

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

AGRICULTURE BILL

Twelfth Sitting

Thursday 5 March 2020

(Afternoon)

CONTENTS

New clauses considered.
Bill, as amended, to be reported.
Written evidence reported to the House.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Monday 9 March 2020

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: † SIR DAVID AMESS, GRAHAM STRINGER

- | | |
|---|---|
| † Brock, Deidre (<i>Edinburgh North and Leith</i>) (SNP) | † Kearns, Alicia (<i>Rutland and Melton</i>) (Con) |
| † Clarke, Theo (<i>Stafford</i>) (Con) | † Kruger, Danny (<i>Devizes</i>) (Con) |
| † Courts, Robert (<i>Witney</i>) (Con) | † McCarthy, Kerry (<i>Bristol East</i>) (Lab) |
| † Crosbie, Virginia (<i>Ynys Môn</i>) (Con) | † Morris, James (<i>Halesowen and Rowley Regis</i>) (Con) |
| † Debbonaire, Thangam (<i>Bristol West</i>) (Lab) | Oppong-Asare, Abena (<i>Erith and Thamesmead</i>) (Lab) |
| † Dines, Miss Sarah (<i>Derbyshire Dales</i>) (Con) | † Prentis, Victoria (<i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs</i>) |
| Doogan, Dave (<i>Angus</i>) (SNP) | † Whittome, Nadia (<i>Nottingham East</i>) (Lab) |
| † Goodwill, Mr Robert (<i>Scarborough and Whitby</i>) (Con) | † Zeichner, Daniel (<i>Cambridge</i>) (Lab) |
| Jones, Fay (<i>Brecon and Radnorshire</i>) (Con) | Kenneth Fox, Kevin Maddison, <i>Committee Clerks</i> |
| † Jones, Ruth (<i>Newport West</i>) (Lab) | |
| † Jupp, Simon (<i>East Devon</i>) (Con) | † attended the Committee |

Public Bill Committee

Thursday 5 March 2020

(Afternoon)

[SIR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

Agriculture Bill

New Clause 1

IMPORT OF AGRICULTURAL GOODS

‘(1) Agricultural goods may be imported into the UK only if the standards to which those goods were produced were as high as, or higher than, standards which at the time of import applied under UK law relating to—

- (a) animal welfare,
- (b) protection of the environment, and
- (c) food safety.

(2) “Agricultural goods”, for the purposes of this section, means—

- (a) any livestock within the meaning of section 1(5),
- (b) any plants or seeds, within the meaning of section 22(6),
- (c) any product derived from livestock, plants or seeds.’

—(*Daniel Zeichner.*)

This new clause would set a requirement for imported agricultural goods to meet animal welfare, environmental and food safety standards which are at least as high as those which apply to UK produced agricultural goods.

Brought up, read the First time, and Question proposed (this day), That the clause be read a Second time.

2pm

Question again proposed.

The Chair: I remind the Committee that with this we are considering the following:

New clause 4—*Import of agricultural goods after IP completion day*—

‘(1) After IP completion day, agricultural goods imported under a free trade agreement may be imported into the UK only if the standards to which those goods were produced were as high as, or higher than, standards which at the time of import applied under UK law relating to—

- (a) animal welfare,
- (b) protection of the environment,
- (c) food safety, hygiene and traceability, and
- (d) plant health.

(2) The Secretary of State must prepare a register of UK production standards, to be updated annually, to which goods imported under subsection (1) would have to adhere.

(3) “Agricultural goods” for the purposes of this section, mean—

- (a) any livestock within the meaning of section 1(5),
- (b) any plants or seeds, within the meaning of section 22(6),
- (c) any product derived from livestock, plants or seeds.

(4) “IP completion day” has the meaning given in section 39 of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020.’

New clause 7—*International trade agreements: agricultural and food products*—

‘(1) A Minister of the Crown may not lay a copy of an international trade agreement before Parliament under section 20(1) of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 unless the agreement—

- (a) includes an affirmation of the United Kingdom’s rights and obligations under the SPS Agreement, and

(b) prohibits the importation into the United Kingdom of agricultural and food products in relation to which the relevant standards are lower than the relevant standards in the United Kingdom.

(2) In subsection (1)—

“international trade agreement” means—

- (a) an agreement that is or was notifiable under—
- (b) an international agreement that mainly relates to trade, other than an agreement mentioned in sub-paragraph (i) or (ii);

“Minister of the Crown” has the same meaning as in the Ministers of the Crown Act 1975;

“relevant standards” means standards relating to environmental protection, plant health and animal welfare applying in connection with the production of agricultural and food products;

“SPS Agreement” means the agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, part of Annex 1A to the WTO Agreement (as modified from time to time);

“WTO Agreement” means the agreement establishing the World Trade Organisation signed at Marrakesh on 15 April 1994.’

This new clause would ensure that HMG has a duty to protect the quality of the domestic food supply by ensuring that imported foodstuffs are held to the same standards as domestic foodstuffs are held to.

New clause 30—*Prohibition on the sale of certain animals and animal products: substances*—

‘(1) Subject to subsections (3) and (4), no person shall sell or supply for human consumption any animal—

- (a) which contains or to which there has been administered—
 - (i) a Class I prohibited substance listed in paragraph 1 of Schedule [*Prohibited substances*],
 - (ii) a Class II prohibited substance listed in paragraph 2 of Schedule [*Prohibited substances*],
 - (iii) a Class III prohibited substance listed in paragraph 3 of Schedule [*Prohibited substances*], or
 - (iv) a Class IV prohibited substance listed in paragraph 4 of Schedule [*Prohibited substances*],

unless that substance was administered in accordance with subsection (4);

- (b) that is an aquaculture animal to which—
 - (i) a Class II prohibited substance listed in paragraph 2 of Schedule [*Prohibited substances*],
 - (ii) a Class III prohibited substance listed in paragraph 3 of Schedule [*Prohibited substances*], or
 - (iii) a Class IV prohibited substance listed in paragraph 4 of Schedule [*Prohibited substances*],

has been administered;

- (c) which contains a substance specified by the Secretary of State in regulations under subsection (5)(a) at a concentration exceeding the maximum residue limit; or

- (d) to which a medicinal product has been administered if the withdrawal period for that product has not expired.

(2) No person may sell or supply for human consumption any animal product which is derived wholly or partly from an animal the sale or supply of which is prohibited under subsection (1).

(3) Nothing in paragraph (1)(d) shall prohibit the sale before the end of the withdrawal period of any high-value horse to which has been administered allyl trenbolone or a beta-agonist in accordance with regulation 5 of the Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits)(England and Scotland) Regulations 2015, provided that the type and date of treatment was entered on the horse’s passport by the veterinary surgeon directly responsible for the treatment.

(4) The prohibitions in paragraphs (1) and (2) shall not apply to the sale of an animal, or of an animal product derived wholly or partly from an animal to which has been administered a compliant veterinary medicinal product—

- (a) containing testosterone, progesterone or a derivative of these substances which readily yields the parent compound on hydrolysis after absorption at the site of application, if the administration is in accordance with regulation 26 of the Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (England and Scotland) Regulations 2015;
- (b) containing allyl trenbolone or a beta-agonist, if the administration is in accordance with regulation 27 of the Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (England and Scotland) Regulations 2015;
- (c) having oestrogenic action (but not containing oestradiol 17 β or its ester-like derivatives), androgenic action or gestagenic action, if the administration is in accordance with regulation 28 of the Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (England and Scotland) Regulations 2015.

(5) The Secretary of State may make regulations—

- (a) specifying for the purposes of subsection (1)(c) maximum residue limits for pharmacologically active substances, and
- (b) adding one or more substances to any of the classes of prohibited substances in Schedule [Prohibited substances].

(6) Regulations under subsection (5) shall be made by statutory instrument, and any such statutory instrument may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.

(7) For the purposes of this section—

a veterinary medicinal product is a compliant veterinary medicinal product if it complies with the requirements of Regulation 25 of the Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (England and Scotland) Regulations 2015), and “withdrawal period” shall have the meaning given in Regulation 2 of the Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (England and Scotland) Regulations 2015).

(8) Regulations 9 and 10 of the Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (England and Scotland) Regulations 2015 are revoked.’.

New clause 31—*Prohibition on sale: hygiene*—

‘(1) No person shall sell or supply any animal which has been treated for the purposes of removal of surface contamination with a substance other than potable water.

(2) No person shall sell or supply any animal product which is derived wholly or partly from an animal which has been treated for the purposes of removal of surface contamination with a substance other than potable water.’.

New clause 32—*Prohibition on sale: stocking densities*—

‘(1) No person shall sell or supply any chicken, any part of a chicken or any product which is partly or wholly derived from a chicken unless the condition in subsection (2) is met.

(2) The condition is that the stocking density in any house in which the chicken was reared—

- (a) did not exceed 33 kilograms per m² of usable area, or
- (b) did not exceed 39 kilograms per m² of usable area if the requirements of subsection (3) were met.

(3) The requirements of this subsection are that the keeper must—

- (a) maintain and, on request, make available to the Secretary of State, documentation in the house giving a detailed description of the production systems, in particular information on technical details of the house and its equipment, including—

- (i) a plan of the house including the dimensions of the surfaces occupied by the chickens;
 - (ii) ventilation and any relevant cooling and heating system (including their location), and a ventilation plan, detailing target air quality parameters (such as airflow, air speed and temperature);
 - (iii) feeding and watering systems (and their location);
 - (iv) alarm and backup systems in the event of a failure of any equipment essential for the health and well-being of the chickens;
 - (v) floor type and litter normally used; and
 - (vi) records of technical inspections of the ventilation and alarm systems;
- (b) keep up to date the documentation referred to in subparagraph (a);
- (c) ensure that each house is equipped with ventilation and, if necessary, heating and cooling systems designed, constructed and operated in such a way that—
- (i) the concentration of ammonia does not exceed 20 parts per million and the concentration of carbon dioxide does not exceed 3,000 parts per million, when measured at the level of the chickens’ heads;
 - (ii) when the outside temperature measured in the shade exceeds 30°C, the inside temperature does not exceed the outside temperature by more than 3°C; and
 - (iii) when the outside temperature is below 10°C, the average relative humidity measured inside the house during a continuous period of 48 hours does not exceed 70%.

(4) In the case of a chicken reared in a house which is not in the United Kingdom, it shall be a requirement upon the importer to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Secretary of State that—

- (a) documentation equivalent to that specified in subsection (3) was maintained by the keeper and was available for supply to the appropriate regulatory authority, and
- (b) the conditions under which the chicken was reared were equivalent to, or better than, those set out in subsections (2) and (3).

(5) For the purposes of this section, “chicken” shall mean a conventionally reared meat chicken.’

New schedule 1—*Prohibited substances*—

1 Class I prohibited substances

Aristolochia spp. and preparations thereof

Chloramphenicol

Chloroform

Chlorpromazine

Colchicine

Dapsone

Dimetridazole

Metronizadole

Nitrofurans (including furazolidone)

Ronizadole

2 Class II prohibited substances

Thyrostatic substances

Stilbenes, stilbene derivatives, their salts and esters

Oestradiol 17 β and its ester-like derivatives

3 Class III prohibited substances

Beta-agonists

4 Class IV prohibited substances

Substances having oestrogenic (other than oestradiol 17 β or its ester-like derivatives), androgenic or gestagenic action.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Sir David, you will be glad to hear that earlier I was mid-sentence but close to my conclusion. All I was going to say was, when we come to conclude our discussion, the simple answer is to put it in the Bill.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The important point about new clauses 1, 4 and 7 is that they would allow us to set standards high to protect the food chain and therefore the consumer. The Minister might, and indeed I am sure she does, have a commitment to maintaining high standards, and she might even believe that her colleagues have a similar commitment. However, as we all know, Governments change—we are still within five years of David Cameron's last election victory, after all—and the current Ministers will not always be in post. I would hate to think of the Minister, in the far-off days of her declining years, staring at a plate of questionable food in front of her, wishing that she had taken steps to guard against it when she could have done. We should take those steps to safeguard our food standards, protect our food producers and maintain the health of consumers, who are, after all, the people who send us here. The SNP therefore supports new clauses 1, 4 and 7.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 10.

Division No. 29]

AYES

Brock, Deidre	McCarthy, Kerry
Debbonaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Jupp, Simon
Courts, Robert	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 4

IMPORT OF AGRICULTURAL GOODS AFTER IP COMPLETION DAY

(1) After IP completion day, agricultural goods imported under a free trade agreement may be imported into the UK only if the standards to which those goods were produced were as high as, or higher than, standards which at the time of import applied under UK law relating to—

- animal welfare,
- protection of the environment,
- food safety, hygiene and traceability, and
- plant health.

