

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT  
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

## AGRICULTURE BILL

*Fourth Sitting*

*Thursday 13 February 2020*

*(Afternoon)*

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Examination of witnesses  
Adjourned till Tuesday 25 February at twenty-five minutes past  
Nine o'clock.  
Written evidence reported to the House.

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**Monday 17 February 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)	Jupp, Simon ( <i>East Devon</i> ) (Con)
† Clarke, Theo ( <i>Stafford</i> ) (Con)	† Kearns, Alicia ( <i>Rutland and Melton</i> ) (Con)
† Courts, Robert ( <i>Witney</i> ) (Con)	† Kruger, Danny ( <i>Devizes</i> ) (Con)
Crosbie, Virginia ( <i>Ynys Môn</i> ) (Con)	† McCarthy, Kerry ( <i>Bristol East</i> ) (Lab)
† Debbonaire, Thangam ( <i>Bristol West</i> ) (Lab)	† Morris, James ( <i>Halesowen and Rowley Regis</i> ) (Con)
† Dines, Miss Sarah ( <i>Derbyshire Dales</i> ) (Con)	† Oppong-Asare, Abena ( <i>Erith and Thamesmead</i> ) (Lab)
† Doogan, Dave ( <i>Angus</i> ) (SNP)	† Whittome, Nadia ( <i>Nottingham East</i> ) (Lab)
† Eustice, George ( <i>Camborne and Redruth</i> ) (Con)	† Zeichner, Daniel ( <i>Cambridge</i> ) (Lab)
† Goodwill, Mr Robert ( <i>Scarborough and Whitby</i> ) (Con)	Kenneth Fox, Kevin Maddison, <i>Committee Clerks</i>
† Jones, Fay ( <i>Brecon and Radnorshire</i> ) (Con)	† <b>attended the Committee</b>
† Jones, Ruth ( <i>Newport West</i> ) (Lab)	

**Witnesses**

Jonnie Hall, Director of Policy, NFU Scotland

Alan Clarke, Chief Executive, Quality Meat Scotland

George Burgess, Deputy Director, Trade Policy, Food and Drink, Scottish Government

George Monbiot, journalist and author

Professor Bill Keevil, Professor of Environmental Healthcare, School of Biological Sciences, University of Southampton

Diana Holland, Assistant General Secretary (responsible for Food, Drink and Agriculture), Unite

Jyoti Fernandes, Campaigns and Policy Co-ordinator, Landworkers Alliance

Vicki Hird, Campaign Co-ordinator, Food and Farming Policy, Sustain

Dr Nick Palmer, Head of Compassion in World Farming UK, Compassion in World Farming

James West, Senior Policy Manager, Compassion in World Farming

Sue Davies MBE, Head of Consumer Protection and Food Policy, Which?

## Public Bill Committee

Thursday 13 February 2020

(Afternoon)

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

### Agriculture Bill

#### Examination of Witnesses

*Jonnie Hall, Alan Clarke and George Burgess gave evidence.*

2 pm

**The Chair:** We will now hear oral evidence from NFU Scotland, Quality Meat Scotland and the Scottish Government. Thank you for coming. The panel will finish at 2.30 pm. Could you introduce yourselves for the record?

**Alan Clarke:** Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Alan Clarke. I am chief executive of Quality Meat Scotland.

**George Burgess:** Good afternoon. I am George Burgess. I am the head of food and drink at the Scottish Government.

**Jonnie Hall:** My name is Jonnie Hall. I am director of policy for NFU Scotland.

**Q174 The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** For decades, the common agricultural policy, with all its prescriptive rules, has applied to every part of the UK. As we leave, each part of the UK will have the freedom to develop a policy that is right for it. Could you each say what it is about the common agricultural policy that you dislike the most, what you most want to change and what type of system you think is appropriate for the modern world?

**Jonnie Hall:** I am happy to start. I can quote Mr Eustice back at him and say that the CAP has largely “incentivised inertia”—a phrase he has used many times. We agree. The bluntness of area-based payments has not driven innovation or productivity, or indeed delivered on environmental challenges.

In that respect, we see the departure from the EU and from the CAP as an opportunity to develop bespoke agricultural policy tailored to the individual needs of the devolved Administrations. We have some capacity for that already, in the fact that we have four different settlements of pillar 1 and pillar 2 under the CAP, but we are nevertheless constrained by an awful lot of bureaucracy and by the rules and regulations around mapping, inspections, penalties and so on.

It is vital for us to take the opportunity and for Scotland to be allowed, under the devolved nature of agricultural policy development and delivery, to develop its own suite of schemes and measures that fit the needs and profile of Scottish agriculture, which is significantly different from that of the rest of the UK and, in particular, England. That is absolutely right and, therefore, this provides us with an opportunity.

**George Burgess:** The Scottish Government position, as I am sure all Committee members will know, has not been in favour of Brexit. We believe that continued membership of the single market and customs union is the best way forward on economic, social and environmental grounds. That includes on the common agricultural policy.

Obviously, there will be areas in the common agricultural policy that are not necessarily to our liking. Work has been under way in Scotland, under the “Stability and Simplicity” consultation, to identify, in the short term, any areas where some improvement could be made to the common agricultural policy. That might be around issues such as mapping and penalties, as Mr Hall has mentioned. We are working, through a farming and food production future policy group, to look at longer-term policy in Scotland.

**Alan Clarke:** I have a couple of points from Quality Meat Scotland. This gives us an opportunity to look outside our normal markets. Currently, 69% of Scottish red meat is being sold in the rest of the UK, outside of Scotland, and 10% goes internationally. It gives us an opportunity to continue to build on that. To do that, protection of our protected geographical indicators is essential.

In addition, we need to have no reduction of standards of any other imports coming into the country, to make sure that we have a level playing field for our food producers. We would like to see transparency of price reporting throughout the supply chain, to enable us to make better decisions across that area. As you will perhaps hear later from me, we have been working closely with the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board and Hybu Cig Cymru on levy repatriation work. We think there is a lot of work that we could build on across the three nations, if not the four nations.

**Q175 George Eustice:** When the current design of the CAP was brought in, I remember a lot of concern in Scotland, including from NFU Scotland, farmers and the Government, that area-based payments did not work in such a landscape—that the diversity between the lowlands and the moorlands made it highly problematic for an area-based-only payment to work. Mr Burgess, are you saying that, although you might try to simplify the legacy CAP scheme around the edges, you still think that a basic CAP subsidy on land tenure is the right approach?

**George Burgess:** The Scottish Government’s approach through the “Stability and Simplicity” consultation is that, for the period from now until 2024, we will essentially retain the features of the current CAP system with some scope for simplification, improvement and piloting. Beyond that, we are open to looking at a more radical reform of the policy. That is the approach we are taking through our future policy group, which includes representatives from the farming industry, food production and environmental groups, so that is the forum for considering the longer-term changes in Scotland. Whether it retains area-based payments or moves to some other system, or a combination of the two, remains to be seen.

**Jonnie Hall:** I support that, in the sense that area-based payments are far too blunt and do not deliver the objectives that we all aspire to, not only in supporting agricultural incomes and productivity but in addressing challenges such as climate change, biodiversity and so on.

The sooner we move to an approach that is more action-based than area-based, the better. However, we are in alignment with the Scottish Government in the sense that from 2021 onwards, we will be venturing into uncharted territory in many ways, given the changes in our operating environment, trading issues and other areas. The ability to retain direct income support that offers some stability in the interim is key. We are absolutely in alignment about change, but the key questions are about the pace of that change and how we manage it.

We note with interest what is happening in England and the Bill's proposals for phasing out direct support. Of course, that would be inappropriate and inapplicable in a Scottish context, so we need the devolved capacity to do things differently. The direction of travel is very much the same and the landing space is probably the same as well, but we have to consider the pace of that change and recognise the challenges and issues that are particularly pertinent to Scottish agriculture.

**Q176 George Eustice:** We have set out in this Bill a seven-year transition for England, from 2021 to 2028. I suppose it is possible that the Scottish Government might say, "We will keep the current system with a few minor simplifications until 2024", but then ditch it overnight and go straight in one leap to a new system. Do you envisage a sharper transition than seven years, or have the Scottish Government made clear that they will definitely not do things faster than seven years?

**George Burgess:** No, I do not think so. The Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Bill, which implements the stability and simplicity approach for the period between now and 2024, is currently before the Scottish Parliament. I have mentioned the future policy group, which aims to bring forward proposals by the summer of this year. That is the point when we will begin looking at the transition—things that may be piloted between now and 2024—so we are definitely not looking at a sharp cliff-edge transition in 2024.

Hopefully within that time period, we will gain a clearer understanding of our trading regime with Europe and the rest of the world. At the moment, it is frankly quite hard to work out what we should be doing with sectors such as sheepmeat, given that we do not know what the situation with our largest export markets will be.

**Jonnie Hall:** A number of interests in Scotland have suggested that there should be a sunset clause in the piece of legislation that Mr Burgess has referred to, so that it comes to a definitive end in 2024. However, we would not agree with that, because it would potentially create a cliff edge where we would go off the stability elements that we have talked about and into the unknown. We want to avoid that; we need to be able to adjust to and reflect on the circumstances of the time, and it is right that the Scottish Government have the ability to do so under the legislation that is going through the Scottish Parliament.

**Q177 Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab):** Good afternoon. I think Mr Clarke alluded to this point briefly earlier, but I will ask all of you, as I have asked most of the witnesses: what effect do you think allowing imports of food produced to lower environmental welfare and health standards will have on Scottish consumers and producers and, most of all, on the Scottish environment?

**Alan Clarke:** It would be a disaster for the Scottish red meat industry. The Scots were pioneers of quality assurance. Scotland was the first country in the world to set up whole of life, whole of supply chain quality assurance, and that gives a unique selling point to our world-class products of Scotch beef PGI, Scotch lamb PGI and specially selected pork. For any diluted product to come to market and be able to compete directly—as far as I am concerned, that has no place on the supermarket shelves.

**George Burgess:** I suspect you will find a very large measure of agreement at this table. The Scottish Government are very concerned at the prospect that future trade agreements could allow for a dilution of standards.

**Jonnie Hall:** It is also worth adding that the produce of Scotland—commodities is the wrong word—is not about, "Stack it high, sell it low." We are not going to compete on world markets. We are not a volume producer. We are based on the authenticity and the provenance of our product, and the welfare standards and environmental standards behind that. If we expose Scottish agriculture to cheaper imports of substandard production methods and so on, we will blow large sections of Scottish agriculture out of the water. That will have significant impacts on the agricultural industry itself, but also, more importantly, on the wider issues around rural communities and the environment and habitats that Scottish agriculture underpins with its extensive grazing systems and so on.

**Q178 Daniel Zeichner:** Paragraph 21 of the written evidence from NFU Scotland touches on the complicated question of the governance of common frameworks. We had the same discussion with representatives from Wales this morning. How do you see a way forward on that? It seems that divergence is inevitable at some point, and yet it needs to be managed.

**Jonnie Hall:** It is quite clear, in many ways, in the sense that the development and delivery of agricultural schemes and policy, in terms of what outcomes we want to achieve from managing our land in an agricultural sense, should absolutely be devolved, and is today. However, when you are looking at the operation of the internal UK market, we need to be able to operate to the same rules in a very transparent and open way across the United Kingdom.

Our worry and concern is that a lot of the discussions from outside of the Government appear to be about common frameworks, but we are unsighted on that. We are not seeing what common frameworks might look like. More important to me is the governance of those common frameworks going forward. Like or loathe the European Commission, at least it acted as some sort of referee when it came to compliance with regulation, standards and so on across member states and within the UK. If we are going to preserve the internal UK market, as Alan Clarke has pointed out is so important to Scottish agriculture, we need to ensure that we are all playing to the same rulebook on a whole range of issues. We are unsighted on an awful lot of that. We are still trying to flush out of Governments—plural—the actions and discussions that are going on.

**Q179 Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con):** I do not know whether I need to restate my interests—I once worked for the UK farming unions, including NFU Scotland—but I will do so, to be on the safe side.

**The Chair:** I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady. We are halfway through and a number of Members want to ask questions, so I would be grateful if you could be short and precise.

**Fay Jones:** Certainly. Mr Hall, your counterparts in Wales are happy with the pace at which the Welsh Government are bringing forward their equivalent Agriculture Bill. Are you content with the pace of the Scottish Government?

**Jonnie Hall:** If anything, we would like the pace to be a wee bit quicker. As I said earlier, we recognise that we are all venturing into an unknown world, in terms of the operating environment in which we will find ourselves, so it is probably more pragmatic not to give ourselves distinct deadlines. I mentioned the proposal for a sunset clause in the current legislation, which might suggest a deadline for new policy to be put in place for the longer term. We do not want to be a hostage to fortune on that. Certain sectors of Scottish agriculture might find it particularly bumpy in 2021, 2022 and possibly 2023. We want to see change happen sooner rather than later, but let us not push ourselves into a situation where we must accept change but that change does not take us in the right direction.

**Q180 Fay Jones:** Correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding is that the Scottish Government still maintain a headage payment system, particularly for the beef sector. Would that sort of measure remain on the table as you design a future agricultural policy?

**Jonnie Hall:** We have had a beef calf payment since 2005 under the CAP. There are strict rules on how much money can be spent on that. It is about how important the suckler herd is to the socioeconomic fabric of rural Scotland. It certainly has not driven production, because suckler cow numbers have continued to decline over that period. If anything, it has slowed the decline down, so I would not call it a production support. It recognises the additional cost of suckler production in our hills, in particular, and therefore it is a very important piece of the policy toolkit. It enables the retention of suckler beef in Scotland, and that has significant implications further downstream and into the supply chain, as I am sure Alan Clarke would agree.

