



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Victoria Prentis MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

T 03459 335577
defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/defra

Dr Hilary Jones
Spokesperson for the School & Nursery Milk
Alliance

Our ref: PO2020/24113/SN

snma@snma.org.uk

17 February 2021

Dear Dr Jones,

Thank you for your letter of 16 September 2020 to Lord Gardiner in which you ask about the future of the School and Nursery Milk Schemes. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area and I sincerely apologise for the delay in doing so.

The nutritional benefits of cow's milk for young children are well evidenced. We want children to be healthy and well-nourished and the dairy industry makes an important contribution to this. These aims are even more important during the period of a pandemic.

As I am sure you are aware, we have retained the former EU powers for the School Milk Scheme within domestic legislation. I am also pleased to confirm that the Scheme will continue to operate in England for the coming 2021-2022 school year with a seamless transition in the summer. The Department of Health and Social Care also has no plans to make changes to its much larger free Nursery Milk Scheme.

The original inclusion of school milk powers in Pillar 1 of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy reflected the scheme's introduction in the historic context of the top-down EU market interventions of earlier decades - in large part as an outlet for the large dairy surpluses of that era. Outside the EU we are able to do away with the bureaucratic Common Agricultural Policy, removing the old-style top-down approach. We are replacing this with a system that will pay our farmers and landowners in a fairer way that leads to higher productivity, greater public benefits and better environmental outcomes.

At the same time as agricultural policy is changing, the public health agenda is also adapting. Indeed, the contemporary focus of the School Milk Scheme is now much more focussed on promoting better nutrition. In the longer term, any future options for the scheme will therefore need to be in line with government priorities on both our new agricultural policy and on public health.

Dairy and child nutrition are also an important part of the conversation around our National Food Strategy. Part Two of the independent review being led by Henry Dimbleby will be published this spring. It will include a thorough examination of the food system and the economics that shape it. We are committed to responding to the recommendations of the independent review in the form a Food Strategy White Paper within 6 months of the release of the final report.

I understand my officials will be attending a meeting with the School and Nursery Milk Alliance on 18 February when there will be an opportunity to consider the current operation of the School Milk Scheme. I look forward to hearing the outcome of these discussions.

I am copying this letter to my counterparts at the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education given our shared policy interests.

Yours sincerely,

Victoria Prentis

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