

## **Subject: Prioritising food security over biofuels**

24<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Dear Mr Shapps

As the world looks with growing horror at the invasion of Ukraine, decisive and urgent action is needed to mitigate the dramatic impact this conflict is having, not only on the people of the Ukraine, but also far beyond.

An area of grave concern is food security, both in the UK and across the world, with food prices rising in this country and worldwide as a direct result of Russia's war on Ukraine disrupting grain and oilseed exports from both countries, as well as pushing up global energy prices which, in turn, affects food prices.

***We believe that this crisis requires an urgent suspension to the use of food and feed crop based feedstocks in UK biofuels, which in turn means urgently revising the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation to prevent any incentives for the use of food crops in biofuels for as long as the global and UK food price crisis continues.***

On the one hand, the war against Ukraine has shown how dangerous our reliance on fossil fuel imports is, and gives yet another reason why a rapid transition from fossil fuels to genuinely clean renewable energy coupled with energy conservation is so urgent. On the other hand, the increasingly dramatic food price crisis must be addressed; a crisis which is aggravated by the large-scale diversion of food to biofuels in many countries in the world, including in the UK, where maize from Ukraine last year accounted for around 25% of all ethanol feedstock. Ensuring stable energy supplies to people and the economy must not come at the expense of food security or let food price inflation spiral out of control. Energy security and food security must have equal importance in political decision making.

Ukraine and Russia together provide about a quarter of all wheat and barley, 15% of corn and over 60% of sunflower oil traded globally. Over the past 18 months, the UK has been heavily reliant on net imports of wheat, maize and rapeseed oil, and fully dependent on imports of soybean meal and oil.<sup>1</sup> According to the UK Government's report on Food Security, published in December 2021,<sup>2</sup> the UK is highly dependent on net food imports, which account for 45% of all the food consumed in this country. Those imports include an annual 1-2 million tonnes of wheat (15-20% of total consumption) and 1-3 million tonnes of maize in total. UK cereal imports from Ukraine have increased since a bilateral trade agreement was signed in November 2020.<sup>3</sup> An article published by the UK's Institute of Export and International Trade three weeks before Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine began, warned that such an invasion would seriously harm Britain's food security.<sup>4</sup>

The most recent statistics on biofuels supply shows a quarter of the bioethanol used in the UK is made from Ukrainian maize (corn). To keep requiring and incentivising the use of wheat, corn, vegetable oils and other food crops in biofuels to power our cars is irresponsible.

There have been significant increases in food commodity prices even before the war. Now the war is driving many of these prices even higher, in particular for wheat. For some crops it has already resulted in global supply shortages - like for sunflower oil. This will only worsen as this unprovoked war drags on. Rising prices and supply shortages will put a huge burden on low income households in wealthier countries. In low income countries, especially countries already struggling to provide their people with sufficient affordable food, the effects could be disastrous. The United

1 [ahdb.org.uk/cereals-oilseeds/trade-data](http://ahdb.org.uk/cereals-oilseeds/trade-data)

2 [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1041623/United\\_Kingdom\\_Food\\_Security\\_Report\\_2021\\_16dec2021b.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1041623/United_Kingdom_Food_Security_Report_2021_16dec2021b.pdf)

3 [gov.uk/government/collections/uk-ukraine-political-free-trade-and-strategic-partnership-agreement](https://gov.uk/government/collections/uk-ukraine-political-free-trade-and-strategic-partnership-agreement)

4 [export.org.uk/news/594513/UK-food-security-will-be-hit-if-Russia-invades-Ukraine-as-Truss-moves-to-toughen-sanctions.htm](https://export.org.uk/news/594513/UK-food-security-will-be-hit-if-Russia-invades-Ukraine-as-Truss-moves-to-toughen-sanctions.htm)

Nations Secretary-General has warned of the acute risk of a “hurricane of hunger and a meltdown of the global food system”.<sup>5</sup>

The options for increasing global supplies of the crops at risk in other regions are very limited in the short term. It would inevitably come with major negative effects on climate and biodiversity. As for fossil fuels, we urgently need to address the demand side.

To keep requiring the use of wheat, corn, vegetable oils and other food crops in biofuels to power our cars is irresponsible.

***We are therefore calling on you to immediately halt the use of food and feed crop based feedstocks in UK biofuels. This means urgently revising the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation to ensure no biofuels from any food crops are incentivised for as long as the global and UK food price crisis continues.***

Biofuels from crops never made sense. No biofuels are carbon neutral, many are worse for the climate than the fossil fuels they replace, all are worse for biodiversity and have always contributed to greater food prices volatility and thereby aggravated food price rises.<sup>6</sup> The immediate suspension of crop-based biofuels needs to lead to a total phase-out, with a strong focus on modal shift from private cars to public transport and active travel, and ambitious efficiency standards for vehicles.

Dear Mr Shapps, in these challenging times, we are calling on you to take emergency measures in a holistic manner ensuring that food security, climate change and biodiversity needs are at the centre of the UK's response'.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further exchange on these issues.

With best regards,

Almuth Ernsting - Biofuelwatch  
Larry Lohmann -The Corner House  
Vicki Hird, Sustain – The alliance for better food and farming  
Greg Archer – Transport & Environment UK  
Chris Todd – Transport Action Network  
Carina Millstone – Feedback Global  
Tom Wilson – UK Youth Climate Coalition  
Kate Metcalf – Wen (Women’s Environmental Network)  
Shanon Shah – Faith for the Climate  
Suzanne Jeffery – Campaign Against Climate Change  
Dorothy Guerrero – Global Justice Now

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5 [news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113882](https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113882)

6 See for example [fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/hlpe/hlpe\\_documents/HLPE-price-volatility-and-food-security-report-July-2011.pdf](https://fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/hlpe/hlpe_documents/HLPE-price-volatility-and-food-security-report-July-2011.pdf)