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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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The first time a Member speaks to a new piece of parliamentary business, the following abbreviations are used to show their party affiliation:

Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind LD	Independent Liberal Democrat
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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House of Lords

Wednesday 10 June 2020

The House met in a Hybrid Sitting.

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Derby.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

11.05 am

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): My Lords, the Hybrid Sitting of the House will now begin. A limited number of Members are here in the Chamber, respecting social distancing, and, if the capacity of the Chamber is exceeded, I will immediately adjourn the House. Other Members will participate remotely, but all Members will be treated equally wherever they are. For Members participating remotely, microphones will unmute shortly before they are to speak—please accept any on-screen prompt to unmute. Microphones will be muted after each speech. I ask noble Lords to be patient if there are any short delays as we switch between physically present and remote participants.

I should remind the House that our normal courtesies in debate still very much apply in this new hybrid way of working. Oral Questions will now begin. Please ensure that questions and answers are short. I call the right reverend Prelate the Lord Bishop of Worcester to ask the first Oral Question.

G20: Debt Cancellation

Question

11.05 am

Asked by The Lord Bishop of Worcester

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that G20 countries cancel any debt owed to them by the poorest countries.

Baroness Penn (Con): My Lords, the Government are concerned by debt vulnerabilities in developing countries, which Covid-19 has amplified. The Chancellor and his G20 counterparts agreed a historic suspension of debt repayments from the world's poorest countries. This will see official creditors provide up to \$12 billion of cash-flow relief to help countries respond to the health and economic impacts of Covid-19. It also provides time to assess what further assistance these countries may need as the full economic impact becomes clearer.

The Lord Bishop of Worcester [V]: I thank the noble Baroness the Minister for her Answer. I also take this opportunity to express appreciation to the Government for their continued commitment to paying 0.7% of GNI to official development assistance. It is a very positive step that debt has been suspended but, in view of the increasing economic and social burden of this terrible virus on the poorest countries in the world, will the Government begin to press not only for the suspension but the cancellation of debts as we go further and, indeed, encourage private debtors to do the same?

Baroness Penn: My Lords, we are in uncharted territory at the moment and the full impact of Covid on the developing world is unknown. The DSSI provides breathing space, so future restructuring of debts may be needed. The G20 has publicly called for the private sector to voluntarily participate in this initiative and, if it did so to the full extent, that would provide another \$10 billion of breathing space for these countries.

Baroness Altmann (Con) [V]: My Lords, I thank my noble friend and the Government for all the work they have already done to help less developed and low-income emerging markets grappling with the health and economic fallout of Covid, especially from the fall in commodity prices. But I hope that the Government will consider debt forgiveness rather than just a debt freeze as we go through this unprecedented crisis, so that these countries can recover rather than having to continue to pay debts that have posed such problems in these times.

Baroness Penn: The Government will continue to keep all options under review. In terms of debt forgiveness, the Government have committed a further £150 million to the IMF Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust, which provides debt relief to low-income countries for their IMF payments. Twenty-five eligible countries will receive that debt relief for at least the next six months.

The Earl of Sandwich (CB) [V]: My Lords, I am grateful for what the Minister has already said, but I want to back up the right reverend Prelate because, given the public interest in debt relief, surely the Government could take the lead in debt cancellation as well as suspension during the pandemic. Does the Minister agree that DfID and the Treasury also have some responsibility for ensuring that the private sector cannot pursue LDCs for any default?

Baroness Penn: Debt relief can be an important route for some countries; however, in terms of UK support, under the heavily indebted poor countries initiative, the UK has written off most of its exposure to low-income developing countries and has since adopted a grant-based financing model. We need to look at all routes of support to these countries during the Covid epidemic.

Baroness Goudie (Lab) [V]: My Lords, for the world as a whole and especially for the G20 countries, the priority at the present time must be for poorer countries to have the resources to combat the pandemic and to do so effectively. To that end, it is essential for these countries to be relieved of debt; a mere postponement of repayment is not enough. Lives must be saved and the spread of the disease must be prevented. Poorer countries must be able to withstand the economic consequences of the pandemic. The United Kingdom must lead the way.

