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Ian Wright and Terry Jones
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Dear Ian and Terry,

Food and Drink Sector Council: Covid-19 Recovery Plan

Thank you for your letter of 31 July, enclosing the Food and Drink Sector Council's Covid-19 Recovery Plan and for inviting me to the Council's meeting on 11th June. Covid-19 has brought about unprecedented challenges. I would like to record my thanks again to all of those working in the food and drink industry for their extraordinary response. They have worked around the clock to maintain the supply chain, keep goods moving and ensure that the nation is fed. Their effort is testament to the strength of the sector

We are committed to supporting the industry through this period. Every part of the sector has faced challenges, but at the same time businesses have risen to the challenge of new ways of working and potentially changed consumer habits.

The response to Covid-19 has strengthened the relationship between industry and the Government. We are keen to build on that relationship and will continue to work with industry and across Government to remove barriers and target support where appropriate. The Food and Drink Sector Council is a key part of that as it offers a strategic approach highlighting the priorities affecting the whole of the sector.

To that end I welcome the recommendations in the Food and Drink Sector Council's Covid-19 Recovery Plan. Many align with our own thinking and in some cases have already been acted upon. For example, the Government has announced a reduction in social distancing as of 4 July, and the new package of financial support including a significant reduction in VAT on food out of home and our new "Eat out to help out" scheme, which will support the hospitality and wholesale sectors. We are continuing our Pick for Britain campaign which encourages students, the unemployed and furloughed

workers into seasonal farm work as well as ensuring health checks and quarantine arrangements do not unnecessarily hinder seasonal agricultural workers coming to the UK.

As the Council has noted, exports and foreign investment will be an important part of achieving sustained long term recovery. We recognise the need to provide support, both here and in markets overseas, and equally for any support for exports to meet the needs of the huge number of SMEs who do or could export. Defra and the Department for International Trade have jointly announced an exports bounce back package for food and drink businesses that includes the launch of a programme of physical and virtual events, using innovative, interactive software to connect buyers, promote the UK and reach international markets. This will include sending food and drink sample boxes to buyers internationally, to help effectively support exporters domestically. We also announced plans to launch a food and drink SME e-commerce accelerator pilot, which will deliver improved engagement with buyers as exports increasingly move to e-commerce. We are also announcing Defra's first agri-food counsellor within the United Arab Emirates (UAE), who will work alongside DIT's existing sector leads in the UAE, providing specialist knowledge and engagement in Government to Government discussions on behalf of UK interests and sectors.

I was also pleased to see that the Food and Drink Sector Council has highlighted the importance of advocacy for British food and the British food industry. We are committed to championing the sector and our high quality food and drink, for example through our Food is GREAT campaign. This will need a collaborative and sustained approach from both industry and Government and we look forward to working with the sector to ensure that consumers, here and abroad, are attracted to great British food and drink.

Looking ahead, the Government is resolute in its efforts to deliver a green, resilient and fair recovery and welcomes the Council's support in achieving that. Finally, we can take the opportunity of leaving the EU to reform internal markets to support vibrant and sustainable growth in our sectors.

We should also continue to highlight the excellent work the Council is doing through its different workstreams, to create a more productive and sustainable food and drink sector. As we move forward through recovery, and as we develop the National Food Strategy, that experience and expertise will be invaluable.



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