**Alan Clarke:** Absolutely.

**Q181 Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): We do not have much time, so could you let us know quickly the main areas you have concerns with in the Bill? You have expressed some of them—governance frameworks is one, of course, Jonnie. One of the things that was brought up was the livestock information provision. An organisation is being set up, and this morning our Welsh counterparts expressed real concern about that. They said that that section of the Bill rang alarm bells and raised important operational issues about whether this could indeed be overseen and directed through England, through the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. That is a starting point, but are there any other areas of the Bill that you have concerns about?

**Jonnie Hall:** In our evidence we cite a number of areas. If you look at the Scottish Bill going through the Scottish Parliament and the Bill that you are considering

now, there are clear overlaps, not just on animal traceability issues but marketing standards and other things. Many of those issues are devolved, but our concern goes back to the operation of the internal UK market. It is quite right that those things are devolved, but how do we ensure that there is consistency in application of those devolved issues across the United Kingdom? If there is not consistency, there has to be at least co-ordination of those things. It is right that the capacities are devolved. It is right that the Scottish Bill is doing what it does and the UK Bill does what it does, but it is about where those things might rub together to create problems in the UK internal market. There are a number of examples in there. *[Interruption.]* I am not saying that it will happen, but we need to have consistency if not co-ordination across the UK.

**George Burgess:** From the Scottish Government's perspective, the Bill is something of a curate's egg. The provisions that we like include the red meat levy provision, which we played a large part in developing at the outset. We very much welcome that, and we would like to see a commitment from the UK Government to its swift implementation.

Other provisions in the Bill on food security and fertilisers make a great deal of sense, but we have some difficulties with others, including the livestock information provision, which has already been mentioned. Again, the concern is really about governance and the appropriate role of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Governments.

Similarly, the organics clause to some extent recognises devolved competences, but we are concerned about the power that is given to the Secretary of State to act in devolved areas without seeking the consent of the Scottish Parliament. Other concerns of long standing from the previous Bill relate to producer organisations, the World Trade Organisation agreement on agriculture, and fair dealing in supply chains, where we have a very different view on devolved competence from DEFRA.

**Alan Clarke:** I will pick two, Deidre, because I am conscious of time. In relation to the LIP system that we talked about, I think there has always been a history, if there has ever been a disease breakout, that everybody has worked extremely well together and come together and shared all the information. I think it is important that that is retained and that anything that is developed in England must read across to the rest of the UK. ScotEID, again, has been leading the way on that in Scotland. There must be those links. I know the meetings happen regularly every month with the devolved associations and the developers of it, but the mechanism that George talked about is one to consider.

The second issue is levy repatriation. I have been working very closely with AHDB and HCC towards getting a scheme of operation, which can be put to Ministers, showing what the long-term solution for levy repatriation would look like. We have identified, using that scheme, the numbers involved. It would mean that every year, £1.2 million of producer levy that is currently trapped in England would come back to Scotland, and £1.1 million of Welsh levy currently trapped in England would come back to Scotland—to Wales. Apologies—Wyn will not forgive me for that one. Essentially, the scheme has been agreed by the three levy bodies. It has now

gone to each of the boards, and we hope to be in a position to put that to the Ministers in a short period of time.

Behind the scenes, we have been looking at the interim solution of the ring-fenced fund—the £2 million that has been ring-fenced for the benefit of levy payers in England, Wales and Scotland. We hope to make an announcement in the next few weeks on greater working relationships between the three levy bodies. This gives us a really good opportunity. We would like to see a date put into the Agriculture Bill to say when the legislation must be passed and the scheme be in operation by. The three levy bodies are working to a date of 1 April 2021 for a long-term solution to be in place, meaning that this is the last operational year of the ring-fenced fund that we will be coming into in April. It would be nice to have that enshrined in law.

**Q182 Mr Robert Goodwill** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): On Tuesday, we had evidence from Jake Fiennes, the general manager for conservation for the Holkham Estate. In his view, the definition of livestock in clause 1 should not be extended to game—to grouse, pheasant or venison, such as the excellent produce produced in Scotland. Do you agree with that observation, or do you think that the management of game and financial help from the taxpayer for those sorts of landscapes would be beneficial to the future of agriculture in Scotland?

**Jonnie Hall:** First, I do not think the likes of game—pheasant, grouse and, indeed, wild deer, because we have farmed deer as well—should be governed as agricultural activity. The husbandry is not the same. They are wild animals. The habitat may be managed in their interests, but nevertheless they are not livestock that are bought, sold and managed in the same way as cattle, sheep, pigs and so on, so I do not see the benefit of that.

I do see, particularly in the Scottish context, the benefits of multiple land use in the same vicinity—the same land—such as having grouse moor management and managing wild deer populations in the interests of conservation, as much as in the interests of stalking and venison, alongside extensive grazing systems for the delivery of key habitats. That is one thing, but we will also be thinking increasingly about the preservation and restoration of our peatlands in the effort to tackle climate change. Grazing management will become a more fundamental issue—and extensive grazing management in Scotland—specifically for its public benefits and public good delivery, rather than just the production of an agricultural product.

That debate is an important one, but at this moment in time I do not view those things as agricultural activities. They can be supported through other means, because they are essentially environmental delivery mechanisms as well.

**Q183 Dave Doogan** (Angus) (SNP): Given the broader ambitions of this Bill, and that which is going through the Scottish Parliament at the hands of the Scottish Government, how seriously do you view the potential for any checks on agricultural commerce between Scotland and Northern Ireland, in terms of how that affects crofters, farmers and processors?

**Jonnie Hall:** Again, at the risk of repeating myself, the preservation of the internal UK market is vital to the interests of Scottish agriculture. Alan Clarke mentioned

some statistics about red meat. Our most important market is the rest of the UK, but we want to grow markets beyond that. I have often referred to the spending power within the M25, where we are sitting right now, as our bread and butter. That remains key, so we are very mindful of anything that rubs against the free flow of not just finished agricultural produce, but livestock. If I were a beef producer in the Scottish borders and wanted to buy a bull from Northumberland, I would not think it a smart move to operate different animal traceability systems and have all sorts of checks and balances at Berwick. In theory, that could be the outcome if we do not get these pieces of legislation to align.

**Q184 Dave Doogan:** What I was trying to get at was the particular role of trade between Scotland and NI, and the implications of any kind of impediment to that free movement. We are not going to have that between Scotland and England, or between Scotland and Wales, but we potentially will with NI. How big a deal is that for Scottish agriculture?

**Jonnie Hall:** I do not think it is a huge deal for produce leaving Scotland and going to Northern Ireland, but it is a very big issue for Northern Irish colleagues, who obviously want to access markets in GB—the rest of the UK. That is a real conundrum, in the sense that regulatory alignment with the EU will clearly be a vital issue on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. If that has implications for regulatory alignment with the rest of the UK and the EU, I can foresee lots of headaches and issues with that.

From what I see, we are moving more and more towards the potential of triangular trading agreements between ourselves, the EU and non-EU countries—for example, those in North America. There clearly has to be some sort of tension point at some level, because the UK Government have made it clear that there will not be regulatory alignment with the EU, although there will be equivalence—whatever that might mean—in order to secure deals with non-EU countries. That puts in doubt or jeopardy our potential to trade both with the EU and with other countries at the same time. That is a major concern for us.

**The Chair:** I call Danny Kruger, and this will have to be the last question.

**Q185 Danny Kruger** (Devizes) (Con): I asked your Welsh counterparts this question this morning. Mr Hall, you talked about the transition from an area-based to an activity-based subsidy regime. There is also an outcome-based regime. I am interested in your view on the right principles that should guide us in designing a regime that has public good as its objective. Do you think we are sufficiently clear at this stage about whether farmers should be rewarded for what they do, or for what the outcomes of their work are?

**Jonnie Hall:** I think it is a very important point for the future direction of agricultural policy anywhere. I would say at the outset that blunt area payments reflect neither activity nor outcomes; they are simply a ticket to receive an income by declaring an area of land and doing some compliance. We really need to work on a system that recognises the actions that deliver an outcome; you then pay for the actions that deliver the outcomes you require. If it were exclusively about delivering outcomes, that is a very risky situation for farmers and crofters in

Scotland. We probably need a combination of both systems, and we are piloting various things in Scotland—for example, an outcome-based approach to agri-environment in different parts of the country.

It is about actions on climate change and so forth. How do we encourage more efficient production systems, soil management and extensive grazing systems? That is within the gift of the farmer or crofter. What is not in their gift is the precise outcome that we get from that. We might think that we will get the right outcome, but we do not 100% know. There are lots of forces at play in agricultural land management, and the risks need to be managed carefully. The key thing is to move away from area-based payments in the first place, with actions then delivering the outcomes and objectives that you want.

**The Chair:** Order. I am afraid that brings us to the end of this panel. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the witnesses for coming along this afternoon.

### Examination of Witness

*George Monbiot gave evidence.*

2.30 pm

**The Chair:** We will now hear evidence from George Monbiot. Welcome to the Committee. This panel will finish at 3 pm. Would you introduce yourself, please?

**George Monbiot:** Thank you. I am an environmental campaigner and journalist.

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I suppose it's down to me?

**The Chair:** Yes. The Minister has gone to see the Prime Minister.

**Q186 James Morris:** What do you think about the public good provisions in the Bill, and to what extent do you think they are correctly defined? Is there further scope for the definition of public good?

**George Monbiot:** I think it really important to tighten the definition and to stick with, basically, the classical definition of non-rivalrous and non-excludable. There is potential for slippage within the wording of the Bill, for example into food production that does not fit the definition. We should basically also be funding public goods that are additional and which are not going to be delivered anyway.

We should be very careful not to use subsidies as a substitute for regulation. There is a real danger in saying, "We will put all this on a voluntary basis and we will pay people to do the right thing," rather than saying, "You may not do the wrong thing." I feel that there have already been a lot of failures in monitoring and enforcement of cross-compliance under the current subsidy regime. If we are not careful, we could see those failures become a lot worse.

**Q187 Daniel Zeichner:** Good afternoon. Since the Bill was introduced a couple of years ago, the world has moved on in some ways. There is greater awareness of the challenge that we face, and the Government have conceded that there is a climate emergency. Do you think that the Bill is up to the task and, if you started with a blank sheet of paper, what would you do?

**George Monbiot:** One of my aims would be to reduce the area of land used for agriculture. All agriculture is a radical simplification of ecosystems, until you get to the point at which it is so extensive that it is not really agriculture. The Knepp Castle Estate, for example, is a wonderful example of rewilding, but I worked out that if we were to universalise that across much of the UK, we would need to cut our meat consumption by about 99.5%—that is not a great example of agriculture. Until you get to that level of extensification, you are really removing huge numbers of species and a huge amount of potential carbon storage that would otherwise be there.

In this country, we suffer grievously from what I call "agricultural sprawl"—large areas of land used to produce small amounts of food. It gets to the point at which, for instance, sheep farming in the uplands, according to my estimates, occupies roughly 4 million hectares—almost as much land as all our arable and horticultural production put together—yet produces roughly 1% of our food by calories and roughly 2% by protein. That is a remarkably wasteful use of land, which could be much better used for carbon storage through regeneration and rewilding, and for the great resuscitation of ecosystems and the recovery of our very put-upon wild species.

**Q188 Daniel Zeichner:** I have one additional question that has not come up very much. We talk about public goods and public money, but should there be some public voice in all this, for any decisions about what goes on locally? Where are the people in all this?

**George Monbiot:** That is a very good question. The Bill discusses both natural heritage and cultural heritage. Both are very important values and neither should be dismissed, but there is an assumption in a great deal of rural thinking in Britain that they are one and the same. We have to acknowledge that they are often in direct conflict. Maintaining sheep on the land is highly damaging to ecosystems, but getting rid of sheep farmers can be highly damaging to local cultures and languages. We have to see that a balance should be struck.

We have so often fudged the issue, the classic example being the world heritage bid in the Lake district, where they were assumed to be one and the same. It is always resolved in favour of farming, because farming is assumed to be good for ecosystems, but in the great majority of cases it is not—the best thing to do for an ecosystem is to withdraw farming from it. But because we do not acknowledge that there is a conflict, we do not produce a balance that ever favours wildlife.

**Q189 Mr Goodwill:** Mr Monbiot, you are on record as saying that

"farming is no longer essential to human survival".

In contradiction to what the Soil Association told us this morning—that we should have more mixed farming and more livestock, allowing soils to be improved by the use of natural manures—you suggest that we should abandon livestock production, particularly on the uplands, and plant trees and rewild large areas of our country. Is that a correct appraisal?

**George Monbiot:** That is broadly correct. One thing to say is that in the uplands there is almost no mixed farming. In fact, it would be very hard for mixed farming to be established in the uplands, which are very

unsuitable on the whole for arable. In the lowlands, if we were to reintroduce mixed farming, at the microlevel that could be a very good thing by comparison to the arable deserts of East Anglia, but we would see a major decline in total yield. There is very little research on what that decline would be, but everyone can more or less accept that we will see that decline.

The global conundrum we are in is that roughly half the global population is dependent on NPK, to put it crudely, and certainly on nitrogen and other artificial fertilisers. If we were to take those out of the system, we would have mass starvation—huge numbers of people would die. However, we are aware that applications of N, P and K and others are causing global disaster: they contribute significantly to climate breakdown, soil loss, downstream pollution, air pollution and a whole load of other issues. We cannot live with it and cannot live without it. We are in an astonishing and very difficult conundrum. If we were to switch—as the Soil Association recommends and as my instincts would tell us to do—to mixed rotation or organic farming, we would not be able to produce enough food. It is as simple as that.

How do we get out of that conundrum? I see some hope in factory-produced food—microbial protein and cultured meat. That could be the only way of reconciling environmental needs of future generations and the rest of life on Earth with the need to feed people alive today and in future. We need to find ways of feeding the planet without devouring it. That could be the way.