Baroness Penn: My Lords, I feel I have said quite a bit on debt relief and that we may be supportive in future for certain countries, if that is the right route. In terms of the UK's contribution to support, very little of our support to countries is in the form of debt and we therefore need to look at other routes as well. That is why the UK is spending over £700 million of its

[BARONESS PENN]

ODA funding towards the Covid response, in addition to normal programming, and is the largest contributor in the G20 to global efforts on a vaccine for Covid.

Baroness Kramer (LD) [V]: My Lords, does the Minister agree that, at a time when low-income countries need to intervene to support their economies but lack the reserves, in addition to broader debt cancellation her Government should urge the IMF to initiate a large special drawing rights allocation to speed the recovery of low-income economies?

Baroness Penn: The noble Baroness is right that the scale of the economic crisis facing these countries is significant. The IMF predicts that global GDP will fall by 3% in 2020 and says it is the worst global recession since the great depression and much worse than the 2008 financial crisis. We are providing a huge amount of additional support, including through the IMF, which has doubled to \$100 billion the emergency financing support available to its members.

Baroness Falkner of Margravine (Non-Aff) [V]: My Lords, I am second to none in wanting to assist poorer countries, but will the noble Baroness accept, in the context of debt forgiveness, that the World Bank has done recent research to show that aid flows through the poorest countries straight back into the wealthier countries—something called aid leakage? So unless we want to give money to Switzerland, Luxembourg, the Cayman Islands and those sorts of places, the best way to help the poorest countries is through a vaccine, through medical and pharmaceutical products and, most importantly, through the special drawing rights of the IMF mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Kramer.

Baroness Penn: The noble Baroness is correct that we need to ensure that the support we give to these countries actually flows into supporting social and health programmes that help to tackle this virus. That is why one of the conditions of the debt service suspension initiative is that the financial headroom it creates for those countries is actually directed towards those services.

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): I call the noble Baroness, Lady Rawlings. No? In that case, I call the noble Lord, Lord Singh of Wimbledon.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (CB) [V]: My Lords, in view of the iniquity of wealth acquired through slave trading, does the Minister agree that the cancellation of debt would be a timely and practical acknowledgement that black lives matter?

Baroness Penn: My Lords, I completely agree with the noble Lord that black lives matter. The UK has been a leading voice on debt forgiveness. As I said previously, however, the UK has forgiven most of its debt from low-income countries, so we also focus our support to those countries through other routes.

Lord Livermore (Lab) [V]: My Lords, the G20 public debt initiative lasts only until the end of 2020, yet it is clear that the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic will be felt far beyond the end of this year. Will the Government support an extension of the scheme?

Baroness Penn: Yes, we will.

Lord Hussain (LD) [V]: My Lords, I know that Britain plays a major role in fighting poverty around the world and I appreciate the UK's generous donation of £150 million to an IMF debt relief scheme used for Covid-19. What further plans do the Government have to take part in international initiatives to repay the debt of the poorest countries?

Baroness Penn: As I said in my response to the noble Lord, Lord Livermore, we will continue to work with the G20 and look at the extension of the debt service suspension initiative. One of the things that makes that initiative so ground-breaking is that it is the first time that China has signed up to a multilateral agreement of this nature, and as it is the largest lender to some of these countries, that will have a big impact for them.

Baroness Verma (Con) [V]: My Lords, will my noble friend ensure that funding through DfID and FCO is directed at supporting economic recovery through an economic recovery plan, whereby British businesses are supported in investing and generating employment?

Baroness Penn: We will absolutely ensure that our commitment to 0.7% of GNI supports economic recovery in the countries most affected by this pandemic and also draw on the expertise and skills of British businesses and investors across the world to support jobs.