(2) The Secretary of State must prepare a register of UK production standards, to be updated annually, to which goods imported under subsection (1) would have to adhere.

(3) "Agricultural goods" for the purposes of this section, mean—

- any livestock within the meaning of section 1(5),
- any plants or seeds, within the meaning of section 22(6),
- any product derived from livestock, plants or seeds.

(4) "IP completion day" has the meaning given in section 39 of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020.—(*Kerry McCarthy*.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 10.

Division No. 30]

AYES

Brock, Deidre	McCarthy, Kerry
Debbonaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Jupp, Simon
Courts, Robert	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 5

SMALLHOLDINGS ESTATES

(1) Every smallholdings authority which immediately before the commencement of Part 1 of this Act holds any land for the purposes of smallholdings shall review the authority's smallholdings estate and shall, before the end of the period of eighteen months beginning with the commencement of Part 1 of this Act, submit to the Minister proposals with respect to the future management of that estate for the purposes of providing—

- opportunities for persons to be farmers on their own account;
- education or experience in environmental land management practices;
- opportunities for increasing public access to the natural environment and understanding of sustainable farming; and
- opportunities for innovation in sustainable land management practices.

(2) For the purposes of this section, "smallholdings authority" has the same meaning as in section 38 of the Agriculture Act 1970.—(*Kerry McCarthy*.)

This new clause would require local authorities to review their smallholdings and submit proposals for future management to provide opportunities to extend access to farming, education, and innovation.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 26—*Smallholdings estates: land management*—

(1) A smallholdings authority which immediately before the commencement of Part 1 of this Act holds any land for the purposes of smallholdings shall review the authority's smallholdings estate and shall, before the end of the period of eighteen months beginning with the commencement of Part 1 of this Act, submit to the Secretary of State proposals with respect to the future management of that estate for the purposes of—

- providing opportunities for persons to be farmers on their own account;
- providing education or experience in environmental land management practices;

- (c) providing opportunities for increasing public access to the natural environment and understanding of sustainable farming;
- (d) contributing to a mitigation of climate change, including a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions,
- (e) providing support for innovative food production techniques (including techniques which do not involve management of land), and
- (f) providing opportunities for innovation in sustainable land management practices.

(2) No land held by a smallholdings authority as a smallholding immediately before commencement of Part 1 of this Act is to be conveyed, transferred, leased or otherwise disposed of otherwise than—

- (a) in connection with the purposes listed in subsection (1); and
- (b) in accordance with proposals submitted under subsection (1).

(3) For the purposes of this section, “smallholdings authority” has the same meaning as in section 38 of the Agriculture Act 1970.’

This new clause would limit the disposal of smallholdings (“county farms”) by local authorities and would require local authorities to review their holding and submit proposals for future management to provide opportunities to extend access to farming, education, and innovation.

Kerry McCarthy: This revisits something that we discussed when the previous Agriculture Bill Committee met, but there have been some positive moves from the Government in respect of county farms since then. I am pleased that there have been quite a few indications of support, but we could do more, which is why I have tabled the new clause.

County farms are an undervalued national asset, and they could play a significant role in the future of UK farming. I have the support of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Sustain and the Landworkers Alliance for the new clause, which is aimed at rejuvenating the county farms project and improving the information that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs holds on the estate. It would require councils to submit a report to the Secretary of State within 18 months of this Act’s becoming law, saying how they would make best use of their smallholdings to support new entrants to farming. We have heard, and it is generally accepted, that the price of land in particular can act as a real deterrent to new entrants.

The new clause also looks at promoting sustainable land management practices, sharing knowledge of those practices, and increasing public access to the natural environment and farming. The new clause is needed because there has been a steep decline in the county farm estate over the past 40 years, and that sell-off appears to be continuing. Between 2010 and 2018, the size of England’s county farm estate fell by more than 15,000 acres, with 58% of that sold between 2016 and 2018. If we want to reverse that trend, it is clear that we need a fresh approach, rather than business as usual, and I hope that the new clause will kick-start that.

There was a session—I think it was of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, but I get confused sometimes, because we also discussed this at the all-party parliamentary group on agroecology for sustainable food and farming—where Cambridgeshire County Council was spoken of. It does really good work on this front. Its estate generates a substantial income for the council of more than £4 million each year, and since 2009, the 109 new tenants who have joined the estate have an average age of 30, which is half the UK average.

We spoke earlier—I think it was when we were talking about de-linked payments and other things—about the average age of farmers in this country and how we really need to bring a new generation on board. County farms seem to be doing that in Cambridgeshire. The estate is also supporting a pioneering agroforestry farmer, Stephen Briggs.

At the very least, I hope the new clause will encourage councils to look favourably on including enhanced management and environmental obligations as part of the tender process and management. This is about not only allowing access to land through the county farm movement, but encouraging people to farm in a certain way. CPRE’s recent report on county farms highlighted the fact that a number of councils already view their estates as a crucial lever in responding to the climate emergency.

As I said at the beginning, we have had some promising words from the Government, but we have not had action yet, and the Bill is still completely silent on this. The now Secretary of State told us in the Agriculture Bill Committee back in October 2018 that he was considering whether to use funds under the productivity strand of the Bill to refresh the model. In January 2019, I chaired a session at the Oxford Real Farming Conference, interviewing the then Secretary of State on stage. It must be said that all the promises he made then went down very well.

One of those promises was to announce a new package of financial support for county farms in the coming months. He reaffirmed that promise in a letter to the EFRA Committee in March 2019, stating his desire to “create a financial incentive for local authorities who want to invest in their council farms”.

In September, that promise was repeated, this time in response to a written question that I asked the current Secretary of State.

While I warmly welcome the statement in the “Future for Food, Farming and the Environment” policy statement published last week that the Department

“will offer funding to councils...who want to invest in creating new opportunities for new-entrant farmers”,

when can we expect some firm detail on the timetable of financial assistance that will be offered? In the meantime, based on the language in the policy statement, I see no reason that the new clause, which is designed to encourage new entrants and sustainable farming, would not help the Government to achieve their desired outcome.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis):

I thank the hon. Member for Bristol East for tabling the new clause and look forward to working with her on how we can support smallholding authorities to invest in, and commit to, their county farms. We want to help them to provide more opportunities for new entrant farmers and to continue to offer the wider environmental and public benefits.

I am concerned that the new clauses would constrain smallholding authorities’ ability to manage their estates effectively and would create an additional administrative burden. Rather than legislating, I would prefer to work collaboratively with smallholding authorities. We want to support them to manage their estates so that they can provide more opportunities for new farmers and existing tenants, as well as for the benefit of the wider public.

[Victoria Prentis]

I hope that the hon. Lady is assured by the document published last week and that she will continue to talk to me. We will continue to talk to smallholding authorities about how we can take things forward. I therefore ask her to withdraw the motion.

Daniel Zeichner: New clause 26 is broadly similar to new clause 5, which my hon. Friend has just moved. She spoke powerfully about the plight of our county farms. She did mention, of course, successes in Cambridgeshire. I rarely find reason to praise Cambridgeshire County Council, but on this occasion, I think that it is doing good work.

As farms owned by local authorities that can be let out at below-market rents—I suspect that there is agreement on this—they are a vital means to encourage young and first-time farmers into the sector. They provide a key way in for those who have not had the good fortune to inherit or are lacking the capital required to buy or rent. As well as offering a sustainable income stream for local authorities, these farms have been recognised as particularly well placed to deliver locally driven social and environmental goods, ranging from tree planting and local education initiatives on farming to public procurement of locally produced food.

As we have heard, however, county farms have been left in serious long-term decline. An investigation last year by *Who Owns England?* showed that the acreage has halved in the past 40 years—first driven by the privatisation drive and cuts to county budgets and powers under the Thatcher and Major Governments, and by the austerity agenda in recent times. Cash-strapped local authorities making difficult decisions have been forced to take cost-saving measures, and 7% of England's county farms estate was sold off between 2010 and 2018, with three quarters of all smallholding authorities having sold parts of their estate.

As we have heard, some authorities, such as my own in Cambridgeshire, have recognised the importance of county farms and have increased the number of acres in the past decade. Interestingly, they are now bringing in a sustainable income for the authorities. I am told that, in Cambridgeshire's case, that is in excess of £4 million each year. However, the situation is not so good elsewhere. I am told that Herefordshire, for instance, has sold many of its county farms; there has been a decline of 89%.

The Government's recent policy document on farming for the future mentions that funding will be offered to councils with county farm estates, but we still have no clear detail on how much that would be and whether it would be sufficient. It is rather surprising that in a flagship Bill on reforming our agricultural system—

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Are there any examples of where local authorities have sold the farms but to the tenants so that they can become owner-occupiers—a sort of right-to-buy scheme—or are the farms being sold off outside the sphere of those tenants?

Daniel Zeichner: I do not know the answer, but I am happy to go away and look for it, because that sounds like an interesting idea.

Let me explain what our worry is. We are here discussing major, flagship legislation for the future of the sector, and to us it would seem sensible to ensure that there was provision for this very important part of the sector, particularly when there was such an opportunity, through the local authorities, to deliver a range of public goods, including land management practices that mitigate climate change; public access; and even the promotion of innovative food production systems, such as vertical farms or city farms. If local authorities were to build into their management practices for their smallholdings the aims of aiding nature recovery and carbon sequestration and of promoting biodiversity, county farms could be a very useful tool for local communities, particularly in areas such as mine, where we have such interest in environmental issues being promoted.

It is important that we stop the loss and refresh the purpose of our county farms. I am not sure that that makes it easier for local authorities, because they are making difficult decisions, but it would make it harder for them to make that particular decision.

2.15 pm

Last December, a report for CPRE by the New Economics Foundation, *Who Owns England?* and *Shared Assets* looked at what would need to be done to revive our county farms. The report said:

“The government should protect the future of the county farm estate by legislating for a ministerial lock on their disposal, and a rejuvenated purpose statement. A forthcoming Agriculture Act should safeguard county farms from extensive disposal by making it incumbent on councils to submit a report to the Secretary of State for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). This should detail how they plan to best manage their county farms to deliver on a range of stipulated social and environmental purposes, and - if they wish to sell off county farms - how doing so accords with these purposes.”

That is exactly what our new clause would achieve. I invite the Government to support the new clause because they believe in the importance of county farms and they now have the opportunity to put that in the Bill.

As with new clause 5, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East, our new clause 6 would require any authority with smallholdings to submit proposals on how they expected to manage their estate to provide opportunities for new farmers, provide educational and environmental land management practices, ensure opportunities for increasing public access to land and understanding of sustainable farming, and provide support for improved food productions, such as vertical or city farms.

Mr Goodwill: What does the hon. Gentleman think about the example of Staffordshire County Council? When selling off farms, the council has given tenants the first opportunity to buy, but if that has not happened it has sold the farms with sitting tenants. The tenants continue their tenancies, but the council can use the money to spend on other priorities, such as schools, getting homeless people into housing and all the other local authority priorities.

Daniel Zeichner: I appreciate what the right hon. Member says. We are not seeking to stop that kind of process. We are trying to make it more difficult for councils to respond to funding cuts by selling county farms, which in some ways I do not criticise because

they face difficult choices. If that practice is not stopped, then, frankly, it will go on happening, unless there are significant changes in funding for local authorities.

In recognition of the key role that local authorities can play in incentivising these farms to be environmental public goods, we would also require local authorities to submit proposals on how they intended to manage their smallholdings in a way that contributed to those various public goods, including the mitigation of climate change and reducing gas emissions. As discussed, our new clause would also limit the continued disposal of farms by stipulating that no local authority smallholding would need to have its ownership transferred unless that was clearly in accordance with those purposes.

Victoria Prentis: I have already responded fairly fully to the hon. Member for Bristol East and I feel that the Labour Front-Bench amendment is strikingly similar. I have said all I need to say on this subject.

Kerry McCarthy: I hope we can continue the dialogue about county farms and that we can see some concrete action from the Government. Given what the Minister has said, for once I will take her at her word that she has leapt upon this and I will not push the measure to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 6

QUALITY SCHEMES FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND FOODSTUFFS

“(1) Subsection (2) applies to any function of the Secretary of State under—

- (a) Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 November 2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs (“the EU Regulation”),
- (b) the delegated and implementing Regulations,
- (c) any regulations made by the Secretary of State under the EU Regulation, and
- (d) any regulations made under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 relating to the enforcement of the EU Regulation or the delegated and implementing Regulations.

(2) The Secretary of State may exercise the function only with the consent of the Scottish Ministers.

