

## Environment Secretary Elizabeth Truss speech at the Oxford Farming Conference on the role of food and farming in our economic future.

Good morning. It's a real pleasure to be here and I'm glad that the theme of this year's conference is Ambitious Agriculture because I am convinced no ambition is too high for British food and farming.

Over recent months we have seen fresh evidence of why we are right to be both ambitious and optimistic for the industry this year and in the future.

- Sales of English and Welsh wine are on course to break the £100 million barrier this year, two thirds of it sparkling as our confident producers take the Australians, French and Italians on at what was their own game.
- Beer exports are also breaking records, with more than a billion pints of beer sold abroad for the first time. That means growing demand from brewers for high-quality British barley and hops.
- Our strawberry growers now supply two thirds of the domestic market. Thanks to modern indoor-growing techniques their produce is on the shelves into the winter months. British cherry growers have adopted this can-do approach, doubling their crop last year.
- Analysis carried out by Defra shows that the economy of rural Britain, powered by food and farming, could be as productive as towns within 10 years.

We have the land, the technology, the entrepreneurial flair – and above all the fantastic food – to lead the world.

Farming is no sunset industry cut off from the modern mainstream.

It is a high-tech powerhouse, a sunrise industry. It is at the heart of our long-term economic plan, and it is vital to our country's future security.

That old divide people sometimes still talk about—the farm gate—means less and less. Farmers are anything but cut off behind their gates.

They are increasingly working hand in hand with manufacturers, retailers, scientists in a food chain worth more than £100 billion to our economy.

The opportunities are clear.

Just look at the number of people in the world today, set to grow from 7.2 billion to 9.6 billion by 2050. Because of rising incomes and urbanisation, the demand for food is expected to grow 60% by then.

I think as, as a country, we are well placed to take advantage. Britain has always been a trading nation. It goes back to the days of the Elizabethan explorers Drake and Raleigh –sailing the oceans, opening new trade routes and bringing back exotica like the potato, which we now claim as our own with great varieties like the Norfolk Peer, produced by Heygate Farms of Swaffham.

Of course, I recognise there are challenges.

I understand that many dairy farmers are feeling the pressure when there's been such a steep drop from the 33.8 pence per litre seen at the start of last year to prices now quoted in the low twenties in some cases.

We will continue to face a difficult global market in the coming months. But we want to make sure the hard-working farmers in this industry are able to withstand as far as possible the immediate effects and also to have the resilience to handle volatility in the longer term.

We are working very closely with the NFU and I have met Dairy UK about how to help farmers manage this situation. At the Dairy Supply Chain Forum in November, George Eustice agreed a set of actions that will ensure we do all we can to help this industry.

This means doing things like making sure dairy farmers receive full support from the £141 million Countryside Productivity Scheme under the Rural Development Programme, which is targeted specifically at helping farm businesses become more competitive.

That could potentially include help with new capital investment for monitoring animal welfare or improving the energy efficiency of cattle housing.

We are also encouraging the use of longer contracts with buyers to give farmers added security.

The Rural Payments Agency is ready to take applications from new organisations for formal recognition, so dairy farmers can come together in producer organisations to give them a stronger bargaining position.

I have made the case for proper Country of Origin labelling to appear on milk and dairy products to Commissioners in Brussels. It is wrong

that when you go into a British supermarket you can look at a product on the shelves and think it's British when in fact the milk in it has been produced abroad.

I am glad the National Farmers Union, with our support, is studying the feasibility of a futures market for dairy. Defra's Resilience Group will be holding talks on this in the next week. Futures could have strong potential to bring added security for farmers.

What I want is for our dairy industry to be number one in the world; an industry that not only gets through this difficult period, but builds up its competitive strength to meet future challenges and opportunities. And those opportunities are very large.

We have already seen the huge export potential of this industry, with dairy sales abroad up 60% since 2009.

This government has backed dairy and backed the food industry across the board. That's why since 2010, we have signed deals to open 600 overseas markets to British food and farm products.

We are putting an emphasis on dairy as we seek new agreements, but all farmers benefit from this work.

We have made real progress in re-opening the US beef market. Following landmark access agreements with China for pork and pig products, we are making good progress and the value of the market could be up to £60 million a year.

It's vital we stay ambitious and outward-looking to increase our security against the ups and downs of global economics and politics.

Last year, when Russia banned the import of agricultural products including fish, this was a concern for the £170 million mackerel industry, mainly based in Scotland. Some companies that I met when I visited Peterhead, are exporting 50% of their turnover to Russia.

Since August, we have been pressing Nigeria successfully to grant more mackerel import licences.

This is opening up a market worth millions of pounds. And it's a vital country to be selling to for the long term. By the end of the century, the Nigerian population is forecast to grow from 170 million today to more than 900 million. It'll be almost as big as China.

There are huge opportunities for British food producers to sell more here in the UK. Currently just 60% of the food we eat is produced

here, down from 74% 20 years ago. The NFU has played a leading role in highlighting this.

We know consumers want to buy British because it is local, because it is seasonal and because it is tasty.

We are showing the way in government. We are implementing the [Bonfield report](#), making it easier for schools, hospitals and canteens to buy high-quality local food rather than have to go for the cheapest price on the day.

That opens up a potential £400m of new business for our producers. Central government will lead the way with a commitment that from 2017 all food that can be bought locally will be bought locally. I am pleased the work of Defra's staff is already being fuelled by British rather than by Danish bacon.

