

[It is disappointing news that Rebecca Steinfeld and Charles Keidan have lost their Court of Appeal battle to enter into a Civil Partnership – Champion](#)

Sarah

Champion, Labour's Shadow

Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, commenting on the Court of Appeal judgement on Civil Partnerships, said:

"It is disappointing news that Rebecca Steinfeld and Charles Keidan have lost their Court of Appeal battle to enter into a Civil Partnership.

"Labour are proud to have introduced Civil Partnerships in 2004 as a key step in achieving true marriage equality for LGBT people.

"But, now that same sex marriage has been legalised, it is an anomaly that Civil Partnerships are not available to all couples regardless of their gender and sexuality.

"Civil Partnerships should be extended to heterosexual couples who wish to have a legal union in accordance with their individual beliefs and values.

"Labour will continue to push the government to look again at this important issue."

[Press release: Planned roadworks in the East of England: weekly summary for Monday 20 to Sunday 26 February 2017](#)

The following information summarises the work being carried out this coming week. It is correct as of the above date but could be subject to change due to weather conditions or unforeseen circumstances. All our improvement work

is carried out with the aim of causing as little disruption as possible.

Various roads: routine inspections and maintenance for street lighting

Highways England is carrying out a programme of routine inspections of electrical and structural equipment across the region, which is planned for completion in Spring 2017. In addition there is a programme of maintenance which includes bulk lamp changes. Work will include inspecting equipment on the:

- A47 westbound Kings Lynn to Norwich and Norwich to Yarmouth, with traffic management but no full closures
- A12 southbound Brentwood to Chapel St Mary central reserve, with traffic management but no full closures
- A5 including underground cable testing

Work will include maintenance and bulk lamp changes on the:

- A1 between Wittering and Stibbington, with traffic management but no full closures
- A1 between Sandy and Biggleswade, with traffic management but no full closures

Various roads: barrier repairs

Highways England will continue repairs to barriers throughout the week, using lane closures to keep road users at a safe distance from the work. The work will take place at various locations, between 8pm and 5am. This week we are repairing barriers on the M11 in both directions from Monday 20 to Friday 24 February overnight, using lane closures while we are working between junctions 6 (M25) and 9 (A11). We are also repairing barriers on the A120 in both directions, between junction 8 with the M11 and Braintree (Marks Farm).

Various roads: litter picking and sweeping

Highways England will continue litter picking throughout the week on the M11. This will be done using a mobile slow-moving hard shoulder or lane closure. Work will also include sweeping the hard shoulder of the M11 during the day while we litter pick between junctions 6 (M25) and 9 (A11).

M1: technology repairs

Highways England will be working to repair and replace faulty power cables for signage technology on the motorway, including overhead sign lighting, on the M1. This will be done using lane and hard shoulder closures while we are working, between 9pm and 5am, from Monday 20 February to Friday 10 March. As part of this work, it will be necessary for slip roads to be closed overnight on some dates. Where slip roads are closed, drivers will be diverted to continue on the M1 to the next junction, exit and return to leave the

junction from the opposite direction.

M11 and A120: structures maintenance

Highways England are carrying out routine maintenance work on bridges crossing the M11 between junctions 6 (M25) and 9 (A11) in both directions. They will also be doing similar work on the A120, between junction 8 with the M11 and Braintree (Marks Farm). These will be done during the day, with the hard shoulder closed while we are working.

M11 and A120 Stansted Airport: pothole filling

Highways England will be filling in potholes on the M11 between junctions 8 (Stansted Airport – Bishop's Stortford) and 9 (A11) in both directions, and on the A120 between Braintree and junction 8 of the M11. This will be done using lane and hard shoulder closures while we are working, between 8.30pm and 6am, from Monday 20 to Friday 24 February.

M11: routine maintenance

Highways England will be doing routine maintenance of structures and technology boxes along the M11 during the day. These will be done with a hard shoulder closure, taking place between junctions 6 (M25) and 9 (A11).