**Q190 Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab):** Could we talk about peatlands? You have been very involved in trying to make the case for the restoration of peatlands and their role as a natural climate solution. Do you think more can be done in the Bill to encourage their being left alone?

**George Monbiot:** I do not know whether this would fit in the remit of the Bill, but I would certainly favour banning driven grouse shooting, which is a major cause of peatland erosion. I would look at the strongest possible measures we could introduce for the restoration of blanket bogs. I would, at the very least, commission new research into the impact of agriculture on peatlands, and whether we are better off without agriculture on peatlands in terms of the carbon budget.

There is a paper in *Food Policy* by Durk Nijdam that points out the extraordinary levels of carbon opportunity cost on Welsh farms with high organic soils. He talks in some cases of 640 kg of carbon per kilogram of lamb protein, as a result of the lost opportunity to protect those organic soils, which is a result of farming continuing there. It would be far better in carbon terms not to farm soils, if his research is replicable.

**Q191 Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con):** I am interested in your view that we should be looking at reducing farming land usage. As we leave our present farming relationships due to Brexit, is this not a time of national need when we must preserve our acreage to feed our growing population? I am asking whether you have a political slant that is not directed at feeding the nation and securing the interests of our home farmers and workers. Is it not fanciful to think that we should give up a large amount of our acreage? Do we not need it to save us against the trials and tribulations of the post-Brexit world?

**George Monbiot:** There are a lot of things we need to save ourselves from at the moment, and the most urgent is climate breakdown and ecological breakdown. Huge tracts of this land are scarcely feeding us at all. There are very large areas of land where you have one sheep per hectare, per 2 hectares or, in some places, per 5 hectares. That is not producing food in any appreciable amount, yet that land could be used to draw down large amounts of carbon, to stop the sixth great extinction in its tracks, for the restoration of wildlife and ecosystems, or to prevent flooding. There is a whole load of ecological goods—public goods—that that land could be delivering, but it is not currently delivering them, because it is producing tiny amounts of food instead. We are probably all against urban sprawl and believe it is a bad thing because it takes up huge amounts of land while delivering not many services for the people who live in a sprawling city. We should be equally concerned about agricultural sprawl, which takes up far more land.

**Q192 Miss Dines:** With respect, what do I say to my farmers in the Derbyshire dales, where, by necessity, the land is good only for sheep in some areas? Do I tell them they should not be able to earn a living and feed the country? It is a bit fanciful to think we can give up huge tracts of land. Is it not the case that we will get the best outcome if farmers work in conjunction with places such as the Peak park authority?

**George Monbiot:** I would characterise the Peak park as an ecological disaster area. It is remarkable how little wildlife there is. You can walk all day and see just a handful of birds; I will see more in a suburban garden. We need a completely different approach to managing land like that.

What you can tell the farmers is, “Let’s pay you to do something completely different, such as restoration, rewilding, bringing back the missing species or bringing back the trees.” Where are the trees above around 200 metres in the Peak district and, indeed, most of the uplands of Britain? They simply are not there. This is a disaster. Anyone who visits from another country—someone from Brazil or Indonesia, my friends, tropical forest ecologists—says, “What’s happened here?” They see these places we call our national parks and say, “How can you call that a national park? It’s a sheep ranch.”

By all means let us keep people on the land, but let us use public money to pay them to do something completely different. Let us face it: there would not be any hill farming in this country without public money. It is a loss-making exercise. If we, the public, are going to pay for it, I think we, the public, have a right to determine what we are paying for. We should be paying for public goods, not public harms.

**Q193 Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab):** Hi George. There has been a lot of publicity about the carbon footprints of different types of food. For example, 1 kg of vegetables produces approximately 2 kg of carbon dioxide, whereas 1 kg of beef produces about 27 kg of carbon dioxide. Do you think the Bill should go a step further and focus on those who produce foodstuffs with low carbon footprints rather than those who produce foodstuffs with higher carbon footprints?

**George Monbiot:** I think this should be the perspective through which we start to see everything. This is the greatest crisis humanity has ever faced: the breakdown

of our life-support systems. The Governments that will be judged favourably by future generations are those that put that issue front and centre. Other things are subsidiary to our survival. It is imperative that we should start favouring a low-carbon diet and use public policy to disfavour a high-carbon diet. Whether through farm subsidies—I think that does play a role—or meat taxes, which I think could also play a role, we should find all the instruments possible to steer and encourage people to reduce the environmental impacts of their diets.

The most important metric here is what scientists call carbon opportunity costs, which is basically, “What could you be doing on that land if you weren’t doing this?” If, for instance, you are producing beef or lamb on this piece of land, what is the carbon opportunity cost of that? What would be the carbon storage if, instead, trees and wild habitats were allowed to return? There has been some new research just published, or a new compilation of research, on Our World in Data showing that when you look at the carbon opportunity costs, those of beef and lamb are massively greater than those of anything else we eat. It is really, really huge. Even when you take food miles into account, they are tiny by comparison to those carbon costs, and that is what we should focus on.

**Q194 Danny Kruger:** I have one yes/no question and then a slightly fuller question. The yes/no question is, did you say that we should take food production out of the Bill? Food production is something that has been added, as an objective of the new system, and I think you said that it should not be an objective of the Bill.

**George Monbiot:** It should certainly not be linked to the public goods agenda; it should not be seen as a public good.

**Q195 Danny Kruger:** It should not be seen as a public good. Okay. Thank you.

My next question is this: do you agree that a grass-fed cattle herd on open pasture in Wiltshire has a net positive effect in terms of carbon capture? I appreciate that you have an argument about opportunity costs—missed opportunities from grazing—but the terrible carbon impact of beef is because of intensively farmed, closely packed cattle—

**George Monbiot:** No, that is not true at all.

**Q196 Danny Kruger:** However, a good pasture-fed, grass-fed cattle herd has a net positive effect in terms of carbon. Do you not agree?

**George Monbiot:** No, that is simply not true. That claim has been made many times, and it is now basically reaching the level of climate denial—climate science denial—because it is so far removed from what the science base actually tells us.

I can pass the papers on to you if you wish. There has been a meta-study done by the Food Climate Research Network that looked at those claims. It investigated 300 sources and found that in none of the cases that it looked at was carbon sequestration in the soil under pasture compensating for carbon losses. The highest level of compensation was 20% to 60% of the overall carbon losses; there is a net loss in every case. The extensive grazing systems also have a higher net loss and a higher carbon opportunity cost than even the intensive grain-fed systems.

There is a paper by Balmford et al in *Nature*, I believe. There is another one by Blomqvist et al—I think it is in *Science of the Total Environment*. They show that, paradoxically—unexpectedly, perhaps—intensive systems per kilo of beef produced are less carbon-damaging than extensive systems per kilo, and that is simply because of the amount of land that they occupy.

**Q197 Deidre Brock:** You were speaking just then about the conflict between natural heritage and cultural heritage, and you will know that the highlands in Scotland still have a wonderful cultural heritage, despite what was at times a quite systematic depopulation of the area. I wondered what sort of future you envisage for the people who live there now if they turn from being farmers on the uplands, which, as you know, are basically largely suitable for rough grazing—that is one of the reasons why sheep, and to a lesser extent cattle, are grazed there. If they do that, what do they then become? Just on a practical, day-to-day level, what do they then become—just land managers, because they get subsidies for food production, which only supplements part of their income? What do those people do, and how do we keep them there so that we still have communities in the highlands?

**George Monbiot:** I would see them as ecological restorers—people who have a different but very rich relationship with the land, bringing back wildlife and ecosystems. We would hopefully see a constant racking-up of ambition as time goes by.

It is hard to universalise it, but there is now quite a big literature on nature-based economies, showing that, certainly in some circumstances, they can employ a lot more people than farm-based economies, even in quite fertile areas. For instance, I was at Gelderse Poort in the Netherlands last year, in an area that was previously dairy and maize farms. For the purposes of creating more room for the river, the dykes were taken a mile or so back from the river and the land was rewilded. The farmers were saying there would be a loss of employment. In fact, it turns out that there was an increase of between five and six times the total employment as a result of the tourists who have come in to see the wildlife, the bed and breakfasts, the cafes and the rest of the things associated with that. The farmers have done very well out of it.

I do not know the answer to whether we can replicate that everywhere, but we should be urgently investigating other new rural economies based around the restoration of wildlife and nature. Given that we are competing here with a loss-making economy—an economy where the farmers would make more money if they took the subsidy and stopped farming—it is not a very steep competition that we have to win if we are to show that nature-based economies are more productive in terms of employment and income.

**Q198 Fay Jones:** My farmers would argue that food production and environmental delivery go hand in hand, and you cannot have one without the other. They would not be able to make any money if they did not have good soil, clean air and clean water, and they are responsible for maintaining that. If we did adopt your model of removing land from agricultural production, who would be responsible for ensuring those environmental benefits? Who would be safeguarding that?

**George Monbiot:** Yes, how did nature survive before humans came along? It is extraordinary, this idea of stewardship and dominion—this idea that humankind has to intervene to protect wildlife and ecosystems. We do not. We can do a lot to encourage the protection and to kick-start things, and we will always need a role as rangers to ensure that there are not too many conflicts between people and ecosystems. However, the idea that we are necessary to create healthy soils and healthy ecosystems—the best thing we can do in the great majority of cases is to remove extractive economies from the land and to let ecosystems recover. We need to bring back missing species, to take down fences, to kick-start woodland in places where there is not a seedbank left and stuff like that, but we need very little human intervention to get a healthy ecosystem going. While farmers are absolutely right to say that they need a healthy ecosystem to sustain their farming, we do not need farming to sustain a healthy ecosystem.

**Q199 Dave Doogan:** Mr Monbiot, there is a significant difference between your ambitions and the ambitions of the Bill and agriculture more generally. If you were to get free rein with one element of the Bill—some operational amendment that you could make to the Bill, rather than a theoretical one—what would it be, and how would you achieve it?

**George Monbiot:** I think it would be a clear distinction between the additionality that public payments for public goods could produce and the regulatory environment. I am not skilled in framing policy, but basically we need to lay down a distinction between, “Here is the list of things that you as a steward of the land are expected to do. That will be a matter of regulation with monitoring and enforcement. For most of those things, you will not get paid,” and, “Here are the additional things that are not being done anyway, for which you will be paid if you do them.” Quite how you draft it to deliver that, I am not sure. Is that a clear enough answer?

**Dave Doogan:** In terms of those things that you would have them do, are these elements of rewilding or some form of carbon—

**George Monbiot:** Rewilding, carbon storage, watershed restoration—there is a whole series of additional ecological interventions that you could consider that would clearly fit the notion of public goods, but I worry when I see things like, “Animal welfare will attract public payments.” Surely animal welfare should be something that we legislate for. Hopefully we legislate for ever higher animal welfare standards.

**Q200 Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con):** I apologise, perhaps Mr Zeichner planned to ask this, as he is an east of England MP, but I found your description of the east of England as an arable desert slightly confusing, having grown up there. It is better known as Britain’s breadbasket, so I wonder how you came to that conclusion.

**George Monbiot:** It can be both. It can be highly productive in producing a handful of crop species and deserted in terms of wildlife. There are large areas of arable land, particularly in East Anglia, where there is little wildlife. We see a lot of nitrate pollution, soil erosion and water pollution. It is not in a good ecological state, even though, thanks to lashings of NPK and lots of pesticides, we are producing a lot of food there.

We must recognise that what is great on one metric is not so great on another. The attempt to pretend that they are one and the same—that agriculture is good for ecosystems and that the more we have, the better it will be for ecosystems—clouds this whole debate. There is an inherent conflict between an extractive economy, which simplifies ecosystems, and the complex, rich ecosystems, with food webs that are both wide and deep, which an ecologist like me wants to see.

**Q201 Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab):** George, Parliament has declared a climate emergency since the last agriculture Bill. What changes can you see in this Bill that deliver the urgent action needed?

**George Monbiot:** I am afraid I have not seen changes commensurate with the declaration of a climate emergency. This should be front and centre. An emergency is an emergency. We should be maximising mitigation and absorption of carbon from the atmosphere. The Paris agreement asks us for the greatest possible ambition; we do not see that in the Agriculture Bill.

**Q202 Nadia Whittome:** I have a quick supplementary question. How far does this Bill go in doing that?

**George Monbiot:** The public goods agenda is something useful that we can build on. It is a massive improvement on the common agricultural policy, but it must be much more explicit about what public goods are. Carbon storage, as a metric, must run throughout it like a stick of rock, but also ecological restoration—we do not want to make it just about carbon. We want to maximise the recovery of wildlife and ecosystems, which are in such a dire state in this country.

It must be recognised that the ecological difference between farming and not farming, particularly in the uplands, is far greater than the ecological difference between, say, BPS sheep farming and HLS sheep farming, which is very small in ecological terms. Having a cessation of farming in those areas, bringing back many of the missing species and having an ecosystem dominated by trees and other thick vegetation would be massively better, in terms of both carbon and ecology, than a modification of farming in those places.

**The Chair:** A very brief question from Theo Clarke.

**Q203 Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con):** Thank you. Farmers are at the forefront of climate change and, I think, do a huge amount to help conserve the countryside. Do you think that farmers and land managers should be financially supported to deliver environmental improvements, or should it just be required by regulation?

**George Monbiot:** As I say, we should distinguish between environmental improvements and not doing harm. I do not think we should be offering payments for not beating up old ladies. That is the way I see it. Lots of people do not do bad things in society, but they do not get paid for refraining from doing bad things. Keeping soil on your land should be a regulatory requirement. We should not have to pay people to do that; we should say, “You are not allowed to destroy our natural heritage in that way.” But we should pay for bringing in ecosystems that do not currently exist.

