



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sarah Dyke MP
Member of Parliament for Glastonbury & Somerton

The Rt Hon Dame Angela Eagle DBE MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

24 September 2026

Dear Angela,

Abrupt closure of Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026 Window 2

We are writing following the deeply concerning closure of Window 2 of the Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026 within hours of its opening yesterday.

The window opened with a budget of £233 million, yet demand exhausted the available funding almost immediately. Farmers who had prepared their applications and logged on ready to apply found the window closed before they had a reasonable opportunity to access it. Others faced technical difficulties with the Rural Payments service while the available funding rapidly disappeared.

This is not a fair or credible way to distribute vital public funding. It has reduced a scheme meant to reward good farming practice to little more than a lottery — decided not by which farm businesses are best placed to deliver food security, environmental improvement and value for the taxpayer, but by who could click fastest.

This failure is particularly serious because it mirrors the abrupt closure of SFI24, which left thousands of farmers in financial limbo. Ministers subsequently promised that SFI26 would be simpler, fairer and more dependable. Instead, farmers who followed the guidance and did everything asked of them have once again been locked out through no fault of their own.

Defra should have anticipated the scale of demand. Months of uncertainty over the SFI's future, combined with the financial pressures already facing the sector, made it entirely foreseeable that demand would far outstrip the available funding. To open a scheme so plainly destined to be oversubscribed, without any safeguards or a fair means of allocating that funding, was not an oversight, it was irresponsible.

This is not a new warning. Liberal Democrats have repeatedly called on the Government to properly fund the agricultural transition, including an £1 billion annual increase to the farming budget, a reopened and permanently available Sustainable Farming Incentive, and an end to the pattern of schemes being closed and reopened without warning. Yesterday's chaotic closure of Window 2 is

exactly the outcome we warned would result from a scheme that remains chronically underfunded relative to demand.

Farmers shut out of Window 2 are not simply disappointed - they are staring down a genuine cliff edge. Basic Payments have already been phased out, and for many, SFI income was the bridge that was supposed to replace it. That bridge has now been pulled away, with no live scheme open to them, no confirmed budget for any future window, and no timetable for when, or if, one might reopen. For some of these businesses, this is not an inconvenience. It is the point at which the numbers simply stop adding up.

For farm businesses in Glastonbury and Somerton, Cumbria and rural communities across the country, the SFI is not an optional extra. Many are already under severe pressure following extreme weather, rising input costs and continued uncertainty over the agricultural transition. They have invested considerable time and money in preparing applications on the basis of assurances given by the Government.

Telling those who missed out to wait for a possible offer in 2027 is wholly inadequate. Farmers cannot plan their businesses, manage their land or make long-term environmental investments based on vague promises about a future scheme for which no firm timetable, budget or eligibility criteria have been published.

We therefore ask that you, urgently:

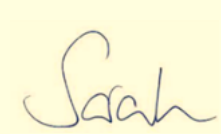
- Explain why Defra so seriously underestimated demand for Window 2 and publish the Department's assessment of the expected level of applications;
- Confirm how many farmers began or attempted an application but were unable to submit it before the window closed;
- Provide a full account of the technical problems experienced by applicants and explain what action will be taken to ensure that nobody is disadvantaged by system failures;
- Make additional funding available so that eligible farmers who had prepared to apply are not excluded simply because the budget was exhausted within hours;
- Review the use of a first-come, first-served system, which plainly failed to provide fair and reasonable access to the scheme; and
- Publish a clear, fully funded timetable for the next application opportunity, including the budget and eligibility criteria, so that farmers can plan with confidence.

As Liberal Democrat Rural Affairs Spokesperson and a member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, Sarah has repeatedly raised the need for stability and certainty within England's agricultural transition. Yesterday's events demonstrate that these warnings have not been heeded.

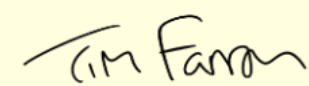
Farmers deserve far better than another botched closure, another round of uncertainty and another promise that support may become available at some unspecified point in the future. We urge you to take immediate action to restore confidence and ensure that those unfairly shut out of Window 2 are given a genuine opportunity to apply.

We would welcome an urgent response setting out what remedial action the Government intends to take.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Dyke MP
Glastonbury and Somerton
Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Rural Affairs



Tim Farron MP
Westmorland and Lonsdale
Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

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