(3) In subsection (1), the “delegated and implementing Regulations” means—

- (a) Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 664/2014 supplementing the EU Regulation with regard to the establishment of Union symbols for protected designations of origin, protected geographical indications and traditional specialities guaranteed and with regard to certain rules on sourcing, certain procedural rules and certain additional transitional rules,
- (b) Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 665/2014 supplementing the EU Regulation with regard to conditions of use of the quality term “mountain product”, and
- (c) Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 668/2014 laying down rules for the application of the EU Regulation.

(4) The references in subsection (1) to the EU Regulation and the delegated and implementing Regulations are to those instruments—

- (a) as they have effect in domestic law by virtue of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and
- (b) as amended from time to time whether by virtue of that Act or otherwise.”—(*Deidre Brock.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Deidre Brock: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause is about protected geographical indicators. They are a vital part of the business plan of many of Scotland’s top food producers and many food producers in other nations. They are a guarantee of quality and of the care and skill that goes into their production.

I am sorry to say that I remain to be convinced that a UK system would be any kind of replacement or match for the EU system, but the UK Government still intend to create their own new system instead of sticking with the EU system, as I understand they could have done. It therefore seems sensible to me to make sure that the new scheme properly serves producers who have the full protection under the current scheme, and any new producers wishing to get geared up for it.

To protect Scottish producers, it seems sensible to ensure that there is input from the Scottish Government to the new scheme. The new clause would simply ensure that the views of Scottish Ministers are properly considered in the exercise of functions under the scheme. It reflects and respects the devolution settlement and is measured.

Victoria Prentis: I see the good intentions behind the new clause, and I understand the desire to ensure that Ministers’ decisions on geographical indicators are made in the best interests of all stakeholders across the nations. However, that is not quite what the new clause would do. It would give Scottish Ministers a veto over Government decisions, even when there was no Scottish interest in those decisions. GIs are a form of intellectual property law and are therefore a reserved matter, so it would not be appropriate to go down the path proposed in the new clause.

Nevertheless, even though GIs are reserved, the Government recognise that the devolved Administrations have always played an important role in these schemes—Scottish salmon, for example, is an important export—and I am keen for that to continue. I assure the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith that my officials have worked closely with colleagues from the devolved Administrations to agree a working-level arrangement to underpin very close co-operation in the new domestic schemes. That was agreed and signed by senior officials in the devolved Administrations, including the Scottish Government, on 4 October last year. The arrangement ensures that the devolved Administrations will be included in the assessment of GI applications and will have a say in the development of scheme rules. I believe that this arrangement does what the hon. Lady seeks with her new clause.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I rise to say on behalf of the shadow European affairs team—in the spirit of transitioning from one state of affairs to another—that Labour Front-Benchers have a lot of sympathy with what the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith and the SNP are trying to do. Of course, we want to protect GIs and people’s ability to trade using them, which is a strength. We particularly

[Thangam Debbonaire]

want to make sure that, given that—I have to reiterate this—the prediction that moving to World Trade Organisation trading rules will be the worst-case scenario, we do everything we can to protect our specialist food producers. However, the Labour party cannot support the new clause as worded because of subsection (2), which would give Scottish Ministers a veto. I will not go over old ground, but it is consistent with Labour policy that we could not support it because of that part, but we support the spirit of what the hon. Lady is trying to achieve.

I urge the Minister to work with all parties and producers across the whole United Kingdom so that we can protect our GI products. They are dear to us and to our sense of who we are, and as we leave the European Union, they may matter even more. There are Members across the Committee who feel very strongly about GIs in their own constituencies.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Work is ongoing on this exact issue. I encourage Labour Members to join the all-party parliamentary group on geographically protected foods, at which we will discuss this, so that we can hold the Minister to account.

Thangam Debbonaire: What a wonderful invitation. I was mentally running through Government Committee members and trying to think of a geographical indicator in the constituency of each one, and I think I did pretty well, actually. Probably all of us have a product in our constituencies whose GI status we want to protect, so the hon. Lady's offer is useful.

In that spirit, as I said, we support the sentiment behind the new clause. We cannot support subsection (2), but in every other way we support making this law, because we need to do everything we can to protect our GIs. I am sorry if that disappoints the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith, but that is where we are at the moment.

Deidre Brock: I appreciate the words of the hon. Member for Bristol West. There is that veto word again. I think it is more a matter of respect for the devolved Administrations and their knowledge of the conditions that apply in their areas, rather than seeking to override their views of Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish Ministers, as the Bill potentially allows for.

Leaving that aside for the moment, I stress how incredibly important protected geographical indicators are in Scotland and to those producers and areas fortunate enough to have been awarded membership of the scheme. There are many questions outstanding about the replacement scheme. There are fears that it will be in no way strong enough to stand up to the US tendency to prefer a trademark system, which is a lot weaker than the European PGI scheme. Previously, a producer who came across a good that made use of their brand inappropriately had the whole of the EU standing behind them when they took action against the offender. We are not entirely sure what we will have instead.

This is something I feel very strongly about. I have done quite a lot of work on PGIs. We have taken a lot of evidence about them in the Scottish Affairs Committee, and I know how important they are, particularly particular to some of the further flung areas of Scotland. I hate to

use the word fragile when talking about rural areas because I know how it sometimes offends people who live up there, but there is no doubt that PGI status is crucial to maintaining people's ability to stay in some of those areas, to work there and to keep the countryside alive with people. I will press the new clause to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 1, Noes 10.

Division No. 31]

AYES

Brock, Deidre

NOES

Clarke, Theo

Courts, Robert

Crosbie, Virginia

Dines, Miss Sarah

Goodwill, Mr Robert

Jupp, Simon

Kearns, Alicia

Kruger, Danny

Morris, James

Prentis, Victoria

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 7

INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS: AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD PRODUCTS

“(1) A Minister of the Crown may not lay a copy of an international trade agreement before Parliament under section 20(1) of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 unless the agreement—

- (a) includes an affirmation of the United Kingdom's rights and obligations under the SPS Agreement, and
- (b) prohibits the importation into the United Kingdom of agricultural and food products in relation to which the relevant standards are lower than the relevant standards in the United Kingdom.

(2) In subsection (1)—

‘international trade agreement’ means—

- (a) an agreement that is or was notifiable under—

- (i) paragraph 7(a) of Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, part of Annex 1A to the WTO Agreement (as modified from time to time), or

- (ii) paragraph 7(a) of Article V of the General Agreement on Trade in Services, part of Annex 1B to the WTO Agreement (as modified from time to time), or

- (b) an international agreement that mainly relates to trade, other than an agreement mentioned in sub-paragraph (i) or (ii);

‘Minister of the Crown’ has the same meaning as in the Ministers of the Crown Act 1975;

‘relevant standards’ means standards relating to environmental protection, plant health and animal welfare applying in connection with the production of agricultural and food products;

‘SPS Agreement’ means the agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, part of Annex 1A to the WTO Agreement (as modified from time to time);

‘WTO Agreement’ means the agreement establishing the World Trade Organisation signed at Marrakesh on 15 April 1994.”—(*Deidre Brock.*)

This new clause would ensure that HMG has a duty to protect the quality of the domestic food supply by ensuring that imported foodstuffs are held to the same standards as domestic foodstuffs are held to.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 10.

Division No. 32]

AYES

Brock, Deidre	McCarthy, Kerry
Debonnaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Jupp, Simon
Courts, Robert	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 9

DUTY AND REGULATIONS GOVERNING AGRICULTURAL AND HORTICULTURAL ACTIVITY

“(1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to establish a regulatory framework relating to agricultural and horticultural activity for or in connection with the following purposes—

- (a) the management of land or water in a way that protects or improves the environment;
- (b) public access to and enjoyment of the countryside, farmland or woodland and better understanding of the environment;
- (c) the management of land or water in a way that maintains, restores or enhances cultural or natural heritage;
- (d) the management of land, water or livestock in a way that mitigates or adapts to climate change;
- (e) the management of land or water in a way that prevents, reduces or protects from environmental hazards;
- (f) the protection or improvement of the health or welfare of livestock;
- (g) the conservation of native livestock, native equines or genetic resources relating to any such animal;
- (h) the protection or improvement of the health of plants;
- (i) the conservation of plants grown or used in carrying on an agricultural, horticultural or forestry activity, their wild relatives or genetic resources relating to any such plant; and
- (j) the protection or improvement of the quality of soil.

(2) Regulations under subsection (1) must include provision about the standards to which activity for or in connection with all of the purposes in subsection (1) must conform.

(3) Regulations under subsection (1) may include provision about enforcement, which may (among other things) include provision—

- (a) about the provision of information;
- (b) conferring powers of entry;
- (c) conferring powers of inspection, search and seizure;
- (d) about the keeping of records;
- (e) imposing monetary penalties;
- (f) creating summary offences punishable with a fine (or a fine not exceeding an amount specified in the regulations, which must not exceed level 4 on the standard scale);
- (g) about appeals;
- (h) conferring functions (including functions involving the exercise of a discretion) on a person.

(4) Regulations under this section are subject to affirmative resolution procedure.”—(*Daniel Zeichner.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5, Noes 10.

Division No. 33]

AYES

Debonnaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	
McCarthy, Kerry	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Jupp, Simon
Courts, Robert	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 10

IMPORT OF FOIE GRAS

“(1) Foie gras may not be imported into the UK.

(2) ‘Foie gras’, for the purposes of this section, shall mean a product derived from the liver of any goose or duck which has been force-fed for the purpose of enlarging its liver.”—(*Nadia Whittome.*)

This new clause would prohibit the import of foie gras into the UK.

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.30 pm

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause would ban the import of foie gras in the UK. As I am sure many here will be aware, foie gras is a product made from the livers of ducks or geese that have been repeatedly force-fed, by having a metal tube inserted down their throats several times a day, when they are just 12 weeks old. It is effectively produced by rendering the animal diseased.

While the production of this so-called delicacy has been banned in Britain since 2000, the fact that imports to the UK are allowed is an effective green light to the continued suffering and mistreatment of these animals. Shockingly, the UK imports around 200 tonnes of foie gras each year from mainland Europe. Today we have an opportunity to put a stop to that once and for all.

Some members of this Bill Committee may recall that the Labour DEFRA team tabled an amendment banning foie gras imports during the Committee stage of the Agriculture Bill in 2018. It was extremely disappointing and embarrassing that the then Government chose not to accept that reasonable and common-sense amendment. I sincerely hope that they will not choose to repeat the mistake today in voting against new clause 10.

We know that the Secretary of State has spoken favourably of a ban. He is on record saying:

“When we leave the European Union, we do indeed have an opportunity to look at restrictions on sales.”—[*Official Report*, 13 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 1052.]

That opportunity is today, and the time is now.

Deidre Brock: I support the new clause simply because it is the right thing to do. I appreciated the speech by the hon. Member for Nottingham East very much, and I hope the Minister will see her way clear to coming to some sort of agreement on this, because many of us are very disturbed by this trade and would like to see it stopped.

Victoria Prentis: While allowed under EU law, the Government have made clear that the production of foie gras from ducks or geese using force-feeding raises serious welfare concerns, as the hon. Member for Nottingham East outlined. The production of foie gras by force-feeding is banned in the UK, as it is incompatible with our domestic legislation. After the transition period, there will be an opportunity to consider whether the UK can adopt a different approach to foie gras imports and sales in this country. I am afraid the time is not quite now; the time is after the transition period.

I understand the strength of feeling on the issue, but this Bill is not about making provisions prohibiting imports. I reassure hon. Members that the Government will use the opportunities provided through future free trade agreements and, of course, our wider international engagements to promote high animal welfare standards among our international trading partners. I am afraid the time is not yet, and I ask the hon. Lady to withdraw the amendment.

Nadia Whittome: I must say I am disappointed in the Minister's response. What she says on animal welfare is at odds with what is in the Bill. Therefore, I will move this new clause to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 10.

Division No. 34]

AYES

Brock, Deidre	McCarthy, Kerry
Debbonaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Jupp, Simon
Courts, Robert	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 11

WHISTLEBLOWING: STANDARDS IN ABATTOIRS

“(1) The Food Standards Act 1999 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 20 insert—

‘20A Whistleblowing: standards in abattoirs

(1) The Agency shall establish a method by which a person can make a qualified disclosure under section 43B(1) of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (as inserted by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998) to the Agency.