A5-M1 Link (Dunstable Northern Bypass), Bedfordshire: major improvements

Highways England is building a new 2.9-mile, two-lane dual carriageway running from north of Dunstable and joining the M1 at a new junction 11a, south of Chalton. Main construction started in March 2015. Work is progressing well. The traffic management, including hard shoulder closures, safety barriers, signs, CCTV and average speed cameras, will stay in place throughout the construction work, which will be carried out in phases and should be finished in spring 2017.

Work on the M1 and A5: there will be M1 lane closures between junctions 10 and 13 from Monday 20 February to Sunday 26 February between 10pm to 6am for overhead gantry works.

Work on the A5 and local roads: from Monday 20 to Sunday 26 February there will be traffic lights overnight on the A5 and A505 between 8pm and 6am for safety barrier installation and construction of a new footpath works. There will be temporary traffic lights on local roads and A5 between 9.30am and 3.30pm for verge and safety barrier work.

Cycle improvements schemes in Suffolk, Essex, Norfolk and Bedfordshire

Work is substantially completed on the building or improving of cycle paths

at 16 locations across the East of England including on the A12, A120, A47 and A5.

The work included the installation of new and upgraded shared-use foot/cycle ways and toucan crossing facilities. The new or improved paths will make it safer and easier to cycle on or around major A-roads and will improve connections with the local and national cycle network.

The project is part of a country-wide initiative which will see Highways England deliver 200 projects over the next five years after the government set up a £100 million dedicated fund for cycling in its Road Investment Strategy.

Ongoing work for this week:

A12 Lowestoft – Station Road/Gunton St/Peters Avenue: there will be off peak three way lights upgrading the existing footpath works. The northbound bus stop opposite the works has temporarily been suspended, whilst the southbound bus stop has been relocated.

A5 Friars Wash: road surface repair

Highways England will be replacing the road surface on the A5 between Friars Wash and Chad Lane. This will be done on Monday 20 February and last for two weeks, working from 8pm to 6am. During the work the A5 will be closed between M1 junction 9 and Chad Lane. Access to and from the Premier Inn will be under escort by our site personnel for safety of our workforce. Diversion routes for traffic will be clearly signed as follows: Drivers heading southbound will be diverted to:

- head north on the A5 to the B4540 Luton Road/ Markyate Road, onto Front Street
- take the A1081 Luton Road towards Harpenden
- take the B487 Redbourn Lane, before joining the A5183 Dunstable Road to join the M1 at junction 9

Drivers heading northbound from M1 junction 9 will be diverted to:

- take the A5183 Dunstable Road
- take B487 Redbourn Lane
- take the A1081 through Harpenden onto Front Street, north towards to Slip End
- take the B4540 Markyate Road/Luton Road back to join the A5 at Markyate

A12/A47 renumbering

Highways England is renumbering part of the A12 to become the A47. This work is being carried out as part of the improvements to the A47/A12 corridor. We will be replacing road signs that currently show the A12 to now show the A47. The work will last approximately 12 weeks to complete. The section of the A12 that currently runs from Lowestoft to Great Yarmouth will become the A47.

There will be off peak lane closures and two/three way traffic lights during the day and night throughout Lowestoft on the A12 installing sign faces and patches.

A14 Bury St Edmunds: junction improvements

Improvement works are being carried out on the A14 junction 45 Rookery Crossroads/Rougham. Works include construction of new eastbound slip roads, which are being funded by Suffolk County Council as part of the Bury St Edmunds Eastern Relief Road scheme. There is a 24 hour 40mph speed limit in place through the works for safety reasons, works are currently taking place overnight using lane closures in both directions. The works are due to take five months to complete.

A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire: major improvements

Early preparatory construction work on the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon scheme has been underway for a number of months and main construction has now started. We are currently carrying out a variety of tasks for which we need to close lanes or carriageway on the A1, A14 and some local roads, usually overnight between 8pm and 6 am unless otherwise stated. The work includes:

- creating safe crossing points for plant on a number of local roads
- installing access points to our construction compounds
- taking core samples of the existing A1 and A14 carriageways to help us plan construction
- clearing sites next to the live carriageway of vegetation
- installing CCTV and average speed cameras
- installing information boards

For this week, the planned closures are:

Full closures

Monday 20 February:

Full closure of A14 eastbound between junction 26 to junction 31.

