



House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Dame Angela Eagle MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
SW1P 4DF

25 September 2026

Dear Angela,

Following the shambolic management of SFI26, we are writing to express our deep concern and anger at the way the scheme has been designed, managed and communicated over the past 18 months. From the unexpected closure of SFI24, the effective removal of Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and the preventable turmoil witnessed on 22 September, your decisions have resulted in a process that farmers have described to us as “demeaning”, “farcical” and “disastrous”. Farmers and land agents dedicated countless hours, over many weeks considering and preparing their SFI26 applications, only to be let down by an inadequate system and insufficient budget.

Since Tuesday, our inboxes have been inundated with messages from farmers and advisers in despair over the handling of the scheme. We have heard personal accounts of farmers missing out on submitting their applications by mere seconds or because they were busy farming and planning on applying that afternoon or evening; farmers applying for reduced amounts after experiencing system errors because they feared missing the deadline; and advisers being forced to decide which of their clients ‘deserved’ to have their applications prioritised, knowing that others could be left facing serious consequences for their businesses and livelihoods.

For many, this was their first opportunity to access SFI since the previous scheme was closed without notice in March 2025. For more than 21,000 existing agreement holders, it was an opportunity to secure ongoing funding for environmental actions already being delivered on their farms. Yet 12,500 existing agreement holders failed to secure a new agreement on Tuesday. In order to keep their farms viable, many are now considering going against their wishes by removing long-established habitats and bringing land back into production or even considering selling farms that have been in their families for generations.

Basic communication failures, such as the lack of a confirmed opening time, were compounded by major technical problems. We have heard accounts of options being incorrectly flagged as incompatible, while areas covered by other ongoing schemes failed to correlate correctly, limiting or entirely preventing farmers from applying for actions as planned.

When farmers turned to the RPA helpline for support, many faced automated responses and missed callbacks that arrived long after the scheme had already closed. As one adviser put it, they were effectively being forced to choose between submitting applications that did not reflect their carefully considered plans and were incorrect or spending valuable time attempting to rectify failures in the RPA system and consequently missing the deadline altogether.

This was entirely foreseeable and avoidable. The Government had been repeatedly warned by Conservative MPs and industry representatives that demand would outstrip the available budget and that a first-come, first-served model would fail farmers and nature by shutting many applicants out while limiting the ability to exercise meaningful quality control over applications. This is precisely why previous iterations of SFI, introduced under the Conservatives, operated on a rolling basis.

Predictions ahead of the opening of SFI26 warned that as many as 40,000 farm businesses could seek funding through Window 2. With approximately 12,200 applications reportedly being accepted before the scheme was closed, more than two-thirds of potential applicants have been left without support at a time when farmers are already facing significant cash flow pressures, including the worst harvest on record, rising costs linked to international conflict, the continuing challenge of bluetongue and a £100 million reduction in the farming budget.

We therefore call on you to confirm the following urgently:

- What special measures were taken by the RPA to ensure that additional resources were available to deal with the anticipated spike in demand?
- Will there be an urgent review of all applications that were started but could not be submitted because of administrative or technical failures within the RPA system?
- Will you explain where the £210 million difference between the value of expiring agreements, estimated at more than £520 million, and the £310 million budget allocated to SFI26 will be spent?
- Will you provide a detailed explanation of how the farming budget has been allocated, including where the savings resulting from reductions in delinked payments have been allocated?
- Will support be made available to farmers with Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier and Higher Tier agreements expiring in December 2026 who have not secured an SFI26 agreement?
- What is the average annual payment per hectare for agreements entered into under SFI26?

- Will farmers managing common land be given fair and timely access to Environmental Land Management schemes, including SFI?
- Will you commit to ensuring that a first-come, first-served model is not used for SFI27 or SFI28?
- Will you confirm a date for SFI27 as soon as possible, and no later than the end of November, to enable farm businesses to plan effectively? SFI27 must be opened in sufficient time for agreements to commence from 1 April 2027 and to minimise gaps in environmental payments for farmers whose existing schemes expire after February 2027.
- Will you confirm the budget for SFI27?