**The Chair:** Order. That brings us to the end of this session. On behalf of the Committee, I thank you for your evidence. I apologise to those members of the

Committee who would have liked to ask questions. You have answered more questions per minute in half an hour than anybody else. Thank you very much.

### Examination of Witness

*Professor Bill Keevil gave evidence.*

3 pm

**The Chair:** We will now hear oral evidence from Professor Bill Keevil from the University of Southampton. We have until 3.30 pm. Will you introduce yourself, please?

**Professor Keevil:** Good afternoon. I am Professor Bill Keevil, professor of environmental healthcare. I head the microbiology group at the University of Southampton.

**Q204 James Morris:** The Bill makes provision for Ministers to report periodically on food security. What do you think about that? What other food security measures might you want to see?

**Professor Keevil:** To my mind, food security is the supply of wholesome, nutritious, safe food. Within that the key issue is safety. There has been a lot of discussion this afternoon about whether the UK can provide its own food. If it does not, we have to rely on imports. What is the veracity of checking the safety of those imports?

We made a short written submission to the national food survey—it may have been circulated to you—in which we talked about the microbiological safety of food, particularly from the processing point of view. It deals in particular with the chlorination of food, which has become a very contentious issue in how the UK sees its future trading relationship with countries that use that practice. Currently, the UK follows EU law, with the standing position being that they dislike chlorinating food. Their perspective is not that chlorination poses a toxic chemical risk if you ingest the food; they are more concerned about animal husbandry. As a microbiologist, I would go further and ask the question that most people have ignored until now: does chlorine actually work? Our published research shows that, in fact, it does not.

For more than 100 years, we have relied on the gold standard of examining a sample from patients, the environment or food by culturing it and growing samples in a Petri dish on a nutritious agar medium. If anything grows, something is still alive; if nothing grows, by that definition, everything must be dead. Our research and that of other groups around the world shows that that is not true; it tells us that the current methods of analysis, which help us set the standards, are not rigorous enough. We have to use modern molecular and biochemical methods, which are available, but which, by and large, have not been adopted so far.

**Q205 Daniel Zeichner:** Good afternoon, Professor Keevil. When I came to this debate a few weeks ago and started reading about it, I found the apparently contradictory claims about the safety of the various systems confusing. I was struck by your evidence, and I wondered if you could take us through it. You say at one point that it is difficult to make comparisons, but I must say that in most of our debates people make comparisons with huge amounts of confidence, depending on which side of the debate they are on. You also say

that the USA reports that 14.7% of its population contracts a food-borne illness annually, while in the UK the figure is 1.5%. Could you amplify that?

**Professor Keevil:** As you rightly say, when we look at the data, depending on the source, it can be difficult to interpret because of the way it is recovered. For example, in the USA, they report on infections, some of which are assumed from the evidence they have available. If you look at the reporting of the numbers of pathogens in American produce, such as poultry, they report it in terms of the answer to the question, “Does the food contain more than”—for example—“400 counts of a pathogen per gram of food?” In the UK, the Food Standards Agency reports in terms of “low”, “medium” or “high”. National surveys such as sampling from supermarkets, for example, show that 50% of poultry have very low numbers of pathogens such as a salmonella; only about 5% or 6% have food samples with over 1,000 counts of a pathogen. By those criteria, UK foods appear to be safer—but, I must stress, according to those criteria.

As I say in the written evidence, we now have this vexed question of viable but non-culturable—VBNC—bacteria. When looking at some of the published data, it is very difficult to take that into account, but the work that we and other labs have done is now telling us that we cannot ignore it. We have published our work on chlorine treatment, but we have also looked at what happens when you stress a pathogen such as listeria by depriving it of nutrients. For example, in a factory where you are washing down with tap water, the listeria can still survive, and in those conditions it can become this VBNC form. If all you are doing is regular swabbing and then reporting, you could say, “Our factory is clear of listeria.” In fact, if we used the more modern methods, that might be found to be not true.

We are really talking not just about standards now, but the standards we should adopt in the future, both in the UK and in what we would expect other countries to adopt if we are going to import food from them.

**Q206 Mr Goodwill:** We occasionally hear of outbreaks of food poisoning, but this is the Agriculture Bill, which relates to food only once it passes the farm gate. To what extent is the problem within agriculture and to what extent is it in the transportation, processing, storage or preparation of food?

**Professor Keevil:** As you rightly to point out, it is very complex. We have to talk about the food chain, but let us look at the route which is the primary source of pathogen ingress into the food chain. To take the case of poultry, one of the issues is that some countries, including America, they have intensive rearing of poultry; they also have cattle feed lots, where animals are raised and fed in a dense community. In the UK and Europe, our husbandry standards appear to be better, poultry are reared in less intensive conditions and we do not have cattle in feed lots like the Americans do, so the animals have more space, they appear to be healthier and, from what we have seen so far, they have reduced numbers of pathogens at that stage.

Of course, you are quite correct that every step in the food chain is a potential source of contamination. If we use lorries, provided that those lorries are properly cleaned and decontaminated, that should not be an issue. When food is produced for restaurants, if the staff adopt good hygiene, they should not transmit pathogens

to the customers—that has been well documented. The supermarkets are very responsible; they have a reputation to maintain—they do not want to be seen as the supermarket that poisons their customers—so they maintain very high standards.

**Q207 Mr Goodwill:** So is food safer now than it was, say, 10 or 20 years ago, or do we have increasing problems?

**Professor Keevil:** That is a tough question, partly because all the time we are seeing pathogens emerging. For example, we have *E. coli* 0157, which not even been heard of 30 years ago. We have *Cryptosporidium*, which had not been heard of 25 years ago. We are being presented with new challenges all the time. If we look at the more conventional pathogens, however, such as salmonella, if anything British farming is doing a good job. Salmonella-contaminated eggs have virtually been eliminated under that scheme, and the quality of the poultry sold by supermarkets appears to be a lot better. These are good things.

**Q208 Abena Oppong-Asare:** The Bill attempts to support innovation, and you said that you like the idea that it is environmental and sustainable. What specifically would you like to see in the Bill to support innovation and help improve supply in this country?

**Professor Keevil:** The previous speaker was very concerned about the carbon footprint, and he rightly commented that the world needs NPK. The UK, if it needs NPK, has got to import it, and that means a very high carbon footprint from shipping, so that is in a way counter-intuitive.

For hundreds of years, the UK has been very good at crop rotation and the recycling of animal and human wastes. My research team has previously done work for DEFRA and the Food Standards Agency, looking at how safe composted animal manures and treated human wastes are. Our research shows that if they are treated properly, they can be recycled safely to land. That is a valuable source of NPK.

In terms of ecosystems and services, we are looking for balance and harmony. If anything, I would support more the view of the Soil Association. I think we can live in harmony, but we need to get that balance. For example, there has been a lot of concern about the availability of bees to fertilise plants. If everything was converted over to woodland, would we have sufficient banks of wildflowers to support essential insects to maintain the ecosystem? The plant life in the UK needs it; certainly, agriculture needs it. We need that balance. I think there is a role for farming in the UK.

On the impact on the environment, we still have green pleasant lands, and when you speak to visitors who come to the UK, a lot of them comment as they fly in that it is a pleasure to see well-kept farmland alongside woods, which I think is a good thing.

**Q209 Abena Oppong-Asare:** Am I correct in assuming that you are very much in favour of natural, organic farming? One of the things that I am concerned about, particularly in this Bill, is that there farmers are being subjected to a lot of expectations to deliver sustainably, and as you know that costs a lot of money. Do you feel that the Bill should provide more information or support, in terms of how people can do organic farming in a way

that is not going to affect us, particularly given the concerns about imported food, which will make it very difficult. Does that make sense?

**Professor Keevil:** Yes, it does. As a microbiologist, I support the safe production and supply of microbiologically safe food. One of the problems is that when we import food, there is a potential issue. If that means that that food is cheaper than what can be produced by UK farmers, the Bill must address that, because otherwise they could be at a financial disadvantage. The UK has always prided itself on quality, and I know that British farmers would like to maintain that reputation for quality. Perhaps the food they supply may be a little more expensive, but in a way that can be reassuring. If it means that the customer has to pay more, that is something that the Government have to look at within the Bill. When they talk about subsidies and remuneration, can it be facilitated that farmers who produce to the highest-quality standards are in some way remunerated for that?

**Q210 Danny Kruger:** You spoke about the physical method for dealing with listeria and salmonella and some of these new pathogens that are emerging. Can you give us your sense of the global architecture for managing this, and what prospects you see for new global agreements on how to deliver high-quality food hygiene? Does the opportunity we now have to be part of the global trade conversation give us the opportunity to improve global standards? What are the architecture and institutions, and what is your sense of where the leadership on this is coming from globally?

**Professor Keevil:** A lot of it is price driven, not surprisingly. Certain countries say, “We are in a competitive economy, and we believe we can supply food safely for a lower cost.” That is what our research and that of others is starting to challenge.

In terms of global supply, we talk a lot now about international jet travel. For example, we can travel around the world in 12 hours or what have you, hence the current problems with coronavirus, but many people forget about migratory birds. We know that some birds fly thousands of miles north and south, east and west. They can bring disease with them. That is partly why we have the problem of emerging diseases that we must be conscious of for the future. We have had concerns, for example, with avian flu and DEFRA maintained high surveillance of the farms where avian flu had an impact, to ensure that it did not decimate the poultry industry in the UK.

Those are all issues that we will have to face. We do not live in a sterile world. We have mass migration of people and particularly of wild birds. We must allow for that in all our farming practices and ecosystems services. I maintain that good husbandry practice is the way forward. The previous speaker mentioned factory production, and I agree with him in that very good supply chains are now being established for vegan burgers, much of which is produced from bacteria and fungi. That is a good thing.

Vertical farming is starting to become more prevalent. That is the horticulture where crops such as salads are grown in an aquaculture-based system, and everything is stacked up. We are now seeing very large factories where they control the quality of the water, the lighting regime and so on. That seems to be a very safe, nutritious

way to produce salads. In the winter the UK imports a lot of salads from the Mediterranean countries—we used to import a lot from Kenya, but I think that is reduced now. We used to import a lot from Florida and California, and that is a carbon footprint, but if we can do more vertical farming ourselves, particularly in the winter, that is a substitute. We can get this mix of what we might call modern biotechnology with more traditional farming.

**Q211 Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): In the Bill, there is a requirement to report on food security every five years. What are your thoughts on that timescale?

**Professor Keevil:** To my mind, every five years should be the minimum frequency. That is because, as I have said, we are continually beset with emerging diseases and we have to be able to respond rapidly. The Food Standards Agency reports much more regularly than that, so in a way we already have inbuilt mechanisms to supply the information. It is true that the Bill says it should be every five years as a minimum, but I think DEFRA and the food standards agencies report more frequently. Whether that should be incorporated within the Bill is up for discussion, but we have good reporting.

**Ruth Jones:** That is what I would like to have your opinion on, because obviously five years is a long time. Do you have any thoughts on the timescale? Would you make a recommendation?

**Professor Keevil:** I would like to see it reported much more frequently, every year or every two years.

**Q212 Miss Dines:** Professor Keevil, you make quite a bold statement in your briefing note about the 14.7% of the USA population getting food-borne illnesses every year, compared with only 1.5% in the UK. I want to ask you about your reference for that, because there is not a reference for the source of that information. That brings me on to a general question. It is quite clear that there could be a variety of other reasons for that: it could be bad storage, bad travel or bad food preparation or cooking. How reliable is this sort of statistic in a climate where we are facing going into new agreements with other countries? How reliable is that sort of information?

**Professor Keevil:** That is a good question, because you will get different metrics if you go to different sources. What we tried to do with those numbers was look at the annual reporting by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. You will find the information on their website. A lot of the agencies say, “Well, these are the numbers of actual reports that we have received,” for example, through people going to hospital, to their GP and so forth, and then they apply a multiplication factor for the numbers who could have been affected but for whom the signs of disease are much less—people who do not report that they have had any disease. A lot of the information is based on those types of numbers—for example, 14% of Americans do not report to a doctor to say they have had food poisoning—but they are extrapolated. As I say, you will get different metrics depending on your source. It could be that the figure in the UK is more than 1.5%, but I do not think it is anywhere near what the Americans have extrapolated.

**Q213 Kerry McCarthy:** We mentioned clause 17 on food security, which is new to this edition of the Bill. Do you think there is scope for an extra provision?

It talks about looking at global food availability, supply sources and resilience of the supply chain. In terms of your speciality, there is a lot of concern about endocrine disruptors in food, nitrates in meat, and the overuse of antibiotics, which affects human health, through the food chain. Do you think there should be reports to Parliament on food security? It is not really about food poisoning, but about the wider health concerns about what is getting into our food supply.

**Professor Keevil:** As I said at the start, the issue is very complex because food security is not just about supply; it is about whether it is nutritious, wholesome and safe. You cannot separate one from the other, so we have to be aware of the microbiological safety of the food that is being produced and consumed. The work that we and others have done shows us that our current methods of assessing safety are not adequate. That has to be recognised. As a scientist, I would always say we need more research done; I sincerely believe we do in this particular case. Knowledge improves standards, and we have to adopt and enforce the highest standards. We need better research and continual reassessment of what we are being challenged with, and perhaps the Bill can reflect that.

**The Chair:** It seems we have no more questions. Professor Keevil, on behalf of the Committee, I thank you for your time and answers this afternoon.

#### Examination of Witnesses

*Diana Holland and Jyoti Fernandes gave evidence.*

3.24 pm

**The Chair:** We will now hear oral evidence from Unite and the Landworkers’ Alliance. We have until 4 pm. Welcome. Would you introduce yourselves?