Tuesday 21 February:

Full closure of A14 eastbound between junction 26 to junction 31.

Wednesday 22 February:

Full closure of A14 westbound junction 31 to junction 27.

Thursday 23 February:

Full closure of A14 westbound junction 31 to junction 27.

Friday 24 February to Monday 27 February:

Full closure of Grafham Road between 8pm Friday and 5am Monday.

Lane closures

Monday 20 February:

- A14 westbound between junction 24 and junction 26 lane 2 closed
- A1 northbound between Little Paxton to Brampton lane 1 closed
- A14 westbound junction 34 to junction 33 lane 1 closed
- M11 northbound between junction 12 and junction lane 1 closed

Tuesday 21 February:

- A14 eastbound between junction 24 and junction 26 lane 2 closed
- A1 northbound between Little Paxton to Brampton lane 1 closed
- A1 southbound between junction 15 and junction 14 lane 1 closure
- A14 eastbound between junction 18 and junction 20 lane 1 closed
- M11 northbound between junction 12 and junction 13 lane 1 closed

Wednesday 22 February:

- M11 northbound between junction 13 and junction 14 lane 2 closed
- A14 eastbound between junction 24 and junction 26 lane 2 closed
- A1 northbound between Little Paxton to Brampton Lane 1 closed
- A1 southbound between junction 15 and junction 14 lane 1 closure
- A14 eastbound between junction 18 and junction 20 lane 1 closed
- M11 northbound between junction 12 and junction 13 lane 1 closed

Thursday 23 February:

- M11 northbound between junction 13 and junction 14 lane 2 closed
- A1 northbound between Little Paxton to Brampton Lane 1 closed
- M11 northbound between junction 12 and junction 13 lane 1 closed

Friday 24 February:

- A1 northbound between Little Paxton to Brampton lane 1 closed
- M11 northbound between junction 12 and junction 13 lane 1 closed

A14 Cambridgeshire: drainage repairs

Highways England is undertaking investigations and repairs to the drainage system of the A14 between junctions 32 (Girton – M11 interchange) and 35 (Stoke cum Quy). There will be lane closures between 8pm and 6am while we are working overnight, with all works on weekdays only.

This week we are working on the A14 westbound direction with the inside lane closed between junctions 35 and 33.

A47 Dogsthorpe: junction improvements (Peterborough)

City Council)

Peterborough City Council is continuing its junction improvement work at the A47/A15 Dogsthorpe junction, Peterborough. The work will involve some overnight full closure and 24/7 lane closures on the A47. For more information, visit the [Peterborough City Council website](#).

A47 Acle Straight: safety improvement works

Highways England will be working to improve safety along the A47 between Acle and Great Yarmouth. Works will start on Monday 20 February and last for two weeks, working from 8pm to 6am on weeknights only.

To keep road users at a safe distance from the works, we will close the A47 between the A1064 Acle Roundabout and the A12/A149 Vauxhall Roundabout. Access to and from the Vauxhall Holiday Park will be under escort by our site personnel for the safety of our workforce. There will be a clearly signed diversion route in place, whereby drivers heading eastbound on the A47 will be directed to:

- exit the A47 at the Acle Roundabout
- take the A1064 north-east towards Caister-on-Sea
- take the A149 south towards Great Yarmouth
- take the A149 Acle New Road to join the A12 at Vauxhall Roundabout

Drivers heading northbound on the A12 past Great Yarmouth will be directed to follow this diversion in reverse.

A120 and A12 Essex: essential maintenance work

We are completing essential maintenance work on the A120 and the A12 in Essex, which will be ongoing until May. This work will include resurfacing, safety barrier repairs, and bridge repairs, with work taking place between Braintree and Marks Tey, near Colchester, at Kelvedon, and at Wix. Unless detailed otherwise, work will be taking place between 8pm and 6am.

