Joint Statement by the Farming and Food Partnership Board

4th Meeting, Monday 26 October 2026

The Farming and Food Partnership Board held its fourth meeting on Monday 26 October 2026, chaired by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Board agreed a series of actions to unlock growth across the farming and food sector, in particular for the poultry and horticulture sectors, as well as to increase resilience to drought.

The Board considered priority actions to address planning barriers affecting poultry investment and growth. Members supported establishing an NFU and Defra co-sponsored poultry planning implementation group to develop practical proposals for both industry and government. The group will include the Food and Drink Federation, Agricultural Industries Confederation, poultry sector expert group, major poultry producers, Environment Agency, Natural England, MHCLG and representatives of local planning authorities.

The implementation group will:

- Deliver guidance for local planning authorities on lower-risk developments, particularly those that support animal welfare improvements.
- Produce clearer standards and guidance for sustainable litter management to clarify and embed best practice.
- Improve understanding of the sustainable expansion capacity of the sector and the mitigation measures available to manage pollution risks from new and existing poultry housing.

The implementation group will be aimed at developing solutions that provide greater clarity and a more straightforward journey through the planning system to facilitate investment, without undermining the environmental protections provided by planning regulation.

Members noted that it was important to progress this work alongside the ongoing work on the wider poultry sector growth plan led by the poultry sector expert group, which would also include work on trade, the impacts of climate change and animal health and welfare.

The Board also noted two emerging areas for recommendations from the Horticulture Sector Growth Plan. Members agreed that there were inefficiencies in the audit landscape and welcomed the British Retail Consortium's commitment to convene retailers, horticulture representatives and Defra to examine opportunities to reduce unnecessary duplication, improve consistency and proportionality. This will be achieved whilst maintaining high standards for food safety, worker welfare and environmental impacts.

Members also supported a more coordinated, grower-led approach to horticultural research and innovation with stronger coordination across crop associations, academia, government and the wider supply chain. The discussion highlighted crop protection, resilience, productivity, robotics, automation and artificial intelligence as areas where applied research could strengthen access and adoption amongst growers.

The Board received an update on work to reduce barriers to on-farm reservoir development including progress on planning, financing and abstraction arrangements. The Board endorsed the priority actions being considered while noting opportunities to go further in driving more transformative change to support resilient food production, in light of both acute and long-term pressures being faced by the sector. The Board welcomed continued engagement between government, industry and delivery partners as this work develops.

Issued on behalf of the Farming and Food Partnership Board:

- The Rt Hon Angela Eagle MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Stephen Morgan MP, Minister of State for Food Security and Rural Affairs
- Tom Bradshaw, President, National Farmers' Union (NFU)
- Robert Sheasby, Chief Executive, Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC)
- Sarah Bradbury, Chief Executive, Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD)
- Kate Nicholls, Chair, UK Hospitality (UKH)
- Emily Norton, Chair, Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB)
- Jim Bligh, Director of Corporate Affairs & Food Policy, British Retail Consortium (BRC)
- Bal Dhoot, Director of Sustainability and Growth, Food and Drink Federation (FDF)