**Diana Holland:** I am Diana Holland, Unite’s assistant general secretary, with responsibility for food, drink and agriculture. We are the only union that represents agricultural workers directly, as the historical Agricultural Workers Union is part of Unite.

**Jyoti Fernandes:** I am Jyoti Fernandes. I am a farmer in Dorset and president of the Landworkers’ Alliance, which is a union for small and family farms, mixed farms, market gardeners and community supported farms.

**The Chair:** Thank you. The acoustics in the room are poor, so it would be helpful if you raised your voice.

**Q214 James Morris:** Diana Holland, in your submission you say that you think the Bill should have measures about pay conditions for agricultural workers. What do you think those measures should be, and why would the Bill, as drafted, be the most appropriate vehicle for them?

**Diana Holland:** The measures we were thinking about have previously been raised in a number of submissions: first, looking at the impact of the Bill on workers in agriculture, and secondly, looking specifically at the reinstatement of the protections of the Agricultural Wages Board, which currently exists, in some form, in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but not in England.

Why do we think that is important? We do not think that agricultural workers are like every other worker; we think that they are different and their experiences are different. As a union with an incredibly long history of representing them, we speak from experience. They have a special place in the union, and we think that they should have a special place in the Agriculture Bill, too.

Right this moment, the director of labour market enforcement has a session going on to look specifically at the problems of wage theft and employment law non-compliance in agriculture. The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority has had a licensing system in agriculture for 15 years, but it is still recognised as an area with a high level of exploitation and threat of exploitation. That is the background to this.

When the Agricultural Wages Board covered everywhere, there was a level of protection and information that is no longer available to us. Increasingly, you will find that statistics relating to agriculture have little stars by them and a note at the bottom saying, “The sample figures are too small.” That does not mean that there are no other workers to record; it means that they are not hitting any of the official ways of recording people. Increasingly, we find that people are employed in different ways, meaning that they are not recognised in the official statistics in the way they used to be. The Agricultural Wages Board provided a way of ensuring that all that information came to the forefront.

Finally, we have always argued that safe, healthy food and high-quality jobs go hand in hand. There is lots of evidence that where workers are badly treated, there is also an undercutting of food quality standards across the board. We see this as part of ensuring and protecting food standards, food security, supply chains and all the other issues in the Bill. They all have workers associated with them, and we think they should be included and recognised.

**Q215 Daniel Zeichner:** Good afternoon to you both. We have heard from a lot of witnesses, but this is possibly the first time we have actually heard about the people who work on the land, which is why it is very important that you are here. How could the things that you are looking for be incorporated into the Bill?

**Diana Holland:** There are a couple of ways. One would obviously be an additional clause that covered the impact on workers of those developments in agriculture and how the protections that exist in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland could also be applied to agricultural workers in England. On top of that, in the rules for agri-food imports, where we will be looking at future developments, we are extremely concerned, first, that there is a lessening of all standards and, secondly, that where food is concerned, while there may be some recognition of protections for food standards, and even of animal welfare, workers may be left out. It should all go together—food, environment, labour protections for everybody.

As I said, when we wrote to our rural and agricultural representatives to ask for examples of issues—I am aware it is anecdotal, but it is important—we found that there are still pressures to hide problems that agricultural workers face, because in small isolated communities personal relationships often extend over other areas and the employer may have other roles in the community that people feel could have an impact on their lives.

There is pressure all the time not to speak out about problems that arise. Your accommodation is often tied to your job in some shape or form, whether that is on the horticultural or agricultural side of things. It is those kinds of pressures and those sorts of experiences that we think need to be included; otherwise there is a real danger that, as well as being wrong for the people concerned, they will undermine some of the other things that the Bill is trying to achieve.

**Q216 Daniel Zeichner:** Will you explain some of the reasons why you feel that agriculture is different from other sectors? When the Agricultural Wages Board was abolished in England, the coalition Government claimed that the minimum wage would pick up the issues. What has the experience been in England since, and what is the difference in the other countries where similar arrangements have persisted?

**Diana Holland:** First, there is a bit of a dearth of information. We have been constantly asking for that to be specifically looked at. We have done some research ourselves, however. Not long after the board was abolished, within the first year or two years, we surveyed all our members who had been covered by it. We were really shocked, although perhaps not surprised, to find that a huge proportion had had no pay rise since the Agricultural Wages Board had been abolished. Those who had had a pay rise, the vast majority, had had no say or discussion over that pay rise—it had just been introduced.

The employers we have talked to in the sector have said that they would find it helpful to have a process that could be relied on and about which everybody has said, “We’ve come to a conclusion,” rather than the pressure of having to negotiate individually or to find that the pressure is on and to think about what is fair in the circumstances. There is also exploitation in the sector—I will not run away from that—but I am not saying that every single person is deliberately trying to exploit. Sometimes there are other pressures.

There was also some survey work done in 2017 that compared Wales with England. There was a suggestion that protections in Wales meant that there was a 6% higher rate of pay overall. As I say, again, these are often small samples and figures, and we need to look more. We have had a chance, however, to talk to the employers in Wales. Some of the evidence from the employer representatives has made us concerned that there are employers in the sector—who previously followed a system that has been abolished—who are not aware of their responsibilities and who saw the national minimum wage as a voluntary mechanism rather than an absolute requirement. That might seem impossible, but it is a reality that came out in the discussions and the evidence. We feel that where the Bill talks about public money for public goods, that should also include ensuring that the workers are treated decently.

The minimum wage does not cover all the additional things. Career progression was provided, relating it to the jobs and roles that people have, allowances for having a dog, overtime and sick pay rates. All those details were included, but they are not in the national minimum wage, which does not take into account the particular considerations that the Agricultural Wages Board does. But that does exist elsewhere. That has been a massive loss to those people, without any demonstrable gain to anybody.

**Q217 Fay Jones:** What is your assessment of the way in which the Bill and its conditions on unfair trading practices will work with existing legislation to protect farmers and those at the lower end of the supply chain? How will those instruments work together?

**Diana Holland:** Can you explain what you mean by that? Do you mean in terms of the workforce?

**Fay Jones:** In terms of farmers being at one end of the supply chain, dealing with much larger retailers and much longer, complex supply chains. Do you think the Bill gives them any further protection than they already have under the Groceries Code Adjudicator or the grocery supply code of practice? Do you think that the Bill will work well with existing policy measures?

**Diana Holland:** First of all, we really welcome the recognition that protection needs to be built in to the supply chain. However, we are concerned that there is not sufficient detail, and how it will work in practice needs to be fleshed out in more detail. In our experience, holding different stages in the supply chain to account is a very difficult thing to enforce. Often, when workers are at the end of that supply chain, they are the last people to be considered. Something that may have been very well intentioned at one end of that supply chain pushes enormous pressures at the other. If there are savings to be made, it would be on the amounts of money that are paid.

We want protections built in, so that part of enforcement along the supply chain would be to check that that is not happening, and that it is not a method of passing on pressures to cut standards and people's pay. It is really important that it is in there, but we feel that there should be more detail. I have not identified any contradictions with other legislation, but when it comes to the detail, that would need to be taken into account.

**Q218 Fay Jones:** Do you think the Bill gives more protection to farmers or farming co-operatives than existing legislation such as the Groceries Code Adjudicator?

**Jyoti Fernandes:** No, I do not think it gives more protection to farmers. This is a slightly different part of the Bill, and I had prepared to talk about it later. It needs to change from powers to duties, to assure farmers that the money will come through to support farmer incomes. We greatly agree with the thrust of the Bill, but it is quite scary that even though great programmes are being rolled out, such as the environmental land management schemes, there is no assurance that that will continue and that Government will give the budget to those programmes to help supplement farmer incomes in future. That is scary and it is worrying for our food supply. It would mean a lot if the Bill's wording was changed from "may" to "must" give money, to ensure that we will be able to rely on some income to supplement producing the food that everybody needs.

**Q219 Abena Oppong-Asare:** My question is targeted at Jyoti. Do you as a smallholder farmer feel that the Bill is wide enough to support those with small farms, compared with those with bigger farms?

**Jyoti Fernandes:** Our union represents all scales of farms: we are all agroecological farms, family farms and mixed farms. As smallholder farmers, this is something we are particularly interested in. We also represent a lot

of horticulturalists, who grow fruit and veg, and it is possible to grow a lot of fruit and veg on a very small acreage.

To date, we have been really disadvantaged by the payment schemes that are out there. There is a 5-hectare threshold, which cuts people off from getting payments if they have less than 5 hectares. If someone has a large landholding that is used extensively for beef, they can get quite a lot of subsidy, but if they have less than 5 hectares and use it for intensive market gardening—providing the fresh fruit and veg that we need—they get nothing. That means that 85% of our membership have never received subsidies before. That puts us at a serious disadvantage, even though we as small farms provide a huge amount of public goods—we directly provide fresh food, the sorts of fresh fruit and veg that we need for healthier diets—to communities. In the transition around climate change, we need to eat more fruit and veg and less meat. That is the sort of thing that we can be in a position to do.

There is nothing in the Bill that specifically directs towards helping smaller farms, though the focus on public goods would enable us to do that, if we get the right schemes in place. We are working with DEFRA to try to ensure that the schemes it rolls out will benefit horticulture and fruit and veg. One amendment that we suggested was about affordable access to food. We would like to see some acknowledgment that agriculture is about producing food and that everyone needs food. While food itself might be a business like any other—bought, sold and traded—access to food is not. Having good, nutritious food available to everyone is something we strongly believe in.

If that was in the Bill, a lot of our farms, which provide a social outcome directly to consumers at an affordable price—from fresh fruit and veg, to milk and pasture-fed, free-range meat—could be enabled to develop those marketing mechanisms. That would help us out quite a lot. That means community supported agriculture, direct supply chain stuff and doorstep delivery of unpasteurised, raw, wholesome milk, or whatever it may be. That would enable those small businesses that work directly for our food supply in our local communities to get support. It would also support community farms that integrate social measures. They might, for example, have green gyms, work with horticultural therapy or bring people from disadvantaged backgrounds into the countryside to learn where their food comes from and join in that process. Food has a much wider remit than just being something that farmers gain an income from. A lot of us produce food because we believe it is important to our society.

**Q220 Danny Kruger:** This is for Diana. You mentioned this when you spoke about wages, but could you explain a bit more about why you think agricultural workers need a different protection regime than workers in other sectors?

**Diana Holland:** Obviously, all workers deserve overall protection. Many workers have additional forms of collective bargaining or representation through different structures. Agricultural workers in some areas are an example of an extremely fragmented and isolated group of workers; in other areas, there are big concentrations for small periods of time. The work is seasonal and there is insecurity.

The issues they have experienced over many years are well-documented. I think that singles them out to require more than the basic national minimum wage, working time regulations etc., to take account of the fact that people may have accommodation tied to their role, which could be their permanent home or temporary accommodation for a seasonal role, or that transport could be provided, which, in extreme circumstances, is used to keep people on site beyond the time that they should be there or is denied to them. Those kinds of things mean that there is intense pressure.

**Q221 Danny Kruger:** You mean they are particularly vulnerable?

**Diana Holland:** They are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Therefore, it continues to be recognised that they need to be identified within labour market protection. In Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, they have additional protections to those that apply in England. We think that needs to be put right.

While, of course, at the time, in 2010, a number of things identified as red tape, burdens and so on were got rid of, there was general shock throughout the sector—across the board—that it could have been done like that to the Agricultural Wages Board, with a two-week consultation period, given that it had existed all that time and had all that experience. It needs to be put right.

**Q222 Dave Doogan:** Diana, you talked very clearly about the effect of the removal of the Agricultural Wages Board and its replacement with the dysfunctional—in the context of agricultural workers—minimum wage. Are the three devolved Administrations broadly similar? Do you suggest that including in the Bill an instrument to replicate the provision of the Agricultural Wages Board would be relatively straightforward for Ministers to do?

**Diana Holland:** I would say so, yes. It has been done recently; obviously, the original legislation covered England and Wales, so extricating Wales and doing that separately has been done in recent times. My answer would be yes.

**Q223 Dave Doogan:** Jyoti, I was interested to note that you represent large horticultural producers as well. There is nothing in the Bill to give a positive voice to industry about the availability of seasonal labour from abroad. Do you see that as a challenge? Would you have that amended?

**Jyoti Fernandes:** In many ways, because our union works with workers across Europe, we think it is important that some workers can come over to other places, as long as they are respected and get decent wages and decent labour conditions, to work on larger agricultural units. By and large, we represent people who live in the UK who want to be able to produce and to farm and work on other landholdings as well. We do feel that more encouragement and support for the sector, so there did not need to be poor working conditions, there were decent wages, and fewer pesticides and fungicides were used, would encourage British workers to work on farms. We also feel that would encourage loads of independent smallholder market gardens, which can be quite intensive and could provide really good employment—and enjoyment in that employment. We would like to see a lot more encouragement for independent horticulture and British workers.

**Q224 Mr Goodwill:** Key to the structure of agriculture in many parts of the country is the traditional family farm. In many cases, family members who perhaps have other jobs will come and work for free at weekends. Spouses are often unwaged. As a farmer's son myself, I did not get any wages at all until I was 28; I just got some money out of my mum's purse if I needed it. You suggest reinstating the Agricultural Wages Board. How would that work with the traditional family farm structure? I can see difficulties. Some of these farms are very marginal indeed and can survive only because of people working either unwaged or for low wages in the hope of inheriting the family business.