This week we are resurfacing the road and footpaths and replacing street lights, fencing and road signs on the A120 between Marks Tey and Marks Farm from Monday 20 to Friday 24 February, under night time (8pm-6am) temporary traffic signals at Marks Farm, Coggeshall and Marks Tey.

A120 Blackwater Bridge Bradwell Village – footpath will be accessible but reduced in width to 1.2m from Monday 20 to Friday 24 February to allow bridge deck investigative works. The works will only take place on a day time, but the pedestrian management will be in place for safety 24 hours a day.

We are repairing drainage on the A120 Wix bypass on nights from Monday 20 to Friday 24 February. There will be night time (8pm-6am) traffic lights in place and a 40mph speed limit while we are working. This work is expected to be complete by late April.

We are replacing the central reservation safety barrier on the A120 between junction 29 of the A12 (Crown Interchange) to Hare Green (between the B1029 and the A133). There will be narrow lanes westbound with a 50mph limit in place in both directions 24/7 throughout the works until mid-March. In addition there will be a lane 2 closure eastbound from Monday 20 to Friday 24 February overnight. Overnight westbound full closures from Monday 20 February -Great Bromley Junction and A133 link road. Diversion route via A131/A1232 to junction 29 for Temporary Barrier and narrow lanes to be relocated

We are repairing bridge joints on the A12 Ewell Bridge near Kelvedon. Bridge closed to pedestrians 24/7 until scheme is completed April 2017. Pedestrians who cross over Ewell Bridge westbound from its connection with Windmill Hill will be diverted head south on Windmill Hill to its junction with Highfields Lane, then along Highfields Lane, heading towards Kelvedon, before crossing Maldon Road Bridge to the junction with Ewell Hall Chase, and finally join Ewell Hall Chase to meet with the public right of way in the vicinity of Ewell Hall Farm. Pedestrians wishing to cross eastbound, the diversion is the reverse of the above.

Porter Park Bridge A12 north of junction 19: repairing bridge joints and water proofing, resurfacing of the carriageway and footpath. Closed to all vehicles. Diversion, (Southbound) B1137, A130, Essex Regiment way, Wheelers Hill, Leigh's Road, Drakes Lane, Boreham Road, Waltham Road, B1137. The northbound diversion is the reverse of the southbound. Pedestrian access is maintained.

A428 Eltisley: street lighting and road markings

Highways England will be improving street lighting and road markings on the A428 through Eltisley. This will be done between Monday 20 February and Friday 31 March. During the works we will have traffic lights in place while we are working. As part of this work, it will be necessary for road to be closed overnight on some dates. Where the A428 is closed westbound, drivers will be diverted to take the A1198 northbound at Caxton Gibbet roundabout, then at Godmanchester follow the A14 westbound to junction 21 at Brampton Hut, then take the A1 southbound and follow the A1 southbound to Wyboston junction roundabout, where the diversion ends. Drivers heading eastbound will follow this diversion in reverse.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Press release: Planned roadworks in Yorkshire and the Humber: summary for Monday 20 February to Sunday 26 February 2017](#)

The following summary of planned new and ongoing road improvements over the coming week is correct as of Friday 17 February and could be subject to change due to weather conditions or unforeseen circumstances. All our improvement work is carried out with the aim of causing as little disruption as possible.

M1 junction 32 Thircroft to junction 35a Stocksbridge

The hard shoulder is currently closed in both directions between junction 32 and junction 34 as part of the smart motorway scheme. The northbound entry slip road at junction 33 will be fully closed overnight for seven nights from Monday 20 February. The northbound exit slip road at junction 34 will be fully closed overnight for six nights from Tuesday 21 February. The southbound carriageway at junction 34 will be closed overnight on Tuesday 21 February. The southbound exit slip road at junction 33 will be closed overnight for two nights from Tuesday 21 February. There will be narrow lanes and a 50mph speed limit until the project is completed. The closures will take place between 8pm and 6am, and drivers will be able to follow clearly signed diversion routes.