(2) A qualified disclosure under subsection (1) may relate to any act which, in the reasonable belief of the person making the disclosure, tends to show that an offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed in England, Wales or Northern Ireland under—

(a) any of paragraphs 3 to 32 of Schedule 1 (additional requirements for slaughterhouses) to the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 (S.I., No. 1782),

(b) any of paragraphs 3 to 32 of Schedule 1 (additional requirements for slaughterhouses) to the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (Wales) Regulations 2014 (S.I., No. 951 (W. 92)),

(c) any of paragraphs 3 to 32 of Schedule 1 (additional requirements for slaughterhouses) to the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (Northern Ireland Statutory Rules 2014 No. 107), or

(d) any of sections 4, 5 or 7 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, in relation to livestock.

(3) The Agency shall take steps to promote awareness of the method established under subsection (1).

(4) The Agency may share with an enforcement authority (within the meaning of section 15(2) of this Act) information received under a qualified disclosure.

(5) “Livestock” shall, for the purposes of this section, have the meaning given in section 1(5) of the Agriculture Act 2020.”—
(*Ruth Jones.*)

This new clause would require the Food Standards Agency to set up and publicise a channel for whistleblowing about conduct in abattoirs.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

It is a pleasure to continue under your chairmanship, Sir David. I am pleased to speak briefly to the new clause, which is about standards, animal welfare and what is right. It is about who we are and what we eat, although I am mindful of my hon. Friends from Bristol, so the last part applies only to some of us.

Sir David, we know that many people in Southend West, Newport West and right across the United Kingdom are concerned that Britain's departure from the European Union could lead to laws on the quality of meat standards being relaxed to the point of impotency, purely so that a deal can be struck between the Prime Minister and the United States Government. Many Opposition Members have loudly made the case that we cannot sell out or trade off our high standards and practice, and many on the Government Benches make those points in private too. This morning, the Secretary of State for International Trade made a strong comment in response to my question in the House. She said that the Government would walk away from any US-UK deal that did not protect our high standards. Obviously, we will watch that very closely.

I commend Unison for commissioning a recent survey that looked at the wider issues of meat standards. It is important for representative bodies such as Unison to take the lead in highlighting those issues. In Labour's 2019 manifesto, we pledged to introduce a formal whistleblowing procedure through the Food Standards Agency, to enable employees to report bad behaviour and practice in abattoirs. The new clause would make good on that pledge, but more importantly ensure that malpractice and impropriety had no place in abattoirs across the country. The new clause is sensible, and essentially self-explanatory. Surely the Government will have little issue accepting it, and I call on them to do so.

Victoria Prentis: Whistleblowing is already protected in legislation in Great Britain through the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, and the Food Standards Agency already has robust procedures in place to process

whistleblowing in relation to animal welfare offences committed in abattoirs. The Act provides procedures to support staff and workers to raise concerns regarding possible past, current or future wrongdoing during the course of their work. That includes abattoir workers who are concerned that animal welfare offences might have been committed by their employer. That legislation and the FSA procedures provide a clear framework to handle whistleblowing and encourage disclosure—not just within abattoirs, but across the scope of work carried out by the FSA.

Following the 2013 review into the integrity and insurance of food networks, the National Food Crime Unit was established in 2015, which allows anyone to report any suspected food crime by calling Food Crime Confidential on a dedicated number. That crime unit is strengthening its capabilities and will be opening a fully functioning in-house criminal investigations unit by April 2020. I am sure that the hon. Member for Newport West will agree that this is progress, so I ask her to withdraw her proposal.

Ruth Jones: I thank the Minister for her comments and her affirmation of what is already going on. However, if this is already in law, it could do no harm to enshrine and reaffirm it in the Bill, so we will not withdraw the new clause; we will push it to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5, Noes 10.

Division No. 35]

AYES

Debbonaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	
McCarthy, Kerry	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Jupp, Simon
Courts, Robert	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 12

SOW FARROWING STALLS

“Sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 6 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 shall be omitted.”—
(*Daniel Zeichner.*)

This new clause and Amendments 40 and 41 would end the use of sow farrowing crates (subject to a delayed commencement) and add improving the standard of accommodation for farrowing sows to the purposes for financial assistance in Clause 1.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5, Noes 10.

Division No. 36]

AYES

Debbonaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	
McCarthy, Kerry	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Jupp, Simon
Courts, Robert	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 13

LIVESTOCK FARMING PRACTICES: RESEARCH

“(1) The Secretary of State must—

- (a) conduct,
- (b) commission, or
- (c) assist the conduct of

research into the impact on animal welfare of highly intensive livestock farming practices in England.

(2) The Secretary of State, in assisting in the conduct of research under subsection (1)(c), must—

- (a) provide financial assistance, and
- (b) make available the services of any person or other resources.”—(*Daniel Zeichner.*)

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to conduct or commission research into the impact on animal welfare of highly intensive livestock farming practices in England.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Daniel Zeichner: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 14—*Livestock farming practices: duty to promote research*—

“The Secretary of State must promote the conduct of research into the impact on animal welfare of highly intensive livestock farming practices in England.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to promote the conduct of research into the impact on animal welfare of highly intensive livestock farming practices in England.

Daniel Zeichner: These two new clauses would require the Secretary of State to conduct or commission research into the impact on animal welfare of highly intensive livestock farming practices in England. We know that effective research into the impact of highly intensive farming practices is going to be vital to contributing to a better understanding of what we can do to improve animal welfare and what better welfare practices can be promoted within the public goods element of the Bill, which we will of course support.

As I outlined during the debate on some previous amendments regarding the need for baseline animal welfare standards, we think much more could be done to improve the lives of animals on our farms, looking particularly at species-specific needs. We think research has a big role to play in that, but unless that research is properly co-ordinated and incentivised by the Government, we will be leaving it largely up to market forces to keep the science up to date. We believe the welfare of our farm animals is too important to be neglected, and we want to see action now. I appreciate that there is a question whether such a provision would be covered by the Bill’s money resolution, so we have helpfully provided two versions. I very much hope that the Government might find it in their heart to support one of them.

2.45 pm

Victoria Prentis: The Government are committed to animal welfare. I reassure Members that high-quality research and evidence from a range of sources will always inform our animal welfare policy. Using the powers set out in the Bill, we are developing a scheme, as the hon. Gentleman knows, that aims to improve farm animal welfare in England. As part of that, we are exploring one-off grants that will help farmers to improve welfare on farms, as well as a payment by results scheme through which farmers could receive ongoing payments for delivering specific animal welfare enhancements.

New clause 13 would make it a legal requirement for the Secretary of State to conduct, commission or assist the conduct of research that specifically considers the impact on animal welfare of highly intensive livestock farming practices in England. Although the new clause is well intentioned, it fails to recognise the unintentional consequences that could occur as a result. Farm animal welfare relies primarily on good stockmanship. The Animal Welfare Committee frequently concludes that good stockmanship is more important than the system in which animals are kept when it comes to meeting their welfare needs. In addition, it is difficult to be clear about what constitutes a highly intensive farming system, because the term is not defined.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs already conducts internal and external research into farm animal welfare, and is supported by a range of evidence committees, such as the Animal Welfare Committee. Although new clause 14 does not state what is meant by “promote” and is ambiguous on what would fulfil that requirement, I reassure Members that DEFRA already promotes animal welfare research in a number of ways. However, we do not wish to be restricted to focusing only on intensive farming systems, however defined. DEFRA publishes details of current research and development online, as well as the final reports from internal and external research projects.

I hope that I have demonstrated that the Government share the public’s high regard for animal welfare, and recognise the need for animal welfare policy development and implementation to be very well founded in evidence. That will ensure that we remain at the global forefront of animal welfare policy. I therefore ask the hon. Member for Cambridge to withdraw the motion.

Daniel Zeichner: I anticipated the question on the definition of highly intensive farming when I reread the new clause over lunchtime. I rather thought that it would be the right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby who raised that query, but the Minister got in there first. I am pleased by her response. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 15

GOUSE SHOOTING AND MANAGEMENT: REVIEW AND CONSULTATION

“(1) The Secretary of State must—

- (a) commission an independent review of the economic, environmental and wildlife impacts of driven grouse shooting, and
- (b) consult on regulation of grouse moor management.

(2) The Secretary of State must make available the services of any person or other resources to assist in the conduct of a review under subsection (1)(a).

(3) The Secretary of State must publish a summary of responses to the consultation under sub-section (1)(b).

(4) The Secretary of State must, no later than three months from the day on which—

- (a) the review commissioned under subsection (1)(a) is received, or
- (b) the consultation under subsection (2) closes,

whichever is the sooner, publish a statement of future policy on grouse shooting and grouse moor management.”—(*Ruth Jones.*) *This new clause would require the Secretary of State to commission a review of the economic, environmental and wildlife impacts of driven grouse shooting and publish proposals for regulation.*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ruth Jones: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 16—*Grouse shooting and management: review and consultation (No. 2)*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must—

- (a) undertake a review of the economic, environmental and wildlife impacts of driven grouse shooting, and
- (b) consult on regulation of grouse moor management.

(2) The Secretary of State must publish a summary of responses to the consultation under sub-section (1)(b).

(3) The Secretary of State must, no later than three months from the day on which the consultation under subsection (2) closes, publish a statement of future policy on grouse shooting and grouse moor management.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to conduct a review of the economic, environmental and wildlife impacts of driven grouse shooting and publish proposals for regulation.

Ruth Jones: I am pleased to speak to new clauses 15 and 16. We know that our planet and climate are experiencing huge change, and the effects of the climate emergency are becoming an increasing feature of the world in which we live, affecting not just humans, but our natural world and our wildlife. The new clauses call on the Government to think about biodiversity, the uplands, the fragile and insecure rural economy, and the many people who live and make their way of life in our green and open spaces. The new clauses are also about the welfare of our wildlife. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East has campaigned on such issues over many years, and I pay tribute to her tenacity and commitment to animal welfare and our environment.

The weight of the scientific evidence before us is such that we can see that driven grouse shooting damages habitats, pollutes our water, increases greenhouse gas emissions, and involves the illegal persecution of birds of prey. The practice also increases the risk of floods, which damage properties and green spaces and lead to devastating deaths of people and animals alike. Right now, flooding is an issue of real concern for many people up and down the country. Those of us who were present for yesterday’s Opposition day debate on flooding heard powerful stories illustrating the need for upstream land management to prevent downstream flooding. As shadow flooding Minister, I was delighted that the Opposition motion received support from both sides of the House, including the Government Benches. By voting with us, the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) showed that, sometimes, politics does not need to win but common sense can.

The new clause addresses the effects of a practice that cuts across many different and important issues, and the Minister can surely support it. It would allow us to look at specific areas such as our soil, drainage and hydrology, conservation, wildlife crime, and the wider concern about sustainability. As legislation such as this Bill passes through the House, we have the chance to address the many issues that have fallen off the to-do list. Let us take the opportunity new clauses 15 and 16 offer to commission a review so that we can methodically, clearly and carefully work our way through those important issues. The future of our planet and our natural world is in our hands, so let us get on and save it.

Mr Goodwill: My North Yorkshire constituency includes about two thirds of the North York Moors national park and vast areas of heather moorland, which is a glory to behold in late summer when the heather is in flower. Indeed, many people flock to the area to see the natural beauty of the landscape and to enjoy all the activities that take place there.

A grouse moor is a fragile environment. Historically, much of the area was forest. It was only when the trees were cut down for domestic fuel or to turn into charcoal to smelt with the limestone that was mined in the area that the forest disappeared. If we do not look after the heather in the right way, we will not keep it for very long. It needs managing not only for grouse, which cannot be reared artificially—it is an indigenous species in this country and needs to be reared in the wild—but for other species, particularly ground-nesting birds such as golden plover and lapwing, which rely on that fragile environment.

I join hon. Members who condemn the illegal persecution of raptors, but it is the case that by managing the moorland, the small mammals, birds' eggs and other prey that the raptors feed on are facilitated. When we consider how to maintain those areas, it is important to listen to the experts. In an article, the North York Moors national park ranger David Smith said:

“Controlled burning is used to manage the heather better. After 15 to 20 years the heather gets old and leggy and you need different age structures for the wildlife that lives on the moor.

Grouse shelter underneath the older heather and the fresh new heather is more palatable for both sheep and grouse. What people don't realise is that the North York Moors is a managed moorland. If you don't stay on top of it, it would turn back to woodland, with birch and rowan trees quickly re-establishing themselves.”

The article continues:

“Cutting the heather, the alternative to burning, does work, but on very stony ground or uneven ground...it's impractical”.

David Smith says:

“If you only cut the heather, you leave smaller vegetation close to the ground, it doesn't destroy everything which is needed to give the new growth a fresh start.

Controlled burns flash across the top of the moor. They don't destroy the seed bank. If you cut the heather, brash is left behind and smothers what's underneath. It stops it from regenerating and slows down regrowth.”

