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Stephen Morgan MP  
Minister of State for Food Security and Rural Affairs  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Dear Minister,

### **Northern Ireland beef sector - imports, labelling and pressure on family farms**

I am writing on behalf of the Ulster Farmers' Union to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Minister of State for Food Security and Rural Affairs, and to raise the serious pressure currently facing Northern Ireland's beef sector.

Northern Ireland beef farmers are extremely concerned about the combined impact of falling producer prices, high input costs and increasing volumes of imported beef entering the UK market. Many family farm businesses are now facing very difficult trading conditions, despite continued strong consumer demand for beef.

Our members produce beef to some of the highest standards anywhere in the world. Northern Ireland's beef sector is built on family farms, high animal welfare standards, robust traceability, food safety and a strong reputation for quality. However, there is growing frustration that local producers are being asked to meet high domestic standards while competing with imported product from countries operating under different production systems.

The UFU is not opposed to international trade. However, trade must be fair, transparent and must not undermine domestic food production. Farmers need confidence that government trade policy, procurement policy and labelling rules will support rather than weaken the UK's own food security.

We are particularly concerned that consumers often do not have clear information on the origin of beef, especially in food service, hospitality, catering, takeaway and processed products. If consumers want to support local farmers and high-standard domestic production, they must be given the information to make that choice.

The UFU is therefore seeking urgent engagement with DEFRA on the following issues:

- Mandatory country-of-origin labelling across food service, hospitality, catering and processed beef products;
- Greater transparency on the origin and production standards of imported beef;
- A Northern Ireland-specific assessment of how trade agreements and rising beef imports are affecting local producers;
- Stronger equivalence measures to ensure imported beef is not produced under lower standards significantly different from those required of UK farmers;
- Public procurement policies that prioritise beef produced to UK-equivalent standards; and
- A clear government commitment that domestic producers will not be disadvantaged by trade policy decisions.

Food security must not be taken for granted. Recent years have shown the importance of maintaining strong domestic food production and resilient supply chains. If falling returns and import pressures continue to

weaken confidence in the beef sector, there will be long-term consequences for family farms, rural communities and local food production.

The UFU would welcome an urgent meeting with you and your officials to discuss these concerns and to ensure the specific circumstances facing Northern Ireland beef producers are fully recognised within UK Government policy.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clement Lynch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Clement Lynch  
Deputy President  
Ulster Farmers' Union