M62 junction 22 to junction 23 Outlane

The westbound carriageway will be reduced to a single lane overnight for six nights from Monday 20 February for road marking works. The closure will take place between 10pm and 6am.

M62 junction 25 to junction 26 Chain Bar

The westbound carriageway will be reduced to a single lane closing the carriageway between the slip roads at junction 26 overnight for technology works on Wednesday 26 February. The closures will take place between 9pm and 6am, and drivers will be able to follow clearly signed diversion routes.

M62 junction 31 to junction 32 Castleford

The eastbound carriageway will be reduced to a single lane overnight for four nights from Monday 20 February for bridge works. The westbound carriageway

will be reduced to a single lane overnight on Friday 24 February for bridge works. The closure will take place between 10pm and 6am.

M62 junction 35 to M18 junction 7 Langham

The east south link will be fully closed overnight on Monday 20 February for carriageway repairs. The closures will take place between 7pm and 7am, and drivers will be able to follow clearly signed diversion routes.

M180 junction 4 to junction 5 Barnetby

The eastbound carriageway will be fully closed overnight for five nights from Monday 20 February for bridge works. The closures will take place between 9pm and 6am, and drivers will be able to follow clearly signed diversion routes.

M621 junction 4 Hunslet

The anticlockwise entry slip road will be fully closed overnight on Wednesday 22 February for electrical works. The closures will take place between 9pm and 6am, and drivers will be able to follow clearly signed diversion routes.

A63 Daltry Street Flyover

The westbound carriageway will be fully closed overnight for two nights from Monday 20 February for resurfacing works. The closures will take place between 10pm and 6am, and drivers will be able to follow clearly signed diversion routes.

A64 Fulford

The eastbound carriageway will be fully closed between the slip roads overnight for five nights from Monday 20 February for bridge works. The westbound carriageway will be fully closed between the slip roads overnight for five nights from Monday 20 February for bridge works. The closures will take place between 8pm and 6am, and drivers will be able to follow clearly signed diversion routes.

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Speech: Environment Secretary speaks at NFU conference

As you rightly say, Meurig, food and farming faces some of the biggest changes of any sector as we leave the EU.

But with change comes great opportunities for what also is by far the UK's largest manufacturing sector.

This morning, you have highlighted a number of those opportunities and challenges.

So I do appreciate that your members are looking for clarity on specific issues – such as the future of direct payments, the prospects for seasonal agricultural workers, and access to the single market to name just a few.

And I don't for one minute underestimate the importance of these. Meeting with farmers in Somerset, Glamorgan, Sussex, Herefordshire and in my own constituency of South Northamptonshire, I've heard the concerns of your members first hand.

And I want to be clear that as a major contributor to the UK economy – contributing close to £110 billion each year – there is no doubt that there will be support for our vital food and farming industry after we leave the EU.

But I'm not going to stand here today and pre-empt the work the Government is doing to get the best possible deal for the UK.

Those negotiations will take time, and change is, of course, inevitable.

But I want you to know that I will fight your corner at every opportunity – and fight for the huge contribution you make to our communities, to our environment, and to our economy.

So, I don't have final answers today – but I do want, this morning, to outline my ambition for a future, more prosperous farming industry, and the five principles we must follow if we are to achieve this.

But first, I want to start by addressing CAP.

CAP and continuity

For more than 40 years, British farming has operated within the EU.

It's provided you with a guaranteed income, and an element of certainty in an otherwise unpredictable world. In turn, you've provided us with food produced to the highest of standards.

Nearly 86 thousand farmers are eligible for BPS payments – and for some of

you, I know it makes up as much as 70% of your bottom line.

I understand how important these payments are to you. But we also know how flawed CAP is – how it ties you up in red tape, offers poor value for money and fails to address the key issues you face.

It's a blunt tool that offers little reward or recognition for the services you provide to this country. And it's desperately complicated.

In 2015, too many farmers experienced delays and problems with their BPS payments.

Lessons have been learnt, and I am pleased that the RPA have made good progress with this year's claims.