We are not going to be fully self-sufficient; of course, we haven't been for hundreds of years. Although we do now grow chillies which we export to Pakistan and Mexico. And to the envy of France, we produce award-winning sparkling wines.

Growing and selling more British food in this country matters. It matters because food and farming employs one in eight people. It matters because food is our biggest manufacturing industry. And it matters because 70% of our landscape is shaped by farming. It is a vital part of our national life.

We are making it easier for shoppers to know the origin of their food and buy British. From April, pork, lamb and poultry will have to show the country where it was reared and slaughtered.

And I also want us to go further in promoting local and regional food. Currently, 62 products in Britain benefit from [this status](#), ranging from Cornish Pasties to Orkney Lamb and Fenland Celery. I had a great opportunity to go on a celery rig last year and see it all happening in real life. But that compares with 219 from France. We've got another 30 products applying and I would like to see lots more.

But of course as well as the huge opportunities, I realise we face significant challenges, some from the natural world and some manmade.

Foremost among these is disease. I know how devastating the impact of foot and mouth was when it struck in 2001– as was BSE in the 1980s and 90s.

That is why protecting our country from animal and plant disease is a top priority for me. Although Defra has had to implement savings as many areas of Government have due to the terrible financial situation we have found the country in, I have been very clear that the number of frontline vets must be protected.

Since 2010 we have maintained the number of vets in our organisation and we've also expanded investigatory capacity. We have also appointed a Chief Plant Health Officer for the first time. And in December the position of Chief Vet was promoted to Director General level to reflect its importance.

This meant that when [a case of avian flu](#) in Drifffield, East Yorkshire, was reported in November, a Government vet was on the premises that day. We took immediate action.

Straight away we established a national disease control centre in London and a forward operating base in Beverley. We also imposed a 3km protection zone and a 10km surveillance zone.

I am determined we maintain our world-class disease science capability at the Animal and Plant Health Agency.

Bovine TB, as many in this room are well aware, is a major threat to the beef and dairy industries. The reality is that under the previous Government nothing was done, and the disease increased ninefold between 1997 and 2010, leaving us with the highest rates of Bovine TB in Europe.

That's why this government is taking action to deal with this bovine TB. This is not something that can be achieved overnight. [Our strategy](#) is focused on eradicating the disease by 2038. It is not easy, but we will do the right thing even if the protest groups don't like it.

Our comprehensive strategy involves cattle movement controls, vaccination in the edge areas and culling where the disease is rife.

We know from the experience in Australia where bovine TB has been eradicated, and in Ireland and New Zealand where it is being dramatically reduced, that this approach works.

As the Chief Vet pointed out, the experience of the cull in Somerset shows controlled shooting and cage trapping can work to reduce disease. And the situation Gloucestershire reflects the challenges of extensive unlawful protest and intimidation.

This government is determined to continue implementing all of the elements of our comprehensive strategy.

Let me be clear— we will not walk away. We will do whatever it takes to eradicate this disease.

Food and farming is one of the areas of our national life that is most burdened with red tape – much of it unnecessary, as I'm sure many in this room are aware. I want farmers farming not form filling.

Since 2010 we have:

- Cut 10,000 unnecessary dairy inspections a year.
- 14 out of 31 inspection regimes now allow farmers to earn recognition, saving them time and money.
- We are reducing the volume of Defra guidance by 80%.
- We're also bringing tractor and trailer regulations up to date, raising weight and speed limits.

I am also determined to see change at the European level, which is the source of 80% of our rules in the case of environmental regulation alone.

As soon as the new European commission started work, I went to see Commissioner Hogan to work to secure an urgent review the three crop rule and simpler greening requirements. I want farmers growing what people want to buy, not what Europe tells them to.

I also met the environment and food safety commissioners and called for decisions on issues like pesticides and GM cultivation to be made on scientific evidence alone.

Ultimately we want to see far more decisions to be taken in Britain for the benefit of British producers.

In the 18th century, we started the world's agricultural revolution and our farmers are geared up for the next one. The one Silicon Valley calls Food 2.0.

We have the leading scientists. The expert farmers. The integrated systems.

Our £160 million agritech strategy will lead directly to innovations in the fields and on the shelves.

The increasingly forward-looking and efficient managers of our food and farming businesses are also coming up with smart, integrated ways to structure themselves.

That means companies like Coop, Waitrose, Sainsbury's and McDonald's working closely with farmers to make sure they are producing what consumers want.

Food and farming is embracing the future - but at the same time it is, like the rest of the country, rediscovering our great food heritage.

Somewhere along the line we lost that connection. If you look back to 1939, ten days after the outbreak of war, farming was brought under government control and the order went out, produce as much as you can. It made sense. Britain was preparing for siege.

But it went on for decades and decades, paying farmers to produce as much bulk as they could, ending in the absurdity of butter mountains and bursting grain warehouses.

We have rediscovered that connection with our food with a vengeance. Over Christmas, I wrote an open letter to Laurent Fabius, the French foreign minister.

France is worried that Anglo-Saxon food could be threatening its own culinary status and is planning a worldwide food campaign of its own.

The French have even complained about a supposed Anglo-Saxon food conspiracy.

What I would say that they are absolutely right to be worried. I am confident we can take on all comers.

We have the entrepreneurs and go-ahead farmers to do it, taking pride in our heritage to forge a future based on innovation, technology and the quality of our great British food. This government will not let farming be ignored again.

Food and farming is a core part of our long-term economic plan and it is at the heart of this government's agenda for Britain's economic future.