

Farming And Food Partnership Board Meeting Summary of minutes 13 July 2026

Date: 13 July 2026

Format: Hybrid

Chair: Secretary of State

Deputy Chair: Minister of State for Food Security and Rural Affairs

Attendees

- Karen Betts (KB), Chief Executive, Food and Drink Federation (FDF)
- Sarah Bradbury (SB), Chief Executive, Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD)
- Tom Bradshaw (TB), President, National Farmers' Union (NFU)
- Kate Nicholls (KN), Chair, UK Hospitality (UKH)
- Emily Norton (EN), Chair, Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB)
- Andrew Opie (AO), Director of Food and Sustainability, British Retail Consortium (BRC)
- Robert Sheasby (RS), Chief Executive, Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC)

Guests

- Martin Emmet (ME), Horticulture Expert Growers Group
- Joanna Key (JK), Director General, Regeneration, Housing and Planning, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MCHLG)
- Jennifer Pheasey (JP), Environmental Horticulture Group
- Anne Rees (AR), UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition

Defra

- Emma Reynolds, Secretary of State (SoS)
- Stephen Morgan (SM), Minister
- Paul Kissack (PK), Permanent Secretary
- Emily Miles (EM), Director General, Farming, Food and Biosecurity
- Tessa Jones (TJ), Director, Agricultural Food Chain Directorate
- Adnan Obaidullah, Deputy Director, Farming Partnership and Growth
- Farming and Partnership Board Secretariat (online)

Introduction

The Farming and Food Partnership Board held its third meeting on Monday 13 July 2026.

The Secretary of State opened the meeting and welcomed members, guests, and Stephen Morgan MP, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, to his first meeting.

Horticulture Sector Growth Plan Development

The board considered the emerging Horticulture Sector Growth Plan, supported by the progress update and three sector-authored papers: the Horticulture Expert Growers Group update, the Environmental Horticulture Group update, and the UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition update.

Table 1: Summary of key themes discussed by members

Theme	Summary of discussion
Productivity across the supply chain	The board recommended that where there were common issues and common solutions through the food and farming production system for the sector, these should be highlighted in the sector growth plan to signal unlocking upstream investment in the supply chain to match increased supply.
Demand-led growth	The board recommended the sector expert groups focus on a small number of key issues, barriers and high value crops where there is strong potential for demand led growth, in the near term in the sector growth plan.
Labour including skills and apprenticeships.	Members noted migrant seasonal workers remain critical for horticulture. The board suggested the Horticulture Expert groups should look at both policy as well as sector led solutions in the sector growth plan, including pathways to adopt existing and new technology, to bridge the demand for labour. The board also supported work to develop proposals for a farming workforce plan, with a focus on the horticulture sector.
Audit burden and ethical assurance	Members noted the importance of ethical assurance, particularly for retailers and consumer-facing brands, and recognised there may be scope to consider streamlining the processes relating to this.
Research and Development (R&D) and pre-competitive collaboration	Members discussed the potential for the sector growth plan to set out greater pre-competitive R&D to increase efficiency and competitiveness in the sector.

Proposed joint working on planning for farm infrastructure

The board considered a proposal for joint work on planning for farm infrastructure. This included consideration of the government's broader planning reform agenda, such as efforts to streamline statutory consultation processes, increase local planning authority capacity and make planning decisions simpler.

Table 2: Points were raised in discussion

Theme	Summary of discussion
Poultry, ammonia and permitted development	Members welcomed Defra's work on poultry, including constraints relating to ammonia and habitats regulations and the evidence behind current limits. Members noted whether welfare-related extensions could be treated as lower risk where they do not increase production capacity. Members also discussed whether new or revised permitted development rights could support poultry modernisation and expansion.
Energy infrastructure and grid connection	The board noted energy infrastructure and grid access and connection as a significant planning and investment barrier, particularly for small rural businesses and where capital outlay for grid access needs to be done before planning consent is secured.
Environment Agency and regulatory interfaces	Members raised concerns about regulatory complexity, including the cumulative challenge of engaging with different bodies – even for technical changes to existing sites – that increase costs and reduce confidence to invest.
National planning policy, devolution and local delivery	Members heard MHCLG's approach to evolving national planning policy and welcomed the move to greater local decision-making to ensure better alignment between multiple issues whilst noting this should not lead to delays.
Reservoirs and water infrastructure	Members raised concerns about water resilience and the need to unlock reservoir development more quickly and welcomed further discussions between Defra and MHCLG on planning for above ground on farm reservoirs.
Additional surveys and planning requirements	Members noted the need for clearer guidance as to when additional information is required by Local Planning Authorities, without unnecessarily delaying decisions.

Theme	Summary of discussion
Prioritising strategic projects	The board agreed Defra should write to members for a list of current and pipeline of priority projects, and clusters of projects, held up by planning issues that would help identify common barriers and reforms through more targeted engagement with MHCLG, Natural England, the Environment Agency and other relevant bodies.

Any other business (AOB) and closing remarks

The chair thanked members and noted that the board had identified several important cross-sectoral issues, through the farming and food production system for farming growth including food demand, energy, water, planning, labour and skills, audit burden and multiple regulatory demands on infrastructure projects.

The board noted that the Data and Market Intelligence Task and Finish Group proposal was included as a paper for views by correspondence.

The chair reiterated that the board should focus on practical priorities and collective action, with clear emphasis on where the board can deliver tangible outcomes quickly.