The article concludes:

“Another reason for controlling the heather is to allow the sheep to move about more easily”

and to provide tender young growth for the sheep, particularly the young lambs, to graze.

We have obligations regarding CO₂ and we need to protect our peat areas, but the deposition of new peat is glacial in pace. If we want to use those areas as a

carbon sink, we should follow the advice of George Monbiot and plant more trees. Perhaps we should plant more trees, but not at the expense of our traditional moorland. We should also make a distinction between blanket bog, such as the bog on Saddleworth moor, which tends to occur in the west of the country, and the dry heathland found in other parts of the country, particularly in the east. We saw on the news the apocalyptic scenes on Saddleworth moor when it was on fire in February 2019. During the recent fires in Australia, much criticism was made of the absence of what they called back burning. I maintain that the controlled burning of small areas of the moorland, at a time of year when those fires are unlikely to get out of control, means that we have natural fire breaks. I suggest that the new clause is not needed.

I suggest that there are those in this country who oppose grouse shooting for reasons that are not particularly environmental, but are to do with animal welfare or with the people who go shooting, whom they may not like. We should not use a false environmental argument to stop the traditional management of the moorland. My wife's grandfather managed a moor at Troutdale until he retired. That moor is not a moorland now; there are no grouse, there are no lapwings; it is brash and trees are growing rapidly. If it is not kept on top of and managed, that type of habitat, which is unique in Europe, is not preserved. We need to protect it.

Victoria Prentis: It is a genuine pleasure and honour to be surrounded by so many knowledgeable and committed environmentalists. The Government consider that shooting activities can bring many benefits to the rural economy, and in many cases are beneficial for wildlife and habitat conservation. We recognise that it is vital that wildlife and habitats are respected and protected. We will continue to work to ensure a sustainable, mutually beneficial relationship between shooting and conservation. There is no need for a commitment to review driven grouse shooting, as defined in the new clause, because we are already considering these issues. If there were to be a review, it might be more efficient and effective to consider other forms of grouse shooting and wider moorland management where there are no grouse, alongside driven grouse shooting.

The Government are already addressing rotational burning associated with grouse moor management on protected blanket bog. We have always been clear of the need to end burning on protected blanket bog to conserve vulnerable habitats, and we are actively looking at how legislation could achieve that. Our intention has always been to legislate if a voluntary approach fails to deliver. Real progress is being made in promoting sustainable alternatives, including consent for cutting of vegetation as an alternative to rotational burning, and removing or modifying consents to burn as higher level stewardship agreements are renewed. We have urged landowners to adopt those measures and continue to work with them constructively.

The recently released Werritty review addresses those issues in Scotland. The group's report recognised the socioeconomic contribution that grouse shooting makes to Scotland's rural economy, but made a number of recommendations that are currently being considered by the Scottish Government. We will watch closely to see how they respond. We do not rule out the possibility of a wider review into grouse moor management in

[Victoria Prentis]

the future, but I would not want to restrict that just to driven grouse management. Once Scotland has announced its plans, we will consider the benefits or otherwise of regulatory alignment between the two jurisdictions. I therefore ask the hon. Lady to withdraw the new clauses.

Ruth Jones: I thank the Minister and the right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby for their comments. I bow to the right hon. Gentleman's expertise in this area; I accept his comments and I am pleased that he agrees with us at least in part.

The burning of heather is an emotive issue, and there are many different expert opinions on it. It is certain that careful land management is crucial to ensure that we achieve our environmental standards. That is why we tabled our new clauses. We all agree that tree planting is essential; the Government are already missing their own targets by at least 70%, so we must keep pushing.

I take issue with the right hon. Gentleman's comments that this is a false animal welfare issue—it is not. It is a very real issue, which is why we have tabled the new clauses, following advice from outside organisations. I am pleased that the Minister is considering driven grouse shooting legislation, but let us start now and put it in the Bill.

Question put, that the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5, Noes 10.

Division No. 37]

AYES

Debbonaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	
McCarthy, Kerry	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Jupp, Simon
Courts, Robert	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 17

REPORT ON AGRICULTURAL PAYMENTS TO THE SCOTTISH MINISTERS

“(1) The Secretary of State must, no later than one month before IP completion day, lay before Parliament a statement of his or her policy on whether sums will be made available to Scottish Ministers each year after IP completion day which are at least equivalent to the sums made available to Scottish Ministers in the year prior to IP completion day for the purpose of expenditure under—

- (a) the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund, and
- (b) the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development as established under Article 3 of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy.

(2) “IP completion day” shall have the meaning given in section 39 of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020.”—(*Deidre Brock.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

3 pm

Deidre Brock: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Briefly, what new clause 17 boils down to is ensuring that Scottish farmers can plan ahead. It would ensure that the resources that will be made available to support Scottish farmers are known about in advance of the implementation period completion day. To be honest, I am not sure that a month is long enough notice, but it would at least be notice.

I am sure that the Minister could give that commitment today, but I think we would all agree that it would be much better written into the Bill. The Minister can think of the new clause as a sort of love letter to Scottish farmers, Parliament can think of things being done in the right way, and I would just be glad to have it confirmed.

Farmers, just like any other business, do best when they have some clarity on their long-term planning—we have heard the Secretary of State say that on several occasions. Providing that certainty and clarity—that honesty and transparency—is the work of the Government in this instance, and that is what new clause 17 asks for. Scottish farmers need that certainty and therefore the Scottish Government need certainty on funding. I would prefer farmers, crofters and Ministers to be told earlier whether funds will be made available that are at least equivalent to the cash that has been available to farmers and crofters up to now, but I look forward to the Minister telling us that the Government agree that farmers and crofters need that certainty and that they accept the new clause.

Thangam Debbonaire: We on the Labour Front Bench would say that the new clause makes a reasonable request. There are lots of ways in which we could try to deal with the problem of divergence and the tension between devolved and reserved matters and protecting regional interests, which we wish to do. There are various alternatives that the Minister could commit to. Having something from her on the record today, in *Hansard*, will be helpful.

Regardless of whether the new clause is agreed to, I am sure that all of us on the Opposition Benches will hold the Minister to her word; she is a woman of her word. If she makes a commitment on the record that there will be some form of report, we will put it in our diaries to follow that up. If the new clause falls, but she has made that commitment, we will be coming back to this point a month before the implementation period is over, at the beginning of December. I hope that, in that spirit, the Minister will consider making the commitment and therefore, when the time comes, the relevant statement can take place. It is completely reasonable that farmers across the whole of the regions and nations—not just Scotland, but the whole of the United Kingdom—can have that continuity and some certainty at least.

I may be wrong, but I am guessing that the Minister might be about to say that it is not necessary to add the new clause to the Bill. We have heard that before, and I understand the argument, but it would be good to have some recognition on the record that we can hold her to.

Victoria Prentis: In my experience, farmers would much prefer a cheque to a love letter. Maybe I have met the wrong ones. In that spirit, the only commitment I

am going to make is the important one, which is a commitment to guarantee the current annual budget in every year of this Parliament, giving real certainty over funding for the coming years. That is worth a great deal more to farmers than a new clause that would merely require the Secretary of State to make a statement on agricultural funding for Scotland.

I reassure the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith that in recognition of the perceived injustice felt by Scottish farmers over convergence funding, the Scottish Government will receive an extra £160 million over two years in 2019-20 and 2020-21. All Members will know that Her Majesty's Treasury is ultimately responsible for financial matters across UK Government. Treasury colleagues lead on discussions on all funding matters with Finance Ministers in the devolved Administrations. DEFRA will continue to work closely with the Treasury and the devolved Administrations on funding arrangements, but the Government have committed to year-on-year funding, and I am afraid that is the best I can do.

Deidre Brock: I cannot say that I am not disappointed by the Minister's response. Yes, the convergence funding was welcome, but that was after many years of tussling over it, as Members will be aware. In our view, that money was returned to us after it was wrongfully taken away by the UK Government. We are delighted we have it now, as are the many farmers and crofters who will benefit from it, after it not being with them for some years.

I do not doubt the Minister's sincerity over this, but I want to hear that the funds made available will be at least equivalent to the cash. That includes such things as inflation, and I do not feel that her words are sufficient to provide that surety. Forgive me, Sir David, but—this is a commonly held view in this place—I do not have a great deal of faith in the Treasury and what it will decide in the future.

I thank the hon. Member for Bristol West for her kind words of support, because this important principle applies not solely to Scotland, but to all the devolved Administrations. She is right about that. That surety is vital for all our farmers and crofters, and even being able to put that into words in Committee would have been a helpful start. With that in mind, I will press the new clause to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 9.

Division No. 38]

AYES

Brock, Deidre	McCarthy, Kerry
Debonnaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria
Jupp, Simon	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 19

REPORT ON IMPACT OF ACT UPON AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

“(1) The Secretary of State shall, within 18 months of Royal Assent being given to this Act, lay before Parliament a report containing an assessment of the impact of the provisions of this Act on agricultural workers in England.

(2) The report under subsection (1) shall include assessments of the impact of the Act upon each of the factors listed in subsection (3).

(3) The factors are agricultural workers’—

- living standards,
- pay,
- conditions of employment, and
- accommodation.

(4) The report under subsection (1) shall include an analysis of the impact on each factor under subsection (3)—

- in each region of England, and
- in each agricultural sector, within the meaning given in Schedule 1.

(5) The Secretary of State shall, no later than three months after the report under subsection (1) has been laid, open a public consultation on—

- the report laid under subsection (1) and any conclusions which it might draw or proposals which it might contain, and
- the merits of establishing a sector negotiating body to be responsible for setting on an annual basis minimum—
 - living standards,
 - pay,
 - conditions of employment, and
 - standards and terms of accommodation for agricultural workers.

(6) ‘Agricultural worker’ shall, for the purposes of this section, be taken to mean any person engaged in—

- agriculture, as defined in section 109 of the Agriculture Act 1947, or
- forestry.”—(*Daniel Zeichner.*)

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to report on the impact of the Act on agricultural workers in England, and to consult on the findings of that report and the merits of establishing a sector negotiating body.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Daniel Zeichner: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I preface my comments by declaring that I am a member of Unite, the trade union that represents many agricultural and rural workers. Given that the Bill is on agriculture, and we have been speaking about it for many hours, it is disappointing that we have got so far without talking about the people who work in the industry. In 2017, 474,000 people were working in agriculture across the UK, so the Bill will affect almost half a million people. It is disappointing that we have had so little mention of workers so far, and no consideration of the current challenging conditions that many of them face, or of what impact the new provisions may have on employment conditions—let alone how we will ensure that we have the workforce to keep our farms running.

Our discussion so far has been in marked contrast to the excellent report last year by the Food Farming and Countryside Commission of the Royal Society for the

[Daniel Zeichner]

encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. That report is elegantly and beautifully produced, and many of the top-line quotes are about the impact on rural workers.

Many of those working in the sector face particularly challenging mental health issues. I suspect that the Government will say that the Bill is about agriculture, but in my view it must also be about the people who work and live in our countryside. We need an impact assessment for the Bill's provisions to help to ensure that new policies affecting workers will result in making working in farming an attractive prospect for workers of all skill levels, from here and from overseas.

That is vital economically, because currently just 0.6% of those who harvest the UK's crops are British. Owing to the toxic atmosphere and uncertainty around Brexit, our farmers are already seeing a significant shortage of workers from overseas. Last autumn, we saw fruit crops rotting in fields due to farmers not having enough people to pick them. We know that the Government's seasonal workers pilot, limiting farmers to hiring up to 10,000 workers this year, will not provide the labour needed, even if it is increased a little.

Our farms require around 80,000 seasonal agricultural workers every year. According to the Office for National Statistics, 99% of those workers come from countries within the EU. The Government have spent a long time working out the detail of an Agriculture Bill that may become rather academic if we do not have the labour to work on our farms. We need to look seriously at employment rights and conditions, because the agricultural sector presents some particular challenges for workers. Many jobs in farming are physically hard, seasonal, low paid and precarious, with too few of the employment benefits that people working in other sectors take for granted.

The national minimum wage simply does not cover the specific and unique conditions associated with land-based workers, who are often in isolated rural situations, face significant mental health challenges, and need specific issues covered such as accommodation, living standards, sick pay, and even extra tools. Agricultural workers are also among the most vulnerable to being paid below the minimum wage, as so many workers are from abroad. If their English skills are not particularly strong or they are unfamiliar with the law, they are unlikely to bring claims against employers about underpayment. Yet in England, agricultural workers now lack any efficient and effective collective sector bargaining body to improve those conditions.

