable food”;** has a clear recommendation that diet is likely to include less meat and more grains, fruit, vegetables and pulses to maximise health and sustainability of the food served. It suggests that public institutions should be serving more alternative proteins, including pulses, delivering significant reductions in emissions per kilo of food served, a reduction in land use area per meal, and making catering more profitable. All of this is enormously positive yet there should be a cautionary note: not all legumes are pulses. Pulses specifically refers to grain legumes (excluding soya) whereas legumes encompass all leguminous crops including clovers, vetches, lucerne and several other crops used as forage which are increasingly included in environmental schemes and cover crop specifications.

It needs to be made clear that while these non- grain production legumes can help deliver some of the environmental benefits when grown in non-arable situations, or as part of environmental schemes, they will not deliver the full suite of benefits that pulse crops can deliver when grown commercially at the field scale for food and feed.

#### **Appendix 14**

**Chapters 4 and 5** reference the role of peas, beans and pulses as valuable healthy diet options.

**Chapter 8** identifies the low carbon footprint and environmental impact of peas and beans.

**Chapter 13** advocates government leadership in public procurement programmes to utilise more plant-based protein. It specifically mentions substitution of some beef for beans.