**Diana Holland:** When it existed, it was not any different, and it was fine in the sense that it operated. Whether everybody got what they were entitled to is another question; perhaps you are suggesting they did not. Certainly, we have worrying evidence of individuals being paid not in money but through provision of accommodation and so on. We got evidence—it was a terrible story—that an individual woman had worked for a long time on a farm and in all that time had never received anything, apart from the odd bit of what might be considered pocket money. She was extremely worried when the employer was in danger of stepping down from his responsibilities that nothing—no rights—would exist for her. I think that is evidence of the nature of the problems that workers in the sector face. I do not think it is a reason for not trying to do something about it. I think it is important that people receive recompense for what they are doing, and that needs to take account of the nature of agriculture. The Agricultural Wages Board does that by bringing together workers' representatives, farmers' and employers' representatives and independent experts in a tripartite way, to make sure that that properly reflects what is really going on. The issues you raise would be discussed at the table, alongside the pressures and issues that I am raising and the official evidence gathered by the experts.

**Q225 Theo Clarke:** I want to pick up the point about agricultural workers. My constituency in Stafford has a lot of rural areas. Farmers have mentioned to me that the pilot scheme is great, and it has now been extended to 10,000. Are your members saying that we need to have an increase in seasonal workers, because there will be fruit left unpicked later in the year if more do not come in? What are your views on that?

**Jyoti Fernandes:** We believe in smaller units, where you do not need to bring in loads of seasonal workers. With smaller-scale market gardens and horticultural units that pay well, you can attract British workers and will not need to bring in so many people from other countries in order to pick those crops. We see a flourishing, home-grown fruit industry, where you can bring in more people to do that kind of work.

That needs investment, access to land, grants for people to get into that kind of small-scale market gardening and horticultural units and to plant fruit trees into mixed farms, and training. It needs routes to market, which means processing facilities, so that you can make apple juices and that type of thing, and so that you can store those things, add value to them and get better value back on them. It needs distribution facilities within local market economies. That might be market facilities in town, online distribution services or co-operatives that try to process those fruits and get

them to market, so that you get a good price for them. It needs all those sorts of investment in our national infrastructure in fruit, fruit processing and distribution.

**Q226 Daniel Zeichner:** I would like to pursue the labour supply issues, because my understanding is that there are very large numbers of people working in something like the poultry sector who are not originally from the UK. Is there anything you think the Bill should look at to make sure that some of those issues are addressed—I am looking particularly at Diana on that one—and am I right to be concerned about it?

**Diana Holland:** You are definitely right to be concerned about it. The important thing is that, where decent standards are protected and reinstated, they should apply to everybody. The original seasonal agricultural workers scheme was part of an educational opportunity for students. We worked very hard and gave evidence over many years to make sure that that was what it was. It should not be about workers coming in from other countries—because the sector cannot get people in this country to work for the terms and conditions and pay that it is offering—and then treating them extremely badly when they are here. As you say, it will not provide the security, the quality needed or the stability in the sector. It is very important. We want opportunities that are properly worked out. How fantastic it would be if we could make this sector one that people want to work in and one that they look for, rather than thinking it is somewhere they will be exploited.

**Daniel Zeichner:** There is a danger that, if we do not address those labour supply issues, the industry will struggle, and we will then inevitably be back to importing food from outside again.

**Diana Holland:** Exactly.

**Jyoti Fernandes:** I was going to bring up something really important to this whole scenario, which is the impact of trade. Basically, we are never going to get the conditions here where small and family farms can survive as independent businesses, or keep decent work opportunities on larger units, if you are undercut by cheaper produce from elsewhere. It just is not a possibility. The global marketplace can source cheap labour—slave labour—from all over the planet, and really exploit places with really low conditions. It is not just the trade standards: it is also the competition from very large multinational corporations in other countries—the huge farms in California or South America, which have loads of exploited labour, much higher levels of pesticide usage and multinational advertising campaigns that will blow any of our homegrown industries out of the water, unless we can get some control over that and have something in the Bill that allows for tariffs that stop that imported stuff, and standards and rules that do not allow our homegrown industries to be undercut.

This is a very exciting Agriculture Bill. Everything about it that is moving towards environmentally friendly farming, agroecological farming and all of that is tremendously exciting. We could have one of the best homegrown food supplies in Europe, and we could really pioneer something very special and really support small and family farms, independent businesses and workers being treated decently, but not if we are undercut by cheap imports. That must be looked at very carefully, otherwise all the good work and the good will of this Bill will be undone.

**The Chair:** If there are no more questions, I thank the witnesses on behalf of the Committee.

### Examination of Witnesses

*Vicki Hird, Dr Nick Palmer and James West gave evidence.*

3.57 pm

**The Chair:** We will now hear oral evidence from Sustain and Compassion in World Farming. We have until 4.30 pm. I welcome the witnesses and would ask them to introduce themselves for the record.

**Dr Palmer:** I am Nick Palmer. I am the head of Compassion in World Farming UK. Compassion is the largest animal welfare charity globally, and we have developed our interests to also look at the environment surrounding animal welfare issues. In the mists of pre-history, I was the Member for Broxtowe for 13 years.

**James West:** I am James West, the senior policy manager at Compassion in World Farming—I work with Nick.

**Vicki Hird:** I am Vicki Hird, farming campaign co-ordinator at Sustain, which is an alliance of over 100 non-governmental organisations and royal societies, including Compassion and many other people you have had as witnesses.

**Q227 James Morris:** This is a question probably for all three witnesses. In your submissions, you refer to some of the public good provisions in the Bill as being positive. I just wondered what aspects of the Bill you thought needed to be improved.

**Dr Palmer:** The Bill is a good basis, but it is a missed opportunity in the sense that it provides the basis for a variety of things that the Secretary of State may do, but it does not specify what the Secretary of State will do. In the current situation in particular, after Brexit, the farmers and everyone dealing with the industry need more certainty. This would really be an opportunity to pin down what we are prepared to do and what we are not prepared to do in terms of trade, support for the farming industry and a long-term strategy to ensure that we have a viable farming industry stretching into the future.

**James West:** I would add that it is important that the Bill is joined-up in its thinking, in as far as protection from potentially being undercut—as I am sure you have heard lots of times—as a result of trade agreements. That is fairly critical. That is not in the Bill. Added to that would be that you are then providing farmers with subsidies and grants to help them move to higher standards of production. We should also be looking at things such as method of production labelling—as Nick said, that it is a “may” in the Bill, rather than a “must”—so that consumers know what they are purchasing. We should also look at Government procurement policy, so that in addition to protecting farmers from what is coming into the country, you are also rewarding farmers for delivering higher standards and for protecting our animal welfare standards. Just on Government procurement, McDonald’s has better animal welfare procurement policies than the UK Government, which should not be the case, and the Bill could address that.

**Vicki Hird:** We were very pleased to see some of the changes in the Agriculture Bill. Overall, we are very positive about the public money for public goods approach

and the financial support being listed. We were very pleased to see soil being included in that. We would like to see a stronger reference to agroecological whole-farm systems, because we think that is the way to ensure that you get the in-field changes, as well as the edge of field, wildlife and other nature outcomes that you see. We need the whole of the UK farming system to go towards an agroecological approach in whatever way they can. Those steps should be available through financial support.

We would also like to see, as Nick said, a lot of these things as duties, rather than powers. It seems incredible how much effort—I know, because I have been involved—DEFRA has put into the environmental land management scheme, when it could stop it all in a couple of years and pay a smaller amount of money and not follow through. As MPs, you should have that accountability for you on delivering ELMS.

Finally, I agree with Diana on the protection for workers. We are also pleased with clause 27, which concerns fair dealing. It has been enhanced to really protect farmers. We are grateful to DEFRA for making those changes and to George Eustice, who we welcome as our new Secretary of State. We would like to see that as a duty, because it is so important. It is absolutely vital that we get the protection for farmers in the supply chain. They do have that from retailers, but most farmers do not sell direct to retailers. They need good codes of conduct developed with the industry for every sector, probably starting with dairy.

**Q228 Daniel Zeichner:** Good afternoon. I have different questions for Vicki and for Compassion. Vicki, in your written evidence, you make a very strong case for a public health function. Can you elaborate on that a little? To Compassion, you make some quite strong suggestions about the pre-conditions for receiving public money. Can you amplify that for the benefit of the Committee?

**Vicki Hird:** Thank you for reminding me about the public health purpose. We think it would be very easy to insert it into the Bill. There are so many ways it is already designed to help, for instance with air pollution and with reducing exposure to plant protection products, which can be harmful. We think that saying that there is a public health purpose for agriculture would recognise what an important thing farmers do in providing us with healthy, safe food. It could help by showing that having animal health and welfare measures that help farmers to manage their stock and change their stocking patterns can reduce the reliance on antibiotics, which we know is an absolute global public good, in order to protect our medicinal antibiotics.

The other area is the huge need to boost our supply of fruit and veg, so that people can have access to closer-to-home, more affordable, fresh, sustainably produced fruit and vegetables. That is absolutely central to a healthier diet for the nation. To be able to say that we were doing that would be a benefit. As James was saying about procurement, we could be saying something about procurement and investing in healthier diets for our children in schools.

**Q229 Daniel Zeichner:** Before we turn to Compassion, on the antibiotics point, do you think there should be stronger, more directive provisions in the Bill?

**Vicki Hird:** I think that would be very helpful. We designed a clause for the previous version of this Bill that mentioned that, along with exposure to pesticides for consumers, workers and the community, and other aspects of public health. There therefore is a clause available, if anybody wants to table it.

Antibiotic reduction is important. I know that the industry has already gone some way. It is doing a good job, but it needs to be supported in that, through animal health and welfare financial support, and through training, advice and demonstration. The Budget should definitely be strong enough and big enough to provide farmers with that kind of support, to take things in the direction of lower antibiotic use.

**James West:** The question was about subsidies, and bars on subsidies. We support the use of subsidies for delivering the public goods that are in the Bill. Again, we would like that to be a requirement rather than a “may”. Essentially, public money should deliver genuinely higher standards of welfare; it should not be for meeting the regulatory baseline or going marginally beyond it. If you are looking at the top line, you might consider such things as allowing animals to express their natural behaviour, access to pasture for dairy cows, and the provision of enrichment materials for pigs. Obviously, depending on which species you look at, there will be different requirements, but broadly speaking, they will be lower stocking densities, slower-growing breeds, if we are talking about meat chickens, and access to pasture outdoors.

You might also look at things that would disqualify someone from receiving an animal welfare payment. One of the things that Compassion works on is ending the live export of animals. From our point of view, if you are involved in the live export trade, you should probably not receive the public subsidy for good animal welfare. In the area of mutilations, going back to pigs, you have enrichment. In Germany, they provide a premium for pigs at slaughter when the pig gets to the slaughterhouse with an intact tail, because that means that you have almost certainly run a very good system. The amount of space, enrichment and so on that you will have given the pigs during the rearing process will have been such that you will not have needed to tail-dock the pig, as you might in more intensive systems. We have fairly detailed documents with what may or may not qualify you for a subsidy, but broadly speaking it is natural behaviours and space.

**Dr Palmer:** The absence of a clear percentage commitment regarding the amount of support that will be given for animal welfare purposes means that a degree of uncertainty remains, which is bad for the whole agricultural industry. A farmer needs to know that what amount of money is potentially available, so that they can try to work for it. With respect to the new Chancellor, we are unlikely to get an infinite amount of subsidy in the Budget, so it makes sense that the available money is used to help farmers to become among the best in the world, rather than to move marginally from a fairly low base to a slightly higher one.

In the long term, the future of British farming has to be at the top of the scale. If we try to race to the bottom, we will fail. The British farming industry will not succeed on that basis, so we should consider the areas where we can help farmers to move towards higher welfare—for instance, ending the use of farrowing

crates. There is a one-off cost, which it is reasonable to help them with. Once they have moved away from that, there should not be an additional cost. They will then, in association with the better labelling scheme, be able to tell consumers that British farming has produced higher welfare, higher quality meat.

**Q230 Mr Goodwill:** To follow smoothly on from that, British farmers pride themselves on having the highest welfare standards in the world. Indeed, in some ways we were held back by the European Union, because we tried to ban things like dry sow stalls, but we could not stop their pork coming in.

However, I noticed that the Compassion in World Farming website talks about ending “the horror” of factory farming. I just wondered if you felt that there were any farms in this country that that definition would apply to. You talked about housed livestock—for example, dairy cattle that are housed in winter. Do you think that is acceptable? Where do you set the bar in describing what British farmers are doing, perfectly legally, as “horror”?

**Dr Palmer:** When we are talking about horrific factory farming, we are talking about the caging of egg-laying hens, which is still one third of the total in Britain; we are talking about the use of farrowing crates, which keep the sow unable even to turn round for up to five weeks.

**Q231 Mr Goodwill:** It saves piglets’ lives, though, does it not?

**Dr Palmer:** There are very well-established alternative methods. At the moment, British farming is 50:50—roughly 50% have moved away from farrowing crates and the other half have not. That is a record that is less good than some countries’, and really we should strive to be the best.

One can always argue about the exact wording, but I think that anyone familiar with the range of systems in British farming would agree that it ranges from the very good—where we can really be proud and tell the world that we are the world leader—to areas where the farmers themselves would say that they would like to do better but cannot afford the conversion costs. This is a classic example of a public good. I think the overwhelming majority of British consumers would be pleased to know that farmers were moving up the scale. Farmers themselves would like to, but they need assistance for the one-off transition costs.

This is not an area of huge controversy between us and the National Farmers Union and others. We are all pulling in the same direction, and we should use the opportunity of Brexit to try to make sure that we actually get to that point.

**Q232 Ruth Jones:** You mentioned that you want to look at banning live exports. Have you talked to people—certain farmers—who say, “Look, let’s be honest: in the south-east of England, to export live exports is quicker than travelling hundreds of miles to an abattoir, given the numerous closures of many of the abattoirs”? Do you have a solution to that?

**Dr Palmer:** Having more local abattoirs is clearly desirable. It is a marginal business for many, and you cannot force people to set up a local abattoir, but I think there would be a great deal of cross-party and cross-industry support for the idea that it should be encouraged.