The agricultural wages board that the Labour Government introduced in 1948 was scrapped by the coalition Government in 2013. I remember those campaigns very well. I was often there on the marches, and the warnings that the trade unions and others made about the consequences have been largely borne out. That act of coalition vandalism—the Liberal Democrats were entirely complicit; my recollection is that the measures were actually driven through by a Liberal Democrat Minister—broke a career structure with six clear pay grades linked to skills, qualifications and experience, and ended a history of pay and protections with statutory underpinning.

Those protections covered the many thousands of workers on which the industry has depended. Indeed, DEFRA's 2012 impact assessment of the abolition of the AWB identified that workers would lose more than £140 million in wages, £97.8 million in annual leave, and £8.7 million in sick pay. Predictably enough, surveys show that since the abolition of the wages board there has been a reduction in pay awards and increased working hours. Workers have seen worsening terms and conditions, including the absence of sick pay.

The fact is that England is now the only country in the UK without an effective collective bargaining body for our agricultural workers to have a voice over their pay and working conditions. Wales has an agricultural advisory panel, and both Northern Ireland and Scotland have agricultural wages boards, although their functions are relatively limited and focus on rates of pay. We believe that this cannot be right, and it is disappointing that a Bill on our agricultural sector does not even propose to look into this. I am afraid it speaks volumes about Conservative attitudes to workers in general.

3.15 pm

Had Labour won the general election in December, rural workers could have been looking forward to a better future. Sadly, we will have to wait for that time, but I can assure hon. Members that it will come. In the meantime, new clause 19 would require the Secretary of State to report on the impact of the Act on agricultural workers in England. It would require the Secretary of State to open a public consultation on the report and its conclusions, and to include in that consultation a consideration of

“the merits of establishing a sector negotiating body”

for agricultural workers, which would be responsible for setting a minimum basis for their living standards, pay, conditions of employment and terms of accommodation.

Victoria Prentis: It is a key priority of the Government to ensure not only a successful and effective agricultural sector, but one in which workers are treated fairly. In recent years there has been enormous change to wider employment legislation, which protects and benefits workers in all sectors of the economy. Given that the national minimum wage has started and the new national living wage has been introduced, we continue to believe that there is no justification to have a separate employment regime for agricultural workers.

The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, working with partner organisations, already investigates serious cases of labour market exploitation across the whole of England and Wales. We remain absolutely committed to monitoring the impacts of the Agriculture Bill across relevant sectors, including on workers. That will be achieved through a mixture of Government and third-party evaluation. We therefore believe that new clause 19 is unnecessary.

Daniel Zeichner: I have to say, I am very disappointed by that reply. It is complacent about what is going on in the countryside, and it does not address the very real issues that employers will face if we are unable to attract more people to the industry. It is to everybody's benefit that agriculture becomes a higher-paid, higher-skilled industry. One of the ways we do that is by ensuring that people have proper rights and the confidence to look after not only themselves, but their colleagues.

I am also disappointed that we have not found any provision in the Bill to tackle the mental health crisis in the agricultural sector. People are working on their own or under pressure, and it is a real issue. We could have addressed it through new clause 19, and I can assure the Minister that we will come back to this in the future. I wish to push new clause 19 to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5, Noes 9.

Division No. 39]

AYES

Debonnaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	
McCarthy, Kerry	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, Mr Robert	
Jupp, Simon	Prentis, Victoria

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 20

MONITORING PESTICIDE USE AND ALTERNATIVES

(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of Royal Assent being given to this Act, publish proposals—

- (a) to monitor the use and effects of pesticides in the management of livestock or land, to conduct research into alternative methods of pest control and to promote their take-up,
- (b) to conduct research into alternative methods of pest control and to promote their take-up, and
- (c) to consult on a target to reduce the use of pesticides.

(2) The proposals shall include steps to measure—

- (a) the effect of pesticides on environmental health,
- (b) the effect of pesticides on human health,
- (c) the frequency with which individual pesticides are applied,
- (d) the areas to which individual pesticides are applied, and
- (e) the take-up of alternative methods of pest control by land use and sector.

(3) “Environmental health” in subsection (2)(a) includes the health of flora, fauna, land, air or any inland water body.

(4) “Human health” in subsection (2)(b) means the health of farmers, farmworkers and their families, operators, bystanders, rural residents and the general public.—(Daniel Zeichner.)

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to publish proposals to monitor the impact of pesticides, to conduct research into alternative methods of pest control, to promote their take-up, and to consult on proposals to set a target to reduce the use of pesticides.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Daniel Zeichner: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Picture this: it is a lovely sunny day and everyone is outside. Kids are playing in the park, with their mums and dads looking on. What we do not often think about when we picture these happy scenarios, because we do not look for them, are herbicides, fungicides and insecticides. They may well be blowing in on spores and from nearby

crops or, more directly, kids may be playing on grass in a park that has been treated with pesticides or weed-killing chemicals.

Quite rightly, we are now being told every day because of coronavirus that we need to wash our hands and not touch our mouths, eyes or nose. In more usual times, we are perhaps a bit more slack about possible transference of dangerous substances into our bodies—and these substances can be dangerous. A selection of the labels on pesticide products used in the UK contains warnings such as “Very toxic by inhalation”, “Do not breathe spray/fumes/vapour”, “Risk of serious damage to eyes”, “Harmful: possible risk of irreversible effects through inhalation”, “May cause cancer by inhalation”, and even “May be fatal if inhaled.” Cornell University’s work on pesticides points to the risk of deformities, mutations, cancer and poisoning of the nervous system. These are dangerous chemicals, and we need to keep a close eye on their impact.

Children and pregnant mothers are more exposed to the potential impact of pesticides than most of us, because they have a higher exposure rate. Children absorb pesticides more easily through their skin: not only is a child’s skin more permeable than an adult’s, but their skin surface area is higher relative to their body weight. That makes it easier for them to absorb higher rates of pesticides; in fact, infants will absorb around three times more pesticides than adults from similar exposure episodes. Children take in more air, water and food than adults relative to their body weight, which also increases their exposure. As an example, the breathing rate of a child in its first 12 years is roughly double that of an adult, and as a result the amount of airborne contaminants reaching the surface of the lung can be much higher.

Not only is exposure likely to be higher, but that child’s ability to cope with pesticide poisoning will differ from that of an adult. The systems in our bodies used to deal with toxins are less well developed in children, which can make them less able to cope with such substances than adults. As they grow, children’s brains and bodies undergo complex changes that affect tissue growth and organ development. Incidents of exposure that would be tolerated by adults can cause irreversible damage to unborn babies, infants and adolescents. What is worrying about this Bill is that not only does it completely omit any requirement for the protection of human health and the environment from pesticides, but it does not make a single recommendation for simply monitoring pesticides or their effects.

Mr Goodwill: One of the ways in which farmers can reduce their reliance on pesticides is by using new varieties derived through gene editing. Potatoes can be engineered to be resistant to blight, for example. Do Labour Front Benchers support that innovative technology that will reduce our reliance on pesticides?

Daniel Zeichner: Aha! As ever, I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He has touched on a subject that is of some interest to me, as I chair the all-party parliamentary group for life sciences. I look forward to having a detailed conversation with him about CRISPR-Cas9 and other exciting techniques.

In answer to the right hon. Gentleman’s question, we are absolutely interested in looking at ways in which we can reduce pesticide use. As I indicated earlier, I am well

[Daniel Zeichner]

aware that farmers do not use pesticides without due caution, or without bearing in mind the current safety regulations and the costs involved. Having said that, we believe there should be additional measures in this Bill. We fully accept that pesticides are needed in some situations, but other new technologies might be available, including drones and satellite images that have the potential to make the application of these chemicals much more targeted and less damaging. I am told that those techniques are already being used in other countries, but if we are not monitoring pesticides and their impact, there is no way that we will be able to encourage or assist farmers to adopt more selective and less damaging techniques.

All Members present have been repeatedly promised by Ministers that when we left Europe, we would bring in stronger human and environmental protections, or at least equivalence. The Labour party believes that that is an absolute minimum, we should monitor what impact pesticides are having; where that impact is concentrated; and whether children, mothers and babies have been affected, especially in rural communities where exposure is likely to be higher. This amendment does not ban anything. It does not stop any farmer who needs to use safe pesticides on their crops, or to use them to increase their yields, from doing so. It simply states that we are not averting our gaze, but keeping our eyes open to the known risks; that we look to reduce those risks; and that we will particularly protect women and children in rural communities. On that basis, I ask that the clause be read a Second time.

Victoria Prentis: I assure the hon. Gentleman that our eyes are very open when it comes to ensuring that the use of pesticides is minimised, and that pesticide usage and its effects are carefully monitored. Current policies address these points already. Strict regulation only allows pesticide use when scientific risk assessments predict that there will be no harm to people and no unacceptable effects on the environment. Existing monitoring schemes cover each of the points proposed in the amendment. They report on the level of usage of each pesticide and on residue levels in food. They also collect and consider reports about possible harm to people or the environment.

The Government support good work to research, develop and promote means to move away from pesticides, which I am sure is our collective aim. These include: plant breeding for pest-resistant varieties; the use of natural predators; the development of biopesticides; and the use of a variety of cultural methods to reduce pest pressures.

The Government intend to continue to develop and refine our approach to pesticides. The 25-year environment plan is where the hon. Gentleman will find most of these details. The plan emphasises the importance of integrated pest management. That means not only that pesticides are used well, but that the approach to farming minimises the need for pesticides and that alternative methods are used wherever possible. Where these practices are shown to help to deliver public goods, they may well be funded under the new environmental land management schemes. We will determine in more detail which ELMS will pay for what as we develop the schemes in the future.

The approach set out in the 25-year environment plan is the right one and we hope that it will minimise pesticide use, help to reduce risks and strongly encourage the uptake of alternatives to pesticides. Alongside the maintenance and development of effective monitoring, this approach will deliver the main outcomes sought by the hon. Gentleman's amendment.

Daniel Zeichner: I listened closely to the Minister and there was much that I probably agree with. However, I would have predicted that we would return to the vexed question of which piece of legislation this proposal would sit in, and we believe that it would be inappropriate to have a piece of major agricultural legislation without reference to it. On that basis, I will push the new clause to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5, Noes 9.

Division No. 40]

AYES

Debonnaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	
McCarthy, Kerry	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria
Jupp, Simon	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 21

LICENCES TO CULL BADGERS FOR CONTROL OF TUBERCULOSIS: REPEAL

(1) No licence may be granted to kill or take badgers, or to interfere with a badger sett, for the purpose of preventing the spread of bovine tuberculosis.

(2) Sub-paragraph (1)(g) of section 10 of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 is accordingly amended by omitting "disease" and substituting "any disease other than bovine tuberculosis."—
(Daniel Zeichner.)

This new clause would end the provision under which a licence can be granted to kill badgers for the purpose of preventing the spread of bovine tuberculosis.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Daniel Zeichner: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Thank you, Sir David—[*Interruption.*] There is some confusion on this side; I apologise. I blame the late publication of the 109-page document.

Victoria Prentis: In fact, why don't the Government just stop? [*Laughter.*]

Daniel Zeichner: Why does it take the Government so long—since 2018—to respond, and why do they finally respond on the day that we discuss this issue in Committee? We probably all know the politics behind these things, but it is disappointing when it involves such an important

subject, discussion of which has been so eagerly awaited by so many people, because it is a highly controversial subject. The science involved is complicated.

In the spirit of sharing the responsibilities across the shadow team, I will pass over to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East in a moment—I hope that she will be called to speak. However, the Labour Front Bench welcomes the Government’s belated response. We also find some things in the response helpful, and we think the Government are changing direction, but not quickly enough. We will make a more considered and detailed response when we have had time to consider it in detail, but our belief is that far too many badgers have been unnecessarily killed. The science is not clear and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that there is as much transmission from cattle to cattle. It is not a simple issue. We fully recognise the huge damage, economic cost and distress that bovine TB causes in many areas. As I say, we welcome the direction of travel, but we believe that it should be much swifter.

3.30 pm

Nadia Whittome: The Government’s much-delayed response to the Godfray report, published this morning, finally concedes to implement more effective methods of containing bovine TB, such as cattle and badger vaccinations. Of course, scientists, activists and politicians have been saying that for years. Can the Minister explain why it has taken the culling of an estimated 130,000 badgers for the Government to come to the same conclusion that most of us came to years ago? Will she provide an estimate of the number of badgers that will be killed before the switch to vaccinations and other non-lethal preventive measures?

The Government’s U-turn on the badger cull is welcome. I would like to think that it is because the Prime Minister knew that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge and I were going to speak to the issue, but I suspect there is someone else he listens to more. It is simply inexcusable, however, that further inhumane killing of this iconic species will continue for several years, especially as the Government have conceded that that is not the most effective strategy for containing bovine TB.

