

Date: 17 September 2021

To: Anna Turrell, Alison Rothnie, Giles Bolton and Ashwin Prasad

From: Charles Watson, Chairman, River Action

Subject: Tesco suppliers and the environmental degradation of the River Wye Catchment

Dear all,

I am writing on behalf of campaign group River Action regarding the escalating river pollution crisis and to understand the steps which major Tesco suppliers are taking to mitigate any potential damaging effects on rivers from their supply chains.

As you will know, our nation's rivers are currently all [polluted beyond legal limits](#). River Action is a national organisation which seeks to engage with major agricultural suppliers and producers regarding the environmental standards of their supply chains. We are supported by an expert Advisory Board of George Monbiot, Amy Slack (Surfers Against Sewage), Ruth Chambers (Green Alliance), Feargal Sharkey, Lord Randall, Francesca Carnibella (ECF strategic communications), Marina Gibson, James Wallace (The Beaver Trust), Isabella Gornall and James Macpherson.

We welcome the [commitments](#) Tesco has made to sustainability by working with farmers to protect water resources, biodiversity, climate and soil health and to freshwater biodiversity. We completely agree with you that rivers are essential for nature, wildlife and human communities and it is vital that production safeguards this valuable resource for current and future generations.

However, we are concerned that the poultry meat and egg production processes of two of your major suppliers, **Noble Foods** and **Avara Foods**, are contributing to the severe recent ecological deterioration of the River Wye and its wider catchment.

Of all the UK's rivers, the Wye has repeatedly made more headlines than any other with regard to the existential pollution crisis it is facing. In recent months, there have been multiple [media stories](#) about the severe damage being done to the river's ecology as a result of the increased amount of nutrient-fed algal blooms. The recent documentary [Rivercide](#) provides a comprehensive account of the decline of this iconic British river.

It can be no coincidence that the river's recent [rapid ecological deterioration](#) correlates with the unprecedented and disproportionate growth of the intensive poultry industry across the Wye Catchment. There are now believed to be [well over 20 million chickens](#) being reared at any one time in the catchment, a significant portion of which are linked to Avara Foods and Noble Foods' poultry meat and egg supply chain. Huge agribusinesses such as these dispose of hundreds of thousands of tons of chicken manure each year by spreading it across the land, which results in nutrient-runoff and saturates the river with damaging phosphates. This excerpt from a recent [article](#) in the Guardian summarises the situation succinctly: *"Chicken excrement rich in phosphates and other chemicals gets spread on the ground around sheds and is being flushed into the river, causing deadly algal blooms to spread. And the problem is becoming increasingly severe as more and more poultry farms are built near the 134-mile-long river. River plants such as ranunculus are being suffocated, oxygen is taken from the water, and the river's brown trout, chubb and barbel are dying off..."*

Water quality monitoring being conducted by environmental groups and NGOs (e.g. [Friends of the Upper Wye](#), the [Wye Salmon Association](#) and [Friends of the Lugg](#)) up and down the river and its

tributaries is documenting massively excessive phosphate levels across the river system. There is now a clear danger that the resultant regular occurrence of algal blooms due to eutrophication will cause irreversible ecological damage to the entire river catchment.

In summary, we believe that there are some very serious questions to be asked with regards to the environmental performance of two of your major suppliers. Given that the products they supply to you are then ultimately sold to the public under the Tesco brand, these questions are by implication equally relevant to the environmental integrity of Tesco as one of the UK's most prominent and successful businesses.

Accordingly, we would appreciate you answering the following questions:

- 1. Please could you provide us with details of the environmental standards you expect of your suppliers with regards to water quality?**
- 2. What does your own environmental due diligence process indicate as to whether Noble Foods and Avara Foods are meeting these standards?**
- 3. What conversations have you had/are having with these two companies to ensure they are meeting these standards?**

I have attached our correspondence thus far with Avara Foods and Noble Foods for your information.

We look forward to hearing your response to our questions as soon as possible and would welcome the opportunity to meet with yourselves to discuss the issues raised in this letter and the actions Tesco plans to take to tackle them.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Watson
Chairman, River Action
Charles@riveractionuk.com

James Wallace
Lord Randall
George Monbiot
James Macpherson
Feargal Sharkey