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MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD
WHITEHALL PLACE, LONDON SW1A 2HH

From the Minister

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1

1 October 1985

My Dear Prime Minister

PARTY CONFERENCE: AGRICULTURAL POLICY

The agriculture debate next Tuesday morning takes place on a resolution asking the government to formulate a long term strategy for agriculture. I have, as you know, been feeling for some time that we need to give an indication of where we stand on the key issues which affect the agriculture and food industries and indeed the rural sector generally. There is a great feeling of uncertainty in the rural areas. My original idea was a White Paper but I have hesitated about that, not least because of the constantly changing situation with the CAP, which of course crucially affects the fortunes of the industry. The alternative of a series of policy speeches, while giving greater flexibility, might not have the impact that I think we need. I have therefore concluded that the best plan would be to use next year's Annual Review White Paper to include some material of policy kind. At present, the White Paper is little more than a statistical document describing the current state of the industry. It is normally published in February. By adding the 1986 version a statement of current Government thinking both on the CAP and on domestic issues we would leave ourselves free to update or revise our thinking in subsequent White Papers if it suited us. If you agree with this approach, I would say in my speech next week that the Government intends to make greater use of the Annual Agriculture Review White Paper to set out more of its strategy towards the agriculture and food industries. The content of the eventual White Paper would of course be the subject of consultation with the colleagues in the usual way.

I should also mention that I am writing to John MacGregor about the assurances we can give to farmers in the uplands and on marginal land that the acute fodder problems they are facing because of the wet summer will be taken into account in our autumn review of hill farming incomes and the special allowances paid on hill sheep and cattle.

/Finally, ...

Finally, I intend to scotch the story which the Daily Telegraph ran that the Ministry of Agriculture is to be absorbed into the Department of the Environment!

I am copying this letter to the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, The Lord President, The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Chief Secretary.

James Erskine
Michael

MICHAEL JOPLING