As of today, 95.5% of farmers have received their 2016 basic payment, but I do recognise that if you're one of the 4,000 still waiting, you need to know when you will get paid.

So this week I secured agreement from the Treasury to offer a 75% bridging payment to anyone with outstanding claims at the end of March.

I am determined that we will do so much better for farmers when we leave the EU – with a system based on simpler, more effective rules, we'll be free to grow more, sell more, and export more of our Great British food.

Now, my first priority on coming into this job was to guarantee Pillar 1 income to 2020 – and Pillar 2 payments signed before we leave the EU for their lifetime.

This was to provide continuity during this period of transition.

But, as the Prime Minister made clear, leaving the EU requires us to take a step back and ask ourselves 'what kind of country do we want to be?'

And we must in turn ask the same question of farming: 'what kind of industry do we want to be?'

And how do we devise a system of support that properly takes into account the diverse types of farming, and the challenges unique to each?

So, for example, how can we ensure a more tailored approach – one that recognises the needs of hill farmers alongside those of arable farmers and protects our precious uplands as well as our productive fenland?

These are the kind of questions the current system can't even pose, let alone answer. With 80% of Defra's work currently framed by EU activity we now have a great opportunity, guided by our 5 principles, to strike the right balance.

Global demand

The first principle is trade.

As a global trading nation with so much to offer the world, we are looking to build new partnerships and strike the best free trade deals for Britain.

This year, exports of British food and drink topped £20 billion for the first time – a tremendous endorsement of our world class products and the importance placed on British provenance.

I've witnessed for myself the growing appetite for primary commodities like lamb, beef and dairy – products we've built our name on and that increasingly attract worldwide demand.

Without you, there would be no Great British brand.

In spite of growing success, we know that only 1 in 5 British food and drink producers are currently exporting. So how can we encourage farmers, exporters, and newcomers to access new markets?

I recognise that around 60% of exports go direct to the EU, and that 4 of our 5 biggest markets are there. The EU is our most important trading partner, a fact that won't change when we leave, and a relationship we are determined to uphold.

As the Prime Minister outlined last month, we want tariff-free and frictionless cross-border trade with Europe.

So with zero tariffs and zero non-tariff barriers as our starting point, we are striving for the best possible access for our farmers and food exporters.

In 2016, exports grew by 9%, with growth in a number of key markets – including a 49% increase to China, 30% to Poland and 17% to Spain.

To get more companies taking advantage of export opportunities, such as the UK-China barley agreement, we have a dedicated government team working with potential exporters in the Great British Food Unit.

They are helping to identify and open new markets for our award-winning produce, as well as providing the skills, knowledge and contacts to take British businesses even further.

Our International Action Plan for Food and Drink has identified a number of priority markets, including the US, China and India, which offer the greatest potential to grow our exports.

Farmers work hard to maintain our reputation for superb tasting, high quality food, produced to high welfare and traceability standards – so let's spread that reputation further around the world.

Productive and competitive

A sector that exports more will rely on a more productive workforce, using the latest technology and data.

However, the current CAP arrangements offer little investment or incentive,

so I want to make productivity and innovation the second principle of a new farming system.

Productivity is the major challenge for our economy as a whole – and the Government's Industrial Strategy outlines the need to raise skills, leadership and business management.

We need to build on excellent initiatives like McDonalds' Progressive Young Farmers and Bright Crop to demonstrate to talented young people that farming offers a great career.

We've made some progress towards increasing the number of apprentices on farms.

But how can we encourage a greater understanding of the food chain?

And how can we help more people with the right skills into food and farming?

As for seasonal agricultural workers, I have heard loud and clear the vital role they play in many farm businesses, not least the horticultural sector.

But at the same time, we mustn't forget that a key factor behind the vote to leave the EU was to control immigration.

So I want to find out what kind of labour you need, in food processing as well as farming, whilst exploring the role innovation can play in support of this.

As I've travelled the UK, I've seen a whole raft of new technologies that complement the workforce.

This Government has invested £450 million in agri-food research and development – and I was pleased to see that under the leadership of Peter Kendall and Jane King, AHDB have placed innovation, productivity and knowledge exchange at the heart of their new strategy.

