

I want some more please

The government needs a touch of the Oliver Twist in its approach to UK food production. Freed of the Common Agriculture policy which left us short of permits to produce milk, paid grants to rip out our orchards and used rules to slim our beef herds we expected a policy that promoted more UK produced food. We need to recapture the lost market share of the CAP years.

Instead so far the government has used its freedoms to pay farmers to leave farming, paid farmers to wild their land and stop growing crops, and paid them money for a range of environmental goods that impede or prevent food growing. What we now need is recognition that imported food can be hard to come by when the world experiences shocks like the Ukraine invasion and the gas shortages. There is a good green argument to cut the food miles. It is easier to be assured of the safety of our food and of the humane treatment of animals and birds reared for the table if the work is done at home under UK regulations.

Agriculture in most parts of the world is heavily subsidised and regulated by governments. Most countries use their powers and money to promote more domestic production, not to stop people farming. We need to catch up. The UK needs to restore full fertiliser production, hit by high gas prices. It needs to work with supermarkets to ensure sensible prices are offered farmers to grow the grains, rear the animals and produce the milk and eggs people will want, seeing that farmers costs for these items have risen rapidly in recent weeks.

Farmers need grants to help buy the more automated systems to plant and harvest a wide range of crops, and to assist in putting in the extra greenhouse and polytunnel capacity needed to extend our growing season. It is bizarre that we import so many flowers, salad stuffs and vegetables from countries like the Netherlands that have no better weather than us but have better systems of investment encouragement and support.