Over the past two years, farmers have had to contend not only with events outside their control, such as extreme weather and international conflict, but also with the uncertainty created by the Family Farm Tax, Family Business Tax, Fertiliser Tax, the effective removal of BPS and now the lamentable launch and management of SFI26.

This is not good enough. British farming needs certainty, stability and a government that understands the consequences of its decisions for farm businesses, food production and the environment.

We therefore ask that you respond urgently to these concerns regarding SFI26, and at the first day of Parliament resitting, you come to the House of Commons so all Members of Parliament can raise concerns their farming constituents have in this regard.

We also call on you to demand that the Prime Minister and Chancellor axe the Family Farm Tax, Family Business Tax and Fertiliser Tax in the Budget on 28 October 2026.

Yours sincerely,

The Rt Hon Victoria Atkins MP
Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Robbie Moore MP
Shadow Minister for Farming, Fisheries
and Food

Dr Neil Hudson MP
Shadow Minister for Water, Biosecurity
and Animals

Aphra Brandreth MP
Shadow Minister for Nature

Alan Mak MP
Alberto Costa MP
The Rt Hon Sir Alec Shelbrooke KBE MP

Dr Alex Burghart MP
Alicia Kearns MP
Alison Griffiths MP
Andrew Griffith MP
The Rt Hon Dr Andrew Murrison MP
Andrew Snowden MP
Sir Ashley Fox MP
Ben Obese-Jecty MP
Sir Bernard Jenkin MP
Blake Stephenson MP
Bob Blackman CBE MP
Bradley Thomas MP
Dame Caroline Dinenage DBE MP
Dr Caroline Johnson MP
Charlie Dewhurst MP
The Rt Hon Chris Philp MP
The Rt Hon Claire Coutinho MP
The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
The Rt Hon Sir David Davis KCB MP
David Reed MP
David Simmonds CBE MP
The Rt Hon Sir Desmond Swayne TD MP
The Rt Hon Edward Argar MP
The Rt Hon Esther McVey MP
Gagan Mohindra MP
Gareth Bacon MP
Gareth Davies MP
Rt Hon Sir Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Cox KC MP
The Rt Hon Graham Stuart MP
Greg Smith MP
Gregory Stafford MP
Dame Harriett Baldwin DBE MP
Helen Grant OBE MP
Helen Whately MP
James Cartlidge MP
James Wild MP
The Rt Hon Sir Jeremy Hunt MP
Rt Hon Sir Jeremy Wright KC MP

Jerome Mayhew MP
Joe Robertson MP
The Rt Hon John Glen MP
The Rt Hon Sir John Hayes CBE MP
John Lamont MP
Rt Hon Sir John Whittingdale OBE MP
Joy Morrissey MP
Julia Lopez MP
The Rt Hon Sir Julian Smith KCB CBE MP
The Rt Hon Dame Karen Bradley DBE MP
Katie Lam MP
Kevin Hollinrake MP
Dr Kieran Mullan MP
The Rt Hon Kit Malthouse MP
The Rt Hon Laura Trott MBE MP
Lincoln Jopp MC MP
Lewis Cocking MP
Louie French MP
Dr Luke Evans MP
Jack Rankin MP
The Rt Hon Sir James Cleverly MP
The Rt Hon Jesse Norman MP
Mark Garnier OBE MP
The Rt Hon Mark Pritchard MP
The Rt Hon Mark Francois MP
Martin Vickers MP
Matt Vickers MP
The Rt Hon Sir Mel Stride MP
Mike Wood MP
Mims Davies MP
Neil O'Brien OBE MP
Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst MP
Nick Timothy CBE MP
Nigel Huddleston MP
Patrick Spencer MP
Paul Holmes MP
Peter Bedford MP
Peter Fortune MP
The Rt Hon Dame Priti Patel DBE MP
Rt Hon Sir Oliver Dowden KCB CBE MP

Dame Rebecca Harris DBE MP
Rebecca Paul MP
Rebecca Smith MP
Richard Fuller CBE MP
The Rt Hon Richard Holden MP
The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Sarah Bool MP
Saqib Bhatti MP
Shivani Raja MP
Simon Hoare MP
The Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
The Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP
The Rt Hon Tom Tugendhat MBE VR MP
The Rt Hon Wendy Morton MP