The former Government adviser Professor Ranald Munro recently said that a large number of badgers are likely to have suffered “immense pain” during culls. It is evident that the correct thing for the Government to do would be to bring forward the ban and start implementing non-lethal alternatives without delay.

Mr Goodwill: Is the hon. Lady not aware that we do not yet have a vaccine that allows us to identify the difference between a vaccinated animal and an infected animal? Until we have that type of vaccine, it will not be possible to make the switch.

Nadia Whittome: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but the state of the science does not prevent the new clause from being made. New clause 21 provides the Government with an opportunity, on the day that they released their long-awaited response to the Godfray review, to urgently put an end to the inhumane and ineffective badger cull, rather than allowing it to continue for another five years.

Victoria Prentis: Bovine TB is one of our most difficult animal health challenges. It costs the Government about £100 million a year and industry around £50 million a

year. Tackling it is important. It imposes a tremendous pressure on the wellbeing of our cattle farmers and their families. Many Committee members, including me, represent constituencies that are exposed to the misery of bovine TB on a daily basis. Left unchecked, bovine TB also poses a threat to public health although that is, to a large extent, mitigated today by milk pasteurisation. My grandfather died of tuberculosis, so I have always taken a close personal interest in the subject. It is a peculiar and complicated disease that it is important for us to take seriously.

No single measure will achieve eradication by our target date of 2038, which is why we are committed to pursuing a wide range of interventions, including culling and vaccination, to deal with the risk from wildlife. Of course culling is a controversial policy, but we have scientific evidence to show that, to a certain extent, it is working. The new review is clear that the evidence indicates that the presence of infected badgers poses a threat to local cattle herds. The review considers that moving from lethal to non-lethal control of disease in badgers is desirable. Of course, we would all go along with that. We have reached a point where intensive culling will soon have been enabled in most of the areas where it has served the greatest impact. As announced in the Government response today, we will be able to develop measures to make badger vaccination, combined with biosecurity, the focus of addressing risks from wildlife as an exit strategy from intensive culling. Our aim is to allow future badger culls only where the epidemiological evidence points to a reservoir of disease in badgers.

Nobody wants to cull badgers inappropriately, but nor can we allow our farmers, their families and our wider dairy and beef industries to continue to suffer the misery and costs caused by the disease. That is why it is right that we take strong and decisive action to tackle the problem effectively, while always looking to evolve towards non-lethal options in future. I therefore do not think the new clause is appropriate.

Daniel Zeichner: I listened closely to the Minister’s comments. I suspect we will come back to this issue. We have been discussing it for the past 10 or 20 years. I fully appreciate what a serious issue it is and how it directly affects both her family and many others. However, at the general election we stood on a clear pledge to end the badger cull. We stand by that and the new clause would put it into law. The direction of travel of the Godfray report today reflects that the Government, on the basis of scientific evidence, are beginning to move in that direction. I suspect it is still partly about costs, because culling is more expensive. The vaccination question that the right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby mentioned is important, but it is important that we follow the science as it develops. We want to eradicate and defend and protect. The issue is of considerable public interest, so I will press the new clause to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5, Noes 9.

Division No. 41]

AYES

Debonnaire, Thangam
Jones, Ruth
McCarthy, Kerry

Whittome, Nadia
Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria
Jupp, Simon	

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 25

CONSULTATION ON ADMINISTRATION

(1) The Secretary of State must, within one calendar month of this Act being given Royal Assent, open a consultation on what body should administer—

- (a) any payment of financial assistance under section 1,
- (b) any check, enforcement, monitoring or investigation in connection with the giving of financial assistance, under subsection (1) of section 3,
- (c) any payment under the basic payment scheme, within the meaning of section 7,
- (d) any delinked payment within the meaning of section 12,
- (e) any other form of financial assistance which may be given under this Act, and
- (f) any environmental land management scheme established in connection with the provisions of this Act.

(2) The consultation shall seek views on whether an existing body should administer the functions under subsection (1) or whether a new body should be created for that purpose.

(3) The Secretary of State must, in any consultation under subsection (1), consult with persons or bodies representing persons who he or she considers are affected by the functions of the proposed administrative body, or who—

- (a) are engaged in production of any product falling within an agricultural sector under Schedule 1, or
- (b) manage land for a purpose other than production of any product falling within an agricultural sector under Schedule 1.

(4) The Secretary of State must lay before both Houses of Parliament—

- (a) in summary form, the views expressed in the consultation held under subsection (1), and
- (b) a statement of how the Secretary of State intends to proceed, with his or her reasons for doing so.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to hold a consultation on whether an existing agency (such as the Rural Payments Agency) or a new body should administer payments and other functions delivered under the Bill's provisions.—(Ruth Jones.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ruth Jones: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause would require the Secretary of State to hold a consultation on whether an existing agency, such as the Rural Payments Agency, or a new body should administer payments and other functions delivered under the Bill. This is an important juncture in our consideration of the Bill. This will probably be, in the words of our former colleague David Drew, “the most popular part”, as we are giving the opportunity to those who wish to be consulted to get rid of the Rural Payments Agency. But, as is always the case, things do not have to be that way. The Government could ensure that we have a strengthened and effective payments agency, but that agency will likely have to be a new body with a strong and effective mandate to do its work. We cannot rely on an existing agency that has a reputation for wrong payments, late payments and no payments at all.

The new clause is not meant to be confusing; it is very clearly about charting a realistic way forward that has the support of those who will be seeking support and funding from Her Majesty's Government in the years ahead. We would welcome it if the Minister stood up and announced a strong and empowered agency, but if she cannot do that today, we want the new clause to stand part of the Bill. We are entering uncharted waters—as the shadow Minister with responsibility for water, I know all about that—and we have the chance to take stock, reflect and start anew.

Much has been made of the future and the new way of doing things. The Government have made a great many promises to our farmers and agricultural workers. If we take the Bill and the Government press lines as they stand, we are entering a new and glorious world, but I caution those on the Treasury Bench to make good on their pledges and promises to our farmers and all those working in the agricultural sector. The demands on those people and workers are great, and the potential to increase support is huge, so let us take it.

The new clause will ensure that things are done properly when it comes to the many financial provisions in the Bill and the passing on of vital payments, that the powers and resources are exercised effectively, and that we do our best for our farmers going forward. I hope that the Minister will listen carefully and respond accordingly.

Victoria Prentis: I hope that I have reassured hon. Members in all parts of the Committee that we will consult extensively on the use of the various powers in the Bill. We know that the delivery of the previous CAP scheme was not as good as we wanted it to be, or as good as farmers deserved. Therefore, we will design new arrangements that will make it as simple as possible for people to apply for funding. We want to ensure that payments are prompt and accurate.

In the short term, the Rural Payments Agency will continue to administer direct payments and countryside stewardship payments, and considerable progress has been made in their delivery and achievement in recent years. We have seen a significant increase in performance and are putting in place further improvements to delivery.

As discussed last week, there will be a public consultation on ELM. Stakeholders will be able to provide us with feedback across all elements of the schemes. We use such feedback to inform decisions on who will be best placed to provide the service for the ELM and other financial schemes going forward. Before consulting on how we deliver future schemes, we will want to refine our policies further. Once we have established who is best placed to deliver the reform, we can take views on how to roll it out. I hope that I have reassured the hon. Lady.

Ruth Jones: I thank the Minister for her comments and for her honesty in accepting that there have been flaws and deficiencies in the previous system. We all share the same aim: we want payments to be made accurately and promptly. We look forward to the promised improvements at the RPA and will therefore not press the new clause to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 27

AGRICULTURE CO-ORDINATION COUNCIL

“(1) There shall be an Agricultural Co-ordination Council composed of—

- (a) the Secretary of State, or representatives of the Secretary of State,
- (b) Scottish Ministers, or representatives of Scottish Ministers,
- (c) Welsh Ministers, or representatives of Welsh Ministers, and
- (d) DAERA.

(2) The Council shall establish a common framework to monitor any disparities within the United Kingdom—

- (a) in standards of food production;
- (b) arising from the exercise of powers to give financial assistance for any purpose which may be specified;
- (c) arising from the power to make payments under the basic payment scheme or to make delinked payments; and
- (d) in marketing standards.

(3) The Council shall review any framework established under subsection (2) at least once in each calendar year, and may amend a framework.”—(*Thangam Debbonaire.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Thangam Debbonaire: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

On behalf of the Labour Front Bench—both the shadow DEFRA and European affairs teams—this is an offer. The new clause is probing, as I am sure the Minister will have noticed. We seem to have got a bit stuck in Committee on the question of how, as we leave the EU, we resolve tensions between devolved powers and duties in agriculture and the reserved powers and duties on WTO compliance.

As we said on WTO compliance, it is a sad state of affairs that we have got to, but none the less we have. The new clause makes the modest suggestion of creating a route to assist in resolving that tension. Establishing an agriculture co-ordination council does not undermine either UK sovereignty or devolution, but it attempts to provide a forum for discussing and addressing any possible differences that might affect compliance, undermine the consistency of standards, or involve various other matters listed in the new clause.

We are not being particularly prescriptive. We have suggested elected Government Ministers or their representatives, so that the council is democratically accountable, but we have left open the timetable and the process. The new clause is a suggestion—not one that we will press to a vote, but one that gives the Minister the opportunity to tell us what she believes the alternatives to be. If not this, then what?

Victoria Prentis: I am reminded that the Government Whip and I both read English at university, and “A Modest Proposal” can mean something quite different. However, I thank the hon. Lady for her new clause seeking to establish an agriculture co-ordination council. I accept that she is asking me generally to explain our plans.

The UK Government have been collaborating closely with all devolved Administrations on a UK-wide framework for agricultural support based on Joint Ministerial Committee principles over the past two and a half years. The framework is planned to cover policy areas

such as agricultural support spending, crisis measures, public intervention, private storage aid, marketing standards, cross-border farms and data collection and sharing.

3.45 pm

Our aim is to have the framework in place by the end of the transition period this year. The shared view of DEFRA and the devolved Administrations is that such a framework does not need to be set out in legislation, but can be suitably managed through non-legislative intragovernmental co-ordination, which could be codified in a concordat. In addition, DEFRA Ministers already meet our devolved Administration counterparts on an almost monthly basis, as part of the inter-ministerial group. A new agricultural co-ordination council would therefore be an unnecessary addition, as that existing group provides a successful forum for discussion and co-ordination between each part of the UK.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Minister for responding to our probing amendment with more information, as I had hoped she would. I reserve judgment on her assertion that what she described all works very well, because that is a matter for the devolved Administrations to comment on, and I expect that they will in due course, possibly in the final stages. I am happy not to press the new clause to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 28

AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES

“(1) The Secretary of State must promote agricultural co-operatives by—

- (a) offering financial assistance for the creation or development of agricultural co-operatives, and
- (b) establishing bodies to provide practical support and guidance for the development of new co-operatives.

(2) The Secretary of State shall examine any proposal for primary or secondary legislation to assess—

- (a) its impact upon agricultural co-operatives, and
- (b) whether that impact is disproportionate in relation to its impact upon other producer organisations or interbranch organisations.

(3) Financial assistance under subsection (1) may be given by way of grant, loan or guarantee, or in any other form.

(4) An organisation shall be recognised as an agricultural co-operative if it meets the conditions in subsections (5) and (6).

(5) Condition 1 is that the organisation—

- (a) is registered with the Financial Conduct Authority as a co-operative, or
- (b) is constituted under the Co-operatives and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014.

(6) Condition 2 is that the organisation—

- (a) operates in a sector which is listed in Schedule 1 to this Act, and
- (b) includes at least one member which is an agricultural or horticultural producer.

(7) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision specifying the criteria under which financial assistance under subsection (1)(a) may be offered.

(8) Regulations under subsection (7) are subject to the negative resolution procedure.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to promote agricultural co-operatives.—(Daniel Zeichner.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Daniel Zeichner: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

We believe it important that the Bill properly supports co-operative models of farming, as they contribute greatly to a fairer and more resilient agricultural sector. By working together, farmers can benefit from mutual protection, access to new markets, cost savings and efficiency, and a louder collective voice for the industry, all of which will be particularly important in the light of the uncertainty caused by our withdrawal from the European Union.

As our countryside is likely to become increasingly commercialised with, I fear, bigger farms and possibly bigger profits, co-operative approaches also provide a counterbalance to the growing consolidation of ownership of farms and food manufacturing in the hands of a few big agribusinesses or international conglomerates. Many players in our agricultural sector already belong to co-operatives. They may not be as strong as in other countries, but more than 140,000 British farmers are members and co-owners of more than 400 agriculture and farmer co-operatives that work across many levels in the supply chain, from milk marketing and processing to arable crop storage, produce marketing and retail supplies.

