

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS
Green Party

for the South East of England

Ben Bradshaw
Minister for Nature Conservation and Fisheries
DEFRA
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1A 3JP

April 29th 2005

Dear Mr Bradshaw,

I am writing to you, as the responsible Minister, about the Single Farm Payment Scheme and organic farming. A matter has been brought to my attention, by a constituent, which is potentially going to have a negative impact on a significant number of organic farmers.

The Single Farm Payment Scheme, as I understand it, will be calculated based on the amount of subsidy that farmers have received in the past. As organic farmers tend to have lower stocking densities, and grow a wider range of unsubsidised crops, they have generally received 40% less CAP money than non-organic farmers.¹ Consequently, under the new scheme, organic farmers will continue to receive less money than conventional farmers. Furthermore, I understand that DEFRA has ruled that any farmers who converted to organic before 1994 are not entitled to any of the hardship subsidies, despite DEFRA having introduced them to deal, in part, with under payments to organic farmers.

As a Green Party MEP I have consistently opposed the Common Agricultural Policy, not least because it does disadvantage organic farmers. As we are, for the foreseeable future anyway, required to operate within the terms of the CAP, it is down to DEFRA to implement the legislation in a sensible and just way. I would argue that making rulings such as those I have outlined above, is neither sensible nor fair. Some 800 organic farmers will be adversely affected by the outcome of these rulings. This contradicts at least one intention of the new Single Farm Payment Scheme, namely to reward environmentally friendly practices, and DEFRA's own commitment to "sustainable, diverse, modern and adaptable farming, integrated with the rest of the food chain and taking into account the needs of the environment and rural economy."

I urge you to reconsider these rulings and establish a subsidy system that does not continue the historical discrimination against organic farmers. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.

¹ Figures from The Soil Association