

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS  
Green Party

for the South East of England

Lord Bach  
Minister for Sustainable Food and Farming  
DEFRA  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR

23<sup>rd</sup> February 2006

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your letter of July 20<sup>th</sup> 2005 regarding organic farmers and the Single Payment Scheme. I hope you will not hold it against me that I have taken so long to respond to some of the points that you made - the latter half of 2005 was exceptionally busy, not least because of the UK's Presidency of the European Union.

I fully appreciate that the government has taken some steps to ensure that organic farmers are not penalised under the changes towards a Single Payment Scheme. However, as you yourself recognise, some 200 farmers will be unable to take advantage of the hardship provisions because they fall outside the criteria for eligibility. Although you assert that there is no basis in EU law for the value of their entitlements to be increased I would ask that you reconsider your position. As far as I am aware, there is no basis in EU law that would prevent you from extending the same financial benefits to these farmers, until 2012, as have been made available to the farmers eligible for hardship funds, even if there is no provision that makes such a move compulsory.

In your letter you refer to the fact that these 200 odd farmers are in the same position as 'any other farmer who made a decision before or during the reference period to adjust their business in a way that would have led them to receive a reduced level of subsidy'. Yet, the crucial point here is, surely, that these farmers did not know they were making a decision that would lead them to receive a reduced subsidy in the future. In fact, many of the farmers affected were pioneers of the organic movement and converted out of a belief in the principles of organic farming. Yet the current SPS arrangement is penalising them for this groundbreaking work. This is in direct contrast to the way farmers that have begun conversion since 2000 are being treated. Whilst their efforts are hugely valuable in terms of sustainable agriculture, these farmers took far less of a risk, safe in the knowledge that there was a secure subsidy system in place to support their conversion.

Given that we are talking about a relatively small number of farmers, and a relatively short period of time, I fail to understand why the government is so determined to deny them access to some kind of transitional subsidy. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.