The Bill is missing clear provisions to make it easier for current and new co-operatives to succeed in farming by providing practical support, funding and protection from the inadvertent impact of future legislation or regulation. The new clause would therefore lock into the Bill a requirement for the Secretary of State to promote agriculture co-operatives by offering financial assistance for their creation and development and to establish bodies to provide practical support and guidance for their development. That support could come in the form of grant or loan funding and through the creation of organisations similar to the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society, which I understand provides practical support such as advice, networking, shared services and linking agriculture co-operatives to potential opportunities.

The clause would also guarantee that the impact of proposed legislation on agriculture co-operatives is considered. That would ensure that future legislation does not inadvertently make it harder to be a co-operative than any other form of business. That is particularly important in the short to medium term, as much of the detail of the post-Brexit settlement for farmers will come in secondary legislation, to which I am sure we are all hugely looking forward.

The Bill is short on detail, and it is important that any undue impact on co-operatives is mitigated against as the detail is fleshed out. That would also help to future-proof the sector against inadvertent undue harm as policy develops over the long term. We hope that the Government will recognise the contribution of co-operatives and the merits of our proposals. It is important that we properly safeguard that sector within farming and that co-operatives are properly supported and encouraged.

Victoria Prentis: I absolutely agree that farmers can benefit in many ways by co-operating and working together. Co-operation provides opportunities to cut costs and achieve economies of scale, whether through purchasing resources or processing and marketing produce. Co-operatives can gain control and hold a stronger position in the supply chain than people who work alone.

By working together, farmers can share knowledge and best practice and support each other to improve productivity and spread innovation.

Clause 1(2) already allows us to provide financial assistance to help farmers to improve productivity. We would like to be able to help farmers to invest in equipment and infrastructure that will help them to benefit from working together. Furthermore, there are provisions elsewhere in the Bill that allow us to create a bespoke UK producer organisations regime, which we will tailor to the needs of UK producers who are interested in collaborating further together.

I hope that that provides some reassurance that we are already supporting, and will continue to support, farmers who want to come together to share knowledge, reduce costs, and strengthen their position in the supply chain.

Daniel Zeichner: I am grateful to the Minister, and I think I have had sufficient reassurance on that. On that basis, I am happy not to proceed and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 29

CARBON EMISSIONS: NET-ZERO

29(1) When considering the provision of financial assistance under sections 1(1) and 1(2) of this Act, the Secretary of State shall ensure that the likely impact of that funding is compatible with the achievement of any emissions reduction target set out in subsection (2).

(2) It is the duty of the Secretary of State to—

- (a) within six months of this Bill receiving Royal Assent, publish greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets for agricultural soil, livestock, peatland and machinery, for the year 2030, which are consistent with an emissions reduction trajectory that would eliminate the substantial majority of the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and
- (b) ensure that the targets are met.

(3) The Secretary of State must, within twelve months of this Bill receiving Royal Assent, publish a statement of the policies to be delivered in order to meet the emissions reduction targets published under subsection (2).

(4) In this section “soil”, “livestock”, “peatland” and “machinery” shall all relate to that used, owned, or operated in the process of farming or any other agricultural activity.”—(*Daniel Zeichner.*)

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to publish greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets for the agricultural sector.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Daniel Zeichner: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I think everyone will be pleased that we are getting towards the finishing straight, but, in the meantime, we believe that the Bill needs to have far stronger net zero commitments. As I have said, it is essential that the climate crisis should be front and centre of the Bill, which will be one of the most important pieces of legislation we have had in the past decade to help to meet the climate emergency. Yes, the Government have said that they are committed to reaching net zero by 2050, but the National Farmers Union has demonstrated much more ambitious leadership by setting a closer target—for the agriculture sector to reach net zero by 2040.

Sadly, we know that the Government are currently not on track to meet their carbon emission goals in the 2030s, let alone to reach net zero by 2050, and the 2040 target remains a voluntary one for the agriculture sector. The fact is that the Committee on Climate Change's 2019 progress report has shown that UK agriculture is not on track with any of its indicators, and there has been little progress in reducing emissions from agriculture since 2008. As only 30% of direct payments are currently secured through meeting greening requirements—an improvement on the previous system, but still not good enough and way short of what is needed—we can see that a lack of financial incentives or legal requirements for farmers to adapt their practices to reduce emissions is part of the problem. That is why it is so important that the Bill should set out clear targets and a proper plan for how agriculture will be expected to reduce its emissions and by what date.

As things stand, all that the Bill does, effectively, is stipulate that the Secretary of State may—not even “must”, to go back to where we started—provide financial assistance under clause 1 for the purposes of climate change and adaptation, as well as other public goods that will have positive impacts on carbon storage, such as good soil management. We have no assurances about how much priority those clause 1 elements that could deliver reductions in greenhouse gas emissions will be given by the Government when funding the measures in the Bill. There are no guarantees that farmers will even take up the new environmental land management schemes in the first place to deliver those vital agricultural adaptations to reduce carbon emissions, and there is no plan for how agriculture is expected to meet any net zero target, be that by 2050, 2040 or earlier.

For the Government to say that they are truly committed to transforming our agricultural and land management systems in order to reduce emissions and avert climate catastrophe, the Bill needs to be much strengthened with a coherent, joined-up approach. That has been the purpose of many of our amendments, which we have discussed over the past few weeks. I think I am correct in saying that, sadly, they have been rejected in their entirety by the Government—so far: there is always hope, right to the end. [*Laughter.*] I do not think there is—but anyway.

The Bill needs binding emission targets for all the key areas of agricultural emissions—soil, livestock, peatland and machinery—for a given date, with clear direction from the Secretary of State on how it is intended to reach them. The NFU suggests 2040. We believe that the target should be in line with that, but that it has got to be even more ambitious if we are to properly address the climate emergency. We propose setting targets that are in line with eliminating the substantial majority of the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

We heard of the need for proper targets in the Bill from numerous witnesses in the evidence sessions. That would be the best way to give the legislation some teeth and proper direction and ensure that the Government's proposed aims for the Bill of reducing agricultural carbon emissions are actually delivered to a timescale that will make those emission reductions effective for averting the climate catastrophe. The urgency of the climate crisis is too real and too important for any less than that.

New clause 29 would align agriculture with the emissions reduction trajectory that would eliminate the substantial majority of the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. It would require the Secretary of State, within six months of the Bill receiving Royal Assent, to publish emission reductions targets for agricultural soil, livestock, peatland and machinery for the year 2030 that are consistent with this aim, to publish a statement within 12 months of the Bill becoming an Act of the policies to be delivered in order to meet the emissions reduction targets, and to ensure those targets are met. The new clause would also ensure that, in providing financial assistance for the clause 1 purposes, the impact of that funding is compatible with the achievement of the target of reducing the substantial majority of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

There can be no more important point on which to conclude our deliberations today. It is a simple test for the Government: are they up to tackling the climate crisis or not? I fear we are about to hear a lot of noes.

Victoria Prentis: Yes, the Government are up to dealing with the climate crisis and are determined to do so, and yes, we agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is no more important thing that we should be doing as a Government.

I am really proud that the UK became the first major economy in the world to set a legally binding target to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions from across the UK economy by 2050. We already have a strong foundation of action and leadership to build from, having cut our emissions by 42% since 1990 while growing the economy by 72%. That does not mean that we are complacent or that we do not recognise that there is a great deal more to do, urgently.

Kerry McCarthy: Will the Minister give way?

Victoria Prentis: I am going to make some progress.

Climate change is a global challenge, requiring action across the whole economy. We do not have sector-specific targets. That is to ensure that we meet our climate change commitments at the lowest possible net cost to UK taxpayers, consumers and businesses, while maximising the social and economic benefits to the UK of the transition.

We have set out a range of specific commitments, in the 25-year environment plan and under the clean growth strategy, to reduce emissions from agriculture. That includes strengthening biosecurity and control of endemic diseases in livestock, and encouraging use of low-emission fertilisers. However, we know that, to achieve net zero, more is needed from the sector. We are looking to reduce agricultural emissions controlled directly within the farm boundary with a broad range of cost-effective measures, primarily through improvements to on-farm efficiency and land use change.

The new ELM scheme will help us to contribute to our net zero commitment by providing farmers with an opportunity to receive financial reward for delivering a range of public goods. We already report on climate change performance under the Climate Change Act 2008 and the convention on biological diversity. Additional reporting as required by the new clause would place an unnecessary burden on the Government without delivering significant new information to Parliament.

Daniel Zeichner: So, we come full circle, back to where we started. I listened closely to the Minister and I end up being disappointed, sadly. I point out that the Government were dragged unwillingly to the 2050 target. It was the Leader of the Opposition who led on that, and it will be Labour in the future that will deliver us from the climate emergency. I did hear a “yes” at one point in the Minister’s speech, and I hope she might just be able to say yes in a moment, when we come to the vote.

This all comes back to the balance between cost and possibility. I kept hearing the words “lowest possible cost”. This is not something that can be done at low cost. The climate emergency is absolutely real, immediate and urgent. There is a fundamental difference between the two sides here on how we approach it. The Minister mentioned environmental land management schemes. We talked much about that last week. There are no guarantees in the Bill that they will achieve the uptake or the outcomes that we are looking for.

There has been a clear division of opinion throughout the discussions on the Bill. It does too little. It is not strong enough. It does not guarantee the way forward that we need. Agriculture is still a major contributor to the climate crisis. We need to find a way of taking the sector to a much better place. This new clause would help us to do that.

4 pm

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5, Noes 9.

Division No. 42]

AYES

Debonnaire, Thangam	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	
McCarthy, Kerry	Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Clarke, Theo	Kearns, Alicia
Crosbie, Virginia	Kruger, Danny
Dines, Miss Sarah	Morris, James
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Prentis, Victoria
Jupp, Simon	

Question accordingly negatived.

Question proposed, That the Chair do report the Bill, as amended, to the House.

Victoria Prentis: On a point of order, Sir David. I understand that now is the right point to thank you very much for your chairmanship. I also thank the other Chair who has helped us with the proceedings, all the Clerks and the civil servants, who have helped us enormously with the production and the taking through

of the Bill. I very much thank the Committee members and the Government and Opposition Whips, who have steered the Bill so seamlessly and with a certain amount of agreement and jollity around the edges.

Daniel Zeichner: On a point of order, Sir David. I expect that I will say something remarkably similar. I particularly thank you and Mr Stringer for your excellent chairmanship. I thank the Whips for making the Committee run so smoothly and efficiently. As we approach International Women’s Day, I look around the room and notice that all my team appear to be women, and there appears to a majority of women on the Government side, too. I think that reflects an important step forward in this place. I suspect that this has been a more gentle and consensual discussion than one might have had otherwise, although I have been chided from my own side for being insufficiently dressed on occasion.

I thank the Clerks, who have been extraordinarily helpful in translating not always clear instructions into workable amendments. I thank all the staff working across the shadow teams; it has been a particularly difficult time. I particularly thank the adviser Rob Wakely and my assistant Rafaelle Robin. We probably expected far too much from them in a short period of time, and I am eternally grateful. All the mistakes are my responsibility.

Deidre Brock: On a point of order, Sir David. Briefly, I thank you and Mr Stringer for your good-humoured chairmanship of the proceedings, and the Clerks, who have been tremendously helpful to my colleague and me. I thank *Hansard*, who sit there patiently recording our every word, and the Officers, who have had to get up and down frequently to close the doors and open them again. My thanks to all the Committee members for interesting proceedings. I look forward to the Bill reaching Report and to further discussion on many important points.

The Chair: Mr Stringer and I would like to thank all hon. Members for their generous remarks. We thank *Hansard* and officials for all their support. We particularly wish to commend the Doorkeepers. One had to cope with a key breaking in the door while he was locking it; another was opening the windows at the same time as closing the doors—there is an example of multitasking. Most of all, I thank our Clerks. Without them and their wise counsel, the Committee would not have run so smoothly. I congratulate hon. Members on the way that they dealt with the proceedings, in spite of my many stumblings.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill, as amended, accordingly to be reported.

4.5 pm

Committee rose.

Written evidence reported to the House

AB63 British Poultry Council

AB64 Paul Gingell

AB65 British Veterinary Association

AB66 WWF-UK

AB67 Mayor of London

AB68 Robert Evans, Visiting Fellow, Global Sustainability Institute, Anglia Ruskin University

AB69 Key stakeholders on Dartmoor (Dartmoor Hill Pony) further submission

AB70 Mayor's Fund for London

