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MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD  
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From the Minister

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP  
Secretary of State for the Environment  
Department of the Environment  
2 Marsham Street  
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~~CAP~~ 0002  
24/7.

24 July 1986

CEREALS SET-ASIDE

Thank you for your letter of 16 July. Many of the matters which you raise will inevitably come up in the discussions currently taking place in the Working Group on Alternative Land Use and Rural Employment (ALURE), which was set up in response to the Prime Minister's 19 March remit to me and on which your Department is strongly represented. I suggest that we should let this Group progress its work a little further as the next step. By all means let us then meet ourselves to discuss the various issues involved.

*WILL REQUEST IF REQUIRED*

Having said this, I would just like to comment briefly on a few of the points you have made.

I think the first point to stress is that my proposals for a scheme for cereals set-aside are concerned to supplement and reinforce a prices policy designed to take land out of cereals production. To this end, it has deliberately been couched in terms which could be adapted to the needs of Member States throughout the Community.

My second point, which flows from the first, is that the paper contains a variety of options on which Member States might draw. One of these is the disposal of land for non-agricultural use for woodlands since we certainly envisage, as you suggest in your letter, that prospective proposals on

/ woodlands should be ...



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woodlands should be linked in with any set-aside scheme so far as this is practicable. I expect the ALURE Group to have quite a bit to say on woodlands, bearing in mind both economic and environmental aspects.

Having said this, however, my third point is that the question of the cost of alternative policies must be very much at the forefront of our minds. You yourself stress the need to stimulate action which costs less. I quite agree on the need to diversify rural economies and to provide incentives for alternatives which have clear benefits, including environmental ones. But to do this in ways which will be cost-effective as compared with current policies, and to demonstrate that this is the case, will by no means be easy. This is a particular area where I hope that the ALURE Group will be able to help us.

Finally, I think you may be under a slight misapprehension about my proposals for fallowing. Contrary to what you fear, this is intended to be fallow within a rotation and not fallowing entire farms. In this connection, I should perhaps recall that before the relatively recent widespread use of chemical fertilisers, fallowing was an entirely traditional agricultural practice, was a permanent feature of our countryside, and attracted no criticism from environmental or other interests. I do not see how a return to this practice could leave us open to attack.

I am sending a copy of this letter to recipients of our earlier correspondence.

*John E. ...*  
*Michael*

MICHAEL JOPLING