And today's Feeding the Future report sets out the research and development required to modernise farming over the next 20 years.

But I know there are also large numbers of farms that are yet to seize these opportunities.

So how, in the future, can we help farmers secure the capital they need to enhance innovation, and how can we help them combine together to improve their power and influence in the supply chain?

I want to use this opportunity to allow innovation to flourish – not just for the sake of productivity, but also as a means of improving the landscape around us.

Sustainable

And this leads me to our third principle; the environment.

British farmers don't only produce world-class food, but as part of that process, they care for and shape some of our most iconic landscapes.

Yet, whilst 70% of our land is farmed, just a small percentage of funding is directed towards the provision of these environmental services.

So, alongside a fair return from the market, farmers must feel incentivised and rewarded for caring for the environment.

The current CAP has improved over recent years, but in trying to do more for the environment, farmers have found themselves confronted with unnecessary bureaucracy.

So as we leave the EU, we have an opportunity to take a fresh look at these schemes and think about what mechanisms are needed to promote the twin goals of productive farming and environmental improvement.

I want to consider, for example, how we will strike the right balance between national frameworks for support measures whilst tailoring them to local landscapes and catchments.

And how can we incentivise as many farmers as possible to undertake environmental improvements on their land?

The Farmer Cluster concept, pioneered by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and Natural England is a great example of how farmers can come together, at a landscape scale, to farm productively whilst delivering greater outcomes for soil, water and wildlife – such as boosting the number of grey partridge in Lincolnshire or harvest mice in Hampshire.

We all know that good farmers produce excellent food at the same time as improving the environment – and by increasing the use of technology alongside traditional farm husbandry, more farmers will be able to achieve both of these things.

Trusted

The fourth principle underpinning a new agricultural support policy must be the promotion of animal and plant health and welfare.

British food is renowned and respected for its high standards of animal welfare, food safety, and food traceability.

It's one of the most compelling reasons for consumers to buy British.

We've gone further and faster than many in the EU when it comes to improving welfare standards.

We were in the vanguard of banning veal crates, sow stalls and battery cages.

And our 2015 manifesto states that 'high animal welfare standards will be incorporated into international trade agreements...'

I am committed to honouring this pledge – and working with industry to improve our welfare standards, whilst ensuring that we are not put at a competitive disadvantage.

The Union flag represents all that's great about our food – we are in the top four in the world for animal welfare – and leaving the EU will not change that.

We must also respond to the global threat of anti-microbial resistance.

This Government wants to see a reduction in the unnecessary use of antibiotics in animals, without putting health and welfare at risk.

Last month I went to meet Abi Reader, Wales' Woman Farmer of the Year, on her dairy farm, where she's been able to reduce antibiotic use by as much as 40% – and improved milk productivity as a result of careful investment in a better equipped dairy parlour.

So in the same way we led from the front on animal health and welfare, I want us to do the same on AMR.

Resilient

The fifth and final principle for our future policy thinking is that of resilience.

Farming is often tough because it faces a unique combination of risks, ranging from the price of oil and commodities, to the threat of flood and storm damage.

One of the biggest risks facing the industry though is the continuing threat of bovine TB – a disease that last year led to the slaughter of 28 thousand cattle in England – and I'm sure that many of you in this hall will have had personal experience in your own herds.

It's a disease that can devastate a rural economy, and the families and individuals dependent on it. I know from my constituents farming in the 'Edge Area' the stress and anxiety of testing day – and the physical risks they, their workers and vets face when trying to get cattle through the crush.

No farmer should have to go through this.

That's why I am committed to our 25 year eradication strategy.

Last summer we rolled out the cull to seven additional areas – all of which were successful.

And this year, I want to extend that even further.

It's thanks to you and the efforts of farmers on the ground that our strategy is working – and that we are now close to declaring half of England officially TB-free, two years ahead of schedule.

But that's no reason to take a step back. In fact, if anything, we must increase our efforts.

