Dear Prime Minister,

Agriculture Bill presents a once in a generation opportunity to secure public goods for society

We wholly welcome the ambitious plans your Government has set out to reform agriculture policy, and overcome the flaws of the Common Agricultural Policy. Central to this ambition is your ground-breaking commitment to develop new farming and land management policies that provide public funds in return for public goods, such as biodiversity, animal welfare and public access.

This summer is a defining moment for the future of our countryside, with drought highlighting the many shared challenges wildlife and farmers face. An ambitious Agriculture Bill that works for the environment, public health and animal welfare, and helps create a farming sector fit for the future, will be crucial if we are to meet these challenges in the years ahead.

Such ambition is good for the public, fair to the taxpayer and, most importantly, critical to bolstering farming’s resilience in the face of climate change, ensuring the country’s long-term food security by protecting our soils, pollinators and water. This is not a choice between productivity and sustainability, but an opportunity to avoid declining productivity by restoring the natural resources that farming depends upon.

There is also public appetite for more sustainable, higher welfare agriculture. The scale of the response to the recent Environmental Principles and Governance Bill consultation was unprecedented, and recent polls by the RSPCA and WWF demonstrated that over 80% of the British public want more support for higher standards of animal welfare, and for nature friendly farming.

Making sure that the Agriculture Bill enables farmers to deliver against these expectations will be the first signal that you are determined to match your welcome 25 Year Environment Plan commitments with firm action. Innovative farmers are already demonstrating how working with nature can be profitable as
well as rewarding. But for this to become the norm, farmers need support to drive forward the restoration of our environment for the next generation, including the next generation of farmers whose livelihoods will depend on its health and resilience.

Farmers should also get a better return from the market for the food they produce. As such, in addition to public money for public goods, the Agriculture Bill should include powers to secure a fair and transparent supply chain that ensures a level playing field for all.

The UK’s exit from the European Union creates inevitable uncertainty. In providing clarity now that future farm support will be centred around public goods, you can provide certainty and confidence that you are up for the challenge of securing a healthy, accessible environment and well looked after animals, alongside a thriving and self-reliant farming sector.

The chance to reform agriculture policy, and to secure all the benefits this would provide, is a once in a generation opportunity. We welcome the leadership you have shown so far on this issue, and look forward to working with you as the Agriculture Bill delivers on these commitments.

Yours sincerely,

Hilary McGrady, Director General, National Trust
Shirley Cramer CBE, Chief Executive, Royal Society for Public Health
Mike Clarke, Chief Executive, RSPB
Martin Lines, UK Chair, Nature Friendly Farming Network
Steph Hilborne, Chief Executive, The Wildlife Trusts
Jyoti Fernandez, Chair of Directors, The Landworker’s Alliance
Tanya Steele, Chief Executive Officer, WWF-UK
Helen Browning, Chief Executive, Soil Association
Liz May, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Traidcraft
Chris Sherwood, Chief Executive, RSPCA
Cóilín Nunan, Campaign Manager, Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics
Dr Tony Gent, Chief Executive Officer, The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust
Andy Atkins, Chief Executive, A Rocha UK
Dominic Dyer, Chief Executive Officer, Badger Trust
Kit Stoner, Chief Executive, Bat Conservation Trust
Howard Jones, Chief Executive Officer, Born Free Foundation
David Turnbull, Chief Executive, British Mountaineering Council
Matt Shardlow, Chief Executive Officer, Buglife
Julie Williams, Chief Executive, Butterfly Conservation
David Joy, Chief Executive, British Canoeing
Fiona Howie, Chief Executive, Campaign for National Parks
James Thornton, Chief Executive Officer, ClientEarth
Philip Lymbery, Chief Executive, Compassion in World Farming
Dr. Mike Heyworth, Director, Council for British Archaeology
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Mike Baker, Chief Executive Officer, The Donkey Sanctuary
James Morford, Chairman, Family Farmers’ Association
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Dr Jeremy Biggs, Director, Freshwater Habitats Trust
Craig Bennett, Chief Executive Officer, Friends of the Earth
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Kate Ashbrook, General Secretary, Open Spaces Society
Roger Kerr, Chief Executive, Organic Farmers and Growers
Keith Tyrell, Director, PAN UK
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Vanessa Griffiths, Chief Executive Officer, Ramblers
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Patrick Holden, Founding Director, Sustainable Food Trust
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Stephen Sibbald, Country Director, UK Office, World Animal Protection
Dominic Jermey, Director General, Zoological Society of London

CC: Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

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