The problem with overseas shipment is partly the time involved, and you can get pre-weaned calves transported for over 100 hours. That is with pauses, but it is nevertheless a grim business and is really difficult to defend, and a lot of farmers will not defend it.

Also, there is the lack of control. It is very difficult, with the best will in the world, for DEFRA to say what will happen at all stages of a journey once a vehicle moves outside the UK. I used to be Parliamentary Private Secretary to a DEFRA Minister, and this was an issue we struggled with. Live exports is a very small part of the British farming industry, and we think it is one that should come to an end.

**James West:** I would add that people can take the journey length to be the time it takes to take the channel tunnel from Dover to Calais, for example, but we are talking about live exports going on a boat that is not really designed for sea crossing. The crossing from Ramsgate to Calais normally takes about six hours, so by the time you have got to Ramsgate and across to the other side, you are talking about a fairly lengthy journey time, which in most cases would probably get you to an abattoir in the UK.

**Q233 Theo Clarke:** I am pleased that the Secretary of State now has direct responsibility for the nation’s food security, but I wonder whether it should be a national priority to support domestic agriculture. What is your view on the frequency of reporting? I know at the moment it is being suggested it should be every five years, but we have heard differing views today. What do the panel think about that?

**Vicki Hird:** I think it is welcome to have that in there. There is a case for making it more frequent, given that we are facing a climate and nature emergency that will threaten our supplies and production here and overseas. We should be building that into the review, in terms of anticipating how that will affect land use both here and overseas. That is currently not in the Bill, and it would be a welcome addition to recognise the sustainability factors that will increasingly come into play before the next five years are up. We already know that flooding is more frequent, and drought is affecting many parts of Africa, which supplies us with a lot of fruit and veg.

There is a case for more frequent reporting; it is a welcome element in the Bill, but as the previous speaker mentioned, we already do much of this food security assessment already, so it is a question of building on that and making it an integral part of the sustainability of our food system. [*Applause.*] May I congratulate George Eustice, our new Secretary of State? I will end there, on food security.

**Q234 Kerry McCarthy:** I am trying to tease this out, because we have heard previous witnesses say that there is concern about the lack of baseline regulation in the Bill and the fact that we no longer have the cross-compliance checks. There are concerns that people will drop below the minimum standards. How does that work? Clearly, you do not want to use public money for public goods just to reward people for keeping to the standards required of them by law, because there is no additionality to that; they ought to be doing it anyway. We could reward farmers for doing the higher welfare stuff, but at the same time, we really ought to have an ambition to say, “If they can do it, why can’t all farmers treat their

animals that way?" Will we end up always having to keep raising what counts as higher welfare for farmers to get money? Do you see what I am saying? You could almost end up not raising standards, because the farmers would not get paid for the higher welfare standards.

**Dr Palmer:** Yes, I see the problem. As in other areas of public subsidy, we have to start from where we are. Because we have the range of quality that I mentioned in response to the previous question, there are a lot of farmers who would genuinely like to raise their standards, but need assistance in doing so. I accept that there is an element of moral hazard in that, if someone already has superb standards, they may feel a bit irritated that someone else is being given money to come up to them.

**Kerry McCarthy:** Is that how it would work? That is the other thing. It is the same as with planting trees or improving soil health; there is a danger that, in a bid to use public money to encourage other people to do that, the people who were ahead of the curve are penalised.

**Dr Palmer:** I believe DEFRA envisages, which I think is right, two types of support. One is to assist with specific one-off costs—I gave the farrowing crate as an example—but the other is to reward people who are meeting a higher standard. To my mind, that must be linked to a good labelling scheme, because if we are spending public money to assist farmers to reach a higher standard, we should also be able to tell consumers about it, so that they can respond, in the same way that we have seen with eggs. When there was a choice between free-range and battery eggs, people migrated overwhelmingly to free range, to the point that it is now very difficult to get the lowest standard of egg in supermarkets. You are right that, over time, we will probably develop further ideas on how to give farm animals the best possible life, and that is right—we should not stay at the same level forever—but for the time being there is a lot to be done to reinforce the farmers who are striving to be the best.

**Q235 Fay Jones:** I have a question about kitemarks found on products, such as Red Tractor and RSPCA Assured. How could future Government policy recognise that?

If I may, Mr Stringer, I have a small supplementary. In Compassion's written submission, you welcomed the Secretary of State's ability to make regulations regarding farming method in relation to labelling. Could you elaborate on that, please?

**James West:** We submitted details to DEFRA a while ago. Essentially it would be different labels indicating the method of production. The range of methods of production would differ according to species, but in effect you would indicate whether it had been produced, say, intensively indoors versus extensively outdoors and everything in between. That would be on the packet, so when you go to the supermarket or shop you can see how the product was produced. As Nick was saying, with eggs that moved the market towards free-range eggs and away from caged egg sales—barn egg sales in the UK are low—to the extent that roughly half the supermarkets have phased out caged egg sales and the other half plan to do so by 2025.

It goes back to the point that you need to support the farmers in the subsidy scheme we introduce, but there also needs to be an outlet for them to show that they are

delivering at a level that consumers may want. It does not mean that consumers have to buy it—they can see the stuff produced to a lower standard and still choose that—but at least they are informed. At the moment, it is really hard to find meat or dairy products labelled as to method of production. Possibly the only other one is outdoor-bred and outdoor-reared for pork; other than that, it is essentially free range/organic or you are in the dark. It would cover the whole spectrum.

**Dr Palmer:** That is also really important when you come to trade, because if we are to sign a free trade agreement with the United States or other countries, we really need to give our negotiators a clear steer on what we collectively are willing to see. If we have an evolving labelling scheme, we have a basis for doing that. As you know, international trade negotiations usually start from the point that each side says what their red lines are and what they cannot move on and the negotiations operate around those to see what is possible. We are keen to see specifications in the Bill on minimum standards for animal welfare—Ministers have said this many times—so that our negotiators can say to their American, Brazilian or other counterparts, "I'd love to help you, but I'm afraid I can't because it is in the legislation." That would give farmers and consumers the reassurance that we are absolutely not going to end up with British farming being undercut by what you vulgarly call cheap and nasty imports.

**Vicki Hird:** I think that goes for other aspects of food standards and production standards. I totally agree with Nick. It is very important that we see something in the Bill around trade—I am sure you have heard this a lot over the last week—so that we have a way to stop agri-food imports produced to lower standards of food, animal welfare and environmental production systems. I would add labour standards as well.

One of our members is supporting the idea of an 100% grass-fed label, because there is some confusion about grass-fed labels and claims being made. There is a very good Pasture-Fed Livestock Association producing animals with really strong environmental, as well as animal welfare, benefits. It is only fair that that should be recognised through a proper labelling scheme.

**Q236 Danny Kruger:** We had George Monbiot here earlier; I do not know if you were listening. What did you think about his point about grass-fed beef?

**Vicki Hird:** There is a balance to be struck. People are still going to eat meat. It is a highly nutritious product and there are people who want to eat it. Recognising that, we should be eating much less but better meat, produced here in ways that we can recognise, enforce and celebrate, alongside the rewilding that can go along with those animals.

**Q237 Danny Kruger:** And carbon capture of beef herds?

**Vicki Hird:** There is a lot of science, and people pick the science they want to use. There are a lot of differences. You can go from one meter in one field, to another meter, and it can be a different carbon reading. We have to be careful with this and not throw the baby out with the bathwater. For instance, small-scale producers will not be able measure their carbon with expensive tools, so we need to make sure we are doing right but also supporting farmers for agroforestry, for rewilding with

animals and for silvopasture, which is fantastic and can have big animal welfare gains. There is a spectrum that we need to recognise.

George has a particular approach and we do have a crisis ahead. We need to recognise that, but we take a less is better approach. We can envisage the Bill supporting farmers to deliver that. It does not include factory farms, I have to say.

**Dr Palmer:** I am not sure I fully answered your question regarding Compassion's submission on labelling. This is an area where the international debate is moving very rapidly. France now has a very extensive scheme, pioneered by Carrefour and Casino, two of the big supermarket chains. Germany is proposing that the European Union as a whole looks at labelling, specifically for animal welfare. There are also schemes in Italy and Denmark. It is important that we do not fall behind the curve here. People are looking at us and asking, after Brexit, are we going to be better or going to have to fall behind? This is a classic example. The Bill offers the opportunity to pin down some of the reassurance that people are looking for.

**Q238 Mr Goodwill:** Just before we finish on the issue of labelling, I see that France has introduced regulations to allow misleading words, such as sausage, burger or steak, to be used in connection with non-meat products. Do you think we should follow that lead?

**Dr Palmer:** Personally, I would not go in for legislating on what people call things, unless there is a deliberate attempt to defraud. If someone goes to the vegan section in Sainsbury's and sees a sausage, it is unlikely that they will say, "Aha! That's a pig." I do not feel it is worth parliamentary time. Companies are quite capable of making clear what it is they are selling.

**The Chair:** If there are no more questions, on behalf of the Committee I thank the witnesses for their evidence this afternoon.

#### Examination of Witness

*Sue Davies gave evidence.*

4.29 pm

**The Chair:** We have until 5pm for evidence from the representative of Which? Welcome. Could you introduce yourself?

**Sue Davies:** Good afternoon. My name is Sue Davies. I am head of consumer protection and food policy at Which?.

**Q239 George Eustice:** The Bill sets a different course for the future of agriculture policy, so it will be much more about payment for the delivery of public goods than arbitrary area-based subsidies. Are you generally supportive of that approach? I know there are one or two other things that you think have been missed. Perhaps you could explain what those are to the Committee.

**Sue Davies:** May I start by saying congratulations on your appointment, Mr Eustice?

We support the public money for public goods approach. We think it is the right way to go, but there is a real opportunity to put more about consumers—the people who will ultimately be eating the food—in the Bill. There is a range of ways in which that could be done. We have a real opportunity to redesign agriculture policy to make sure that we have a much more joined-up

approach to food and farming policy in general. We welcome the commitment to the national food strategy, for example, as part of that.

The public money for the public goods that are included is really important, but we would also like to see a stronger focus on other consumer benefits, particularly in relation to food safety, public health and reducing antibiotic resistance. When talking about productivity and increasing food production, we find that people care so much about food. We have done lots of consumer research over the years. In the last couple of years, we have particularly focused on asking people about food standards.

People expect the UK to have really high standards and that, if anything, we will build on the standards that we have at the moment. We talk about productivity, and we want it done in a way that meets consumer expectations. We would also like to see a more general commitment to upholding high food standards in the Bill.

**Q240 George Eustice:** To come back to that point, the view we took when drafting the Bill—I am interested in why you take a different view—is that the payment for public goods could involve things such as reduced pesticide use and reduced antibiotic use, because animal health and welfare is in there. By targeting those public goods in some areas, there would be a consequential benefit for public health, because of the nature of the food production.

There is a separate area that is about public health campaigns, healthy eating and food standards, but obviously measures are already in place through the Food Safety Act 1990 and the work that the NHS does to encourage healthy eating. Our view is that we do not want to duplicate work that is already present in other fields and is the responsibility of other Departments.

**Sue Davies:** I can see that to some extent, but there is a real opportunity to integrate public health much more in farming practices. A good example of that is the work the Food Standards Agency did a couple of years ago to try to reduce campylobacter rates in chickens. We have regulation to some extent around that to try to control the practices that are used, but it was only by incentivising action throughout the supply chain—in that case, by the Food Standards Agency doing a retail survey, where it was, in effect, naming and shaming retailers by showing how campylobacter levels compared—that that led to co-operation across the supply chain to look at what measures could be put in place. That included measures in slaughterhouses as well as a strong on-farm focus, such as looking at biosecurity measures and what happens in relation to thinning.

It is that kind of approach that we feel should be included, and certainly the opportunity to do it should not be excluded. Some things will require regulation, and we definitely think they should be regulated, but it is a mix of using regulation and wider incentives to raise best practice. For issues such as antibiotic use, there is an opportunity to try to incentivise the reduced use of antibiotics again, on top of the legislative requirements that we have.

**Q241 George Eustice:** There is an animal health provision there, which opens the prospect of healthy livestock accredited schemes that farmers could sign up

to, which might be all about reduced antibiotic use or different stocking densities in poultry. That is all possible under the existing powers, so I am trying to get my head around what additional powers you feel are needed over and above the objectives that we have.

**Sue Davies:** It is certainly really positive that that is in there, but if there are specific measures where the main goal is focused on human health, rather than animal health, that should be included in the Bill. Ultimately, the Bill will determine the types of food choices we have as consumers and the sorts of standards to which our food is produced. Obviously, a lot of other policies will have an impact on that, but we think this is a real opportunity to shape our food system in a positive way that works for consumers as well as farmers. We should not miss these really good opportunities to include that in the Bill at this point.

**Q242 Daniel Zeichner:** Good afternoon. May I add my congratulations to the new Secretary of State? We obviously do not want to be too nice about him and set him off to a bad start, but he is clearly a popular choice.

Ms Davies, I am bound to ask you the question that I have asked virtually every other witness: from a consumer's point of view, what would be the impact of allowing imports produced to lower standards? I think I can probably guess the answer, because it has been very consistent across all our witnesses. At the end of the whole chain, particularly with ready meals and so on, do you feel that consumers know enough in the current system? Could we not do more through the Bill to lift standards, particularly on antibiotics and so on?

**Sue Davies:** I think your food standards question is really important and shows why we need to make sure that we have a joined-up policy. This will have a big impact on the sorts of choices that consumers can make, but if we do not address other policies, particularly trade policy, it could completely undermine all the positive things that we are trying to achieve with the Bill.