This Government will continue to work with you to use every tool at our disposal to beat this disease – and ultimately, end the blight of bovine TB for good.

The past few months have also been very worrying for the poultry sector.

The housing order we have implemented to reduce the spread of Avian Influenza remains in place until 28th February – but if the veterinary assessment stays the same, we hope to be able to take a more targeted approach to controls in England and will be making further announcements shortly.

But disease isn't the only challenge you face, as your recent Flood Manifesto identified.

The Morpeth flood alleviation scheme is just one example of how farmers can provide crucial storage to reduce the risk of flooding.

And we're not just protecting homes and villages – our six year capital floods programme will better protect an extra one million acres of prime farmland by 2021.

So from flooding, to market volatility and disease – as we leave the EU, what policies do we need to help and support farmers to manage risk?

Conclusion

So, to conclude, these are the five principles that will frame the future of food and farming policy.

Since last summer, we've been having regular discussions with organisations from across the sector and beyond.

But today, based on these principles, we are stepping up this engagement to ensure we hear as many views, from as many different perspectives, as possible.

On Thursday I will be meeting Ministers from each of the Devolved Administrations in Edinburgh – and throughout March and April we will be holding a network of events right across the country where ministers and officials will be able to hear your views first hand.

We have a once in a generation opportunity to transform our food and farming policies and it's vital you are a key part of this process

It is only with the the hard work of farmers that we can put quality food on our tables, that we can drive our valuable exports, and that we can improve our environment.

That's why I am determined we should follow these five principles to guide us through a period of change, and provide a foundation for the sort of industry

we want to build over the coming years.

I want farmers to thrive outside of the EU, and I will fight to get you the best deal – at home, in Brussels and around the world.

By working together, I am confident a stronger industry and a bright and prosperous future awaits British farming.

Thank you.

Chinese health and nutraceutical group to open European HQ, R&D and manufacturing centre in Wales

The news was announced today by Economy Secretary Ken Skates who is in China on a trade mission and meeting Acerchem International Chairman Frank Chen, Strategic Director Ms Nancy Wu and Global Vice President Ken Li at a business reception in Shanghai this evening.

Mr Skates said:

“It’s great news that Acerchem International has chosen to set up its European Headquarters in Wales and is to open a manufacturing and Research and Development centre here, creating a significant number of skilled jobs.

“The company has a long standing Research collaboration with Swansea University which clearly illustrates the importance of building international academic links with business and industry.

“This investment, which is supported by the Welsh Government, can only serve to strengthen the ties between our two countries. China is an extremely important market for Wales and our trade mission this week builds on the strong economic and cultural links that have been developed over a number of years.”

The investment by Acerchem International is backed by £600,000 from the Welsh Government and will create 38 highly skilled, well paid jobs, primarily working in R&D. The company plans to establish its R&D facility in the Institute of Life Science at Swansea University.

Acerchem International Chairman Frank Chen said:

“We very much look forward to building up the business in Wales and developing even closer links with Swansea University.

“Support from the Welsh Government helped fast track this project and was vital in bringing it to Wales and we value the support we have had from Welsh Government officials in Shanghai and in Cardiff.

“Opening this new HQ and R&D centre in Wales marks an exciting new development for the group and a great opportunity to develop and grow the business.”

CEO Jeff Jiang founded Acerchem International in Shanghai in 2007 which has grown into a multi million pound business and a leading group in the health and nutraceutical sectors. The company exports to over 40 countries with sales offices in Wales – at the Institute of Life Science, Swansea University – in Japan, the Netherlands and Spain.

Its product range includes nutritional supplements, functional foods and beverages, beauty care and animal nutrition supplements.

The company provides a diversified portfolio of fermented ingredients and has developed a sophisticated extraction and purification business unit using natural ingredients, giving products better absorption and stability.

With an R&D centre in Shanghai, and working alongside Swansea University, it has developed its own formulations which include premix, blends, tablets, soft-gels, and others. It plans to invest significantly in R&D working with Welsh Universities and increase its business with existing customers in Wales that could also lead to additional jobs being created.