

20<sup>th</sup> January 2025

Rt Hon Pat McFadden  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
Cabinet Office  
70 Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2AS  
United Kingdom



Dear Minister,

Over 50% of the entire food supply for UK consumers is stored and distributed via the cold chain sector. If this supply is threatened with disruption, then within a matter of days severe food shortage would result for the UK consumer.

Independent research on food resilience suggests that this in turn would result in civil unrest and potentially, civil disorder. A further consequence would be severe food inflation.

In the coming decades, 80% of experts believe that civil unrest due to food shortage is likely<sup>1</sup>. In particular, they identify the significant risk to food access through logistical distribution disruption.

The recently published UK Food Security Report 2024 identified extreme weather as a major factor in reducing UK productivity. In addition, around half of our UK food supplies come from abroad and in recent times global maritime traffic routes have been severely disrupted by conflict and unrest. The effects of Brexit have also impacted our ability to access food supplies from the EU.

The ability of other nations to supply food to the UK may become worse as more severe climate change affects their ability to take food from the field and into the food chain. Some crops in Africa and India now suffer a 70% attrition rate within one mile of harvest.

The UK cold chain will only grow in its importance to food resilience and safe supply to UK citizens.

In times of emerging national crisis, the cold chain sector is determined to continue vital food supplies to the UK public. This was indeed the case when we ensured uninterrupted food and medicine supplies to the UK public during Covid 19.

However, one element of the Food Security Report that concerns us is that there is no mention or recognition of the cold chain and the vital role it plays in storing and distributing food to the UK consumer.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jones, A, Bridle, S et al. (2023) Scoping Potential Routes to UK Civil Unrest via the Food System: Results of a Structured Expert Elicitation. Sustainability (journal): <https://doi.org/10.3390/su152014783>

**Cold Chain Federation**

7 Diddenham Court, Lambwood Hill, Grazeley, Reading, Berkshire RG7 1JQ  
T 0118 988 4468 E [info@coldchainfed.org.uk](mailto:info@coldchainfed.org.uk) W [coldchainfederation.org.uk](http://coldchainfederation.org.uk)  
Registered in England and Wales company no. 517554

In a time of crisis, the UK's ability to store, plan and control the distribution of 50% of the nation's food is essential to national resilience. Only the cold chain sector has that ability and the resources to do so.

Through the cold chain sector, we have control of over 450 specialised, temperature-controlled warehouses and over 100,000 temperature-controlled vehicles. There are approximately 34 million cubic meters of temperature-controlled storage and 104,000 refrigerated vehicles operating across the UK. 340,000 refrigerated containers of perishable product are imported to the UK, and 104,000 exported each year, with other specialist cold chain products also traded via air freight.

The Cold Chain Federation is the only collective body in the UK to represent every section of this supply chain, from grower, importer, storage & distributor to retailers and sector and as a result, I would ask you to urgently meet with myself and my Deputy CEO, Tom Southall to:

- Discuss how the cold chain sector can develop a joined-up approach with government to ensure that UK citizens receive vital food stocks and medicine supplies during future times of crisis.
- Discuss how the cold chain sector can be recognised as National Critical Infrastructure and thus support government in its aims to safeguard the UK.

I should emphasise that such meetings will not be seeking any form of additional government funds to enable a greater level of resilience. I am simply seeking to ensure we can work with government to plan for any future supply chain issues that might endanger UK security and citizens.

I look forward to your response and the ability to discuss this further.

Yours



Phil Pluck  
Chief Executive

**Cold Chain Federation**

7 Diddenham Court, Lambwood Hill, Grazeley, Reading, Berkshire RG7 1JQ  
T 0118 988 4468 E [info@coldchainfed.org.uk](mailto:info@coldchainfed.org.uk) W [coldchainfederation.org.uk](http://coldchainfederation.org.uk)  
Registered in England and Wales company no. 517554