The Deputy Speaker: My Lords, all supplementary questions have been asked, and we now move to the second Oral Question.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Water and Sanitation Question

11.16 am

Asked by **Lord Bruce of Bennachie**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to increase their support for water and sanitation programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD) [V]: My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing on my name in the Order Paper and draw attention to my entry in the register of interests.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development (Baroness Sugg) (Con): My Lords, water, sanitation and hygiene are essential for preventing the spread of Covid-19. We continue to support WASH projects throughout Africa. Our country teams are responding through health and humanitarian programmes, with water and sanitation being a key area. We have

provided more funding to UNICEF, the lead UN agency for water supply and sanitation, to help with the response. We have launched a new partnership with Unilever, which is working in Africa to scale up Covid-specific messaging on hygiene.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie [V]: With the impact of Covid-19 and the stress on water supplies from the climate emergency, I know the Minister recognises, as she acknowledged, that clean water and sanitation are more vital than ever, especially when aid budgets are squeezed. Water Unite, which I chair, collects a 1% levy on the sale of bottled water to invest in water and sanitation projects. Will the Government encourage this and other innovative ways of unlocking millions of pounds for development funds to add to taxpayer-funded donor contributions? Will she consider meeting me to explore this further?

Baroness Sugg: I thank the noble Lord for that suggestion. We have discussed that excellent initiative in the past and I would be delighted to meet him to discuss it further. As he says, water, sanitation and hygiene are incredibly important and the first line of defence for preventing the spread of Covid. DfID will continue to support WASH, as we know it is critical for managing the Covid recovery.

Lord McNicol of West Kilbride (Lab) [V]: My Lords, handwashing is one of the most effective disease prevention methods available, including specifically for Covid-19, yet 3 billion people globally do not have handwashing facilities at home. As part of DfID's monitoring of Covid-19 cases in developing countries, do the Government intend to increase support for sanitation programmes in areas that are experiencing a high number of cases?

Baroness Sugg: My Lords, as the noble Lord says, hygiene relies on access to adequate quantities of clean water, and that applies to both handwashing and surface hygiene. We will absolutely continue to support WASH projects. We need to make progress on sanitation, and progress to ensure that sufficient clean water is available for people to be able to keep safe.

Lord Mann (Non-Aff) [V]: Can the Minister be absolutely clear: will we be spending more on this in sub-Saharan Africa in the next 12 months?

Baroness Sugg: My Lords, I fear I am not in a position to answer that question. As the noble Lord will be aware, DfID funds a vast number of projects to tackle Covid. As I said, WASH projects will absolutely continue to be a key priority for DfID as we move forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): My Lords, I gather that the noble Lord, Lord Duncan of Springbank, is not asking his question, so I call the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan.

Baroness Sheehan (LD) [V]: My Lords, in Africa, the WASH sector is critical for both containing the virus and lowering its devastating impact on human and economic costs. Can the Minister say what

conversations DfID has had with the CDC about using its heft to leverage investment into both WASH, infrastructure and products such as soap and sanitiser?

Baroness Sugg: My Lords, obviously we work closely with CDC to ensure that it is responding sufficiently to Covid. CDC is urgently undertaking a Covid-19 impact and vulnerability assessment across its portfolio of investments in Africa and South Asia. As other investors withdraw, CDC is looking at extending the risk-sharing agreements it has with partner banks to ensure that it will continue to be able to support projects. I will certainly have a further discussion with it about how it can specifically support WASH projects.

Baroness Stroud (Con) [V]: My Lords, the recent outbreak of Covid has led to the biggest and most welcome extension of the WASH programme across Africa. How can we ensure that the investments made in water sanitation and hygiene by DfID look beyond Covid-19 and help to fight other diseases in the long term, such as neglected tropical diseases, and provide sustainable water and sanitation solutions for vulnerable populations going forward?

Baroness Sugg: My Lords, my noble friend is of course quite right to point out that WASH is critical not only now as we deal with the immediate impacts of Covid-19 but for the future. That is why we are working closely with our partner Governments to ensure that the water systems in their countries continue to receive investment as countries around the world are challenged with the economic impact of Covid-19.

Lord Hope of Craighead (CB) [V]: My Lords, can the noble Baroness assure the House that everything possible is being done to assist villagers in poorer countries such as Malawi, in sub-Saharan Africa? Access to clean water for washing hands is often very limited, as has been pointed out, and traditional medicine inhibits knowledge of symptoms and how to deal with them. The provision of well-judged education and sufficient hand sanitation could save many lives