As I mentioned, we know from our consumer research that people have really high expectations on food standards. Some 93% of people said they expect that food standards will be maintained, and ideally people think they should be enhanced now that we have left the EU. People do not expect cheaper imports to come in and undercut our producers. People want to support UK producers, particularly of products such as meat and dairy, so the tariff schedule that has come out is interesting. All of that has to be joined up to make sure that we are not trading away our standards and potentially bringing in safety issues, or allowing production methods that we know consumers do not find acceptable.

We saw with the horsemeat scare that food has many different aspects. Some are about safety, and others are cultural—people just do not want to eat food that is produced in certain ways. We have been doing a lot of survey work and we know that around eight in 10 people have concerns about eating hormone-treated beef. A similar number have concerns about food produced using antibiotic growth promoters. Those practices are used in some of the countries with which we will seek to reach trade deals—hormones in the case of the US, Australia and New Zealand. We absolutely have to ensure that trade policy builds on our current standards. If anything, we are looking to improve our standards rather than allow them to deteriorate or accept lower

quality imports that will make it very difficult for UK producers to produce to the standards that consumers expect.

We have also asked about labelling issues, because sometimes it is suggested that people can decide if you just label everything. People feel strongly about it and do not think that labelling is the solution. That applies to people across all socioeconomic groups; it is not just better-off customers who can make this sort of choice. We think it is really important that there is something in the Bill that makes it clear that we should maintain and build on our food standards.

We have asked people what they think about labelling, and they generally tell us that they think the labelling information is about right, but when you ask people about where improvements might be made, they talk about things such as helping people to make more sustainable choices and improved animal welfare labelling. There is scope to look at how we can improve that by building on the labelling information that we have already. One area that we know people feel strongly about is the traffic light nutritional labelling system, which we would like to be made mandatory when we have the opportunity to legislate to do so.

**Q243 Fay Jones:** I have a question on food production standards and imports. The Agriculture Bill applies largely to England only, although there are bits and pieces that pertain to the devolved nations. Would food production standards and imports not be covered by international trade? Is the Agriculture Bill the right place for it?

**Sue Davies:** We can put it in this Bill and in the trade Bill. This is about agriculture and how we incentivise food production, and a vision for agriculture in the UK. The approach that we take to trade will have a huge impact on how we are able to deliver that, and it will have huge implications for the support that needs to be provided to farmers and how we incentivise standards. There is a strong link between the two.

We think there should definitely be something in the Bill recognising, at a principled level, that this is what UK food production is about. It should also recognise that, on the one hand, we need to ensure that we maintain high standards that meet consumers' expectations at a national level and, on the other hand, that we will take a strong stance to ensure we are not trading away those food standards to get the many other benefits we might get through trade deals. It should not be about losing food standards to get those benefits.

**Q244 Abena Oppong-Asare:** Thank you for that, Sue. I want to follow up on your comments about food standards, specifically on labelling. How far do you want the Bill to go? Obviously, this starts from the beginning. Do you see soil as part of consumers' concerns, in terms of what type of soil is used and how it is preserved, or do they essentially just want to know about how the food is labelled?

**Sue Davies:** I suppose that reinforces your question in a way. Ultimately, things like soil health will feed through into the quality of the food that we eat as consumers. That is why we must ensure that there is recognition that the way we produce food has huge implications for consumers, both in terms of their health and their

preferences. Most people will not think about soil when you ask them about food, but it will have an indirect impact on them.

At a more principled level, when we are talking about public money for public goods, we should recognise that public health and food safety are important. There is a range of different mechanisms. Some things are obvious, such as the promotion of fruit and vegetables, but as we are looking at how food is produced and the production methods that are used, it is important that there is a clear steer that public health and food safety must also be at the heart of that.

**Q245 Abena Oppong-Asare:** The Food Standards Agency looks into the standards in food production. Are there elements of that that you think should be incorporated into the Bill to embellish it?

**Sue Davies:** Including provisions that enable financial assistance for food safety and public health measures, such as the reduced use of antibiotics, feeds through into the things the Food Standards Agency is trying to achieve. That then allows sufficient flexibility.

I mentioned the example of campylobacter because that has been a big priority. It is the main type of food poisoning in the UK. Most of it comes from chickens. We have been struggling to reduce its level for years. We have made progress in recent years by taking the farm-to-fork approach. We need to recognise that a lot of things that manifest at the end of the food chain originate in production. Giving the flexibility to be able to provide financial assistance and incentivise those kinds of measures is really important. The Food Standards Agency will then need to work with DEFRA and others in defining what those might be and what sort of indicators you might want to include, in terms of the monitoring that is set out in the Bill.

**Q246 Miss Dines:** Ms Davies, your organisation, Which?, has historically been a champion for consumer choice. I want to ask you what your position is. From your written statement, it seems like you are proposing a form of protectionism against certain imports based on standards, but with a lack of clarity, I would suggest. Does that not deny the consumer a choice and potentially make food a lot more expensive for the consumer?

**Sue Davies:** We are certainly not protectionist and we are certainly in favour of consumer choice. However, it is about enabling people to make meaningful choices and the types of choices that we want. We also base what we say and what we call for on consumer research—talking to people and understanding their perspectives. Over the last couple of decades, we have been talking to people about food a lot, but in the last three years we have had a regular tracker and have been asking a lot about food standards.

We are just in the process of doing some more research, for which we are going to do a series of public dialogues around the country, particularly focused on trade deals and what some of the opportunities of those could be, as well as some of the issues over which people might have concerns. It will look at food standards, but also at things like digital services and opportunities for a wide range of cheaper products. We know from the research we have done to date that people feel very strongly about food production methods and would

have concerns if food was allowed to come in with reduced, cheaper standards that undermined the standards and choices we have at the moment.

I do not think it is about reducing people's choice. It is about enabling people to have an informed choice, and about enabling everybody to have a choice. At the moment, we have regulation and standards that underpin everything that everybody buys, whatever their income level. If it suddenly becomes the case that only those who can afford it can have the type of standards we have at the moment, and other people have to have lower standards, that would certainly be a completely retrograde step.

We are starting from a point where we have good standards, and we are about to start negotiating trade deals, so we need to be really clear in those objectives about where food fits. We need to look at the opportunities for food and other things that we might gain in those trade deals, but also to be really clear about where we will not compromise. Things such as food safety and quality and animal welfare come out from our research as things that people do not think we should compromise on.

**Q247 Ruth Jones:** I am sure you are aware that the national food strategy will be published shortly. How do you think that will complement the Bill? The strategy is coming out after the Bill has been published. Will the two marry up? We obviously do not know yet what it will contain.

**Sue Davies:** We are really pleased that the national food strategy is being developed. In a way, it is incredible that we have not really got a clear vision for food and how it should be produced, so we think that is really valuable. The way it is being conducted, with public dialogues and citizens' assemblies, is a really inclusive process, and will hopefully look at the breadth of issues and the many different interests involved in food policy.

As you say, ideally you would have your food policy, and you would then have your agriculture policy, your trade policy and your environment policy; they should all be complementary. Obviously things are working to different timescales, so we need to make sure that the Bill allows for the breadth of issues that agriculture can be impacted by. That is why, as part of that national food strategy, we think it is important that food delivers for consumers and that we tackle some of the challenges in the food system, whether that is climate change, dealing with obesity or food security issues.

We realise that there is limited scope within the Bill, compared with the strategy, but we should take every opportunity to make sure that we put the right incentives in the Bill to deliver on those wider things that matter to people.

**Q248 Ruth Jones:** Is there anything missing from the Bill, in terms of strengthening it or in terms of the national food strategy?

**Sue Davies:** Obviously Which? would say this, but it is really surprising that consumers are not featured in the Bill, when ultimately the Bill will shape the types of food choices we will have, potentially for decades. It is really important to make sure that the Bill recognises that we ultimately produce food to meet the needs and expectations of consumers, and to have a market where people want to buy the products. That is why we think we should ensure that the public money for public

goods area is aligned with consumer needs and benefits, particularly public health and food safety. If we are talking about productivity and producing more food, we should recognise that that has to be done in a way that meets consumers' expectations; not by using production methods that mean people will ultimately not want to buy or eat the food. That is where having that commitment to food standards in the Bill is really important.

**Q249 Mr Goodwill:** Two of the objectives of the Bill are improving plant health and reducing or protecting from environmental hazards. Groundbreaking work is obviously being done on plant breeding. For example, potatoes may not need to be sprayed every 10 days for potato blight, and there are potatoes that are potato cyst nematode resistant. Some of that may use gene editing. Do you think consumers know enough about these issues to have a view, or do you think that if it is presented in the right way, they may see that the upsides cancel out the downsides and their prejudices?

**Sue Davies:** We have done a lot of consumer research over the years and have talked to people about their attitudes to different food technologies. About three or four years ago, we did quite a big project with Sir Mark Walport and the Government Office for Science looking at food system challenges and carrying out public dialogues in different parts of the country. What comes out from those dialogues and our wider research is that people really want to have a more open discussion about what the risks and benefits are. It seems that people do not really know enough about it. They want to be convinced that, if technologies are being used, they are being looked at in the full range of possibilities and alternatives. People are more nervous about technologies like gene editing than, say, the use of precision agriculture. Often in these debates, we start from the technology and look at how it can be used, rather than looking at what the problem is, what the range of options is, and why we are deciding that that is the right approach.

The other thing that comes across really clearly is that people expect there to be strong, independent oversight. It is concerning that when we talk about the use of technologies, you often hear some people call for deregulation and less oversight, when all our experience is to the contrary: you do not want to over-regulate and have an overly burdensome system, but people want to know that things are being done in the public interest, and that there is a clear understanding of any safety issues or wider environmental risks before we go down the route of using some of these technologies.

People are open to technology, but they want to know exactly why it is being used and whether it is the best approach. The only way to do that is that to make sure that, if we are looking at using these technologies, there is proper public engagement and understanding of them. The retailers and others in the food industry are obviously key, in terms of their understanding of whether people would want to buy products produced using these methods.

**Q250 Mr Goodwill:** Is there any reason why people are much more open to these types of advances in medicine, for example, than in food production? It seems that they are happy to go right to the cutting edge of technology, in terms of the treatment of genetic conditions, but somehow this is different.

**Sue Davies:** All the research shows that it is quite a straightforward risk-benefit analysis. If you are ill, you will take something that you think is more risky but might make you better. If it is about maintaining health, people expect there to be a higher barrier.

**Q251 Kerry McCarthy:** Some groups are talking about method of slaughter labelling. Does *Which?* have a view? Would the consumers you deal with find that useful?

**Sue Davies:** It is not something that we have carried out any research on, to be honest. It is not something that we have particularly worked on. As I say, when we have asked people about labelling information, most of them feel that we have quite a good level of information. Certainly, the areas that come out most strongly where people would like more clarity are things like making more sustainable choices. Animal welfare issues are important. We did a report in the last issue of *Which?* that looked at the different assurance schemes that are available to help you make sustainable choices. They all covered different elements of sustainability, so it is difficult for a scheme to help you make a choice. There is a lot more scope in that sort of area to improve labelling. Method of slaughter is not something that we have asked about recently.

**Q252 Kerry McCarthy:** There is some quite misleading packaging. There was the whole issue of Tesco and its fake farms—it had pictures of cows frolicking in meadows, when they had never seen the sunlight. I am not saying that that was simply about Tesco, but the farms that Tesco had on its products did not actually exist.

**Sue Davies:** I think there are still cases where the way foods are presented does not meet the actual way they are produced. When we ask people about their expectations, though, people are often surprised: they may think that welfare standards are higher than they actually are, and then when you explain, they are often quite surprised about what is the minimum—what is free range, what is organic or whatever. It is certainly an area where people want more information.

We also did a report on chicken welfare in, I think, the November issue of *Which?* and it was quite interesting to ask the different retailers about their stocking densities for chickens and to see the variation, even within the current legal framework, between individual retailers. That went down very well; I think people found it very useful information.

**Q253 Kerry McCarthy:** Do you think that, in terms of the consumer side of things, that would be more an issue for the food strategy? I think there will be quite a focus in that on—

**Sue Davies:** It is really good that in the Bill there is, obviously, the potential for financial assistance, and animal welfare is a clear criterion for that. I think that that is right. Whether it is in the Bill or the food strategy, I think there needs to be a mechanism to look at how we improve labelling.

**Q254 Kerry McCarthy:** I suppose the Bill is encouraging more humane production methods and so on, and the food strategy is making sure, at the consumer end of things and the marketing end of things, that farmers

can be rewarded through the market as well. They would be rewarded twice: once through public money for public goods, but also through people being prepared to pay a little bit more because they trust that something has genuinely been produced to better standards.

**Sue Davies:** I suppose that the Bill will also cover the marketing standards that fall under the common agricultural policy, which cover everything from breakfast products like jams to poultry. So there is an element within the Bill where that could be covered. We have had concerns that the marketing standards under the common agricultural policy have been developed very separately from other food standards and very much from a producer-only perspective, rather than by thinking about what the end consumer might want. I think that

there is an opportunity, if we are reviewing any of those standards, to make sure that they are meeting consumer needs as well.

**The Chair:** If there are no more questions, let me thank you on behalf of the Committee for the evidence that you have given this afternoon. Thank you very much.

*Ordered,* That further consideration be now adjourned.  
—(*James Morris.*)

4.57 pm

*Adjourned till Tuesday 25 February at twenty-five minutes past Nine o'clock.*

**Written evidence to be reported  
to the House**

AB14 Arla Foods UK

AB15 Anglian Water Services Ltd

AB16 Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK)

AB17 RSPCA

AB18 Scottish Land &amp; Estates

AB19 Sustain

AB20 Myra Bennett, British Horse Society County  
Access Officer, WiltshireAB21 Public Health Policy Evaluation Unit, School  
of Public Health, Imperial College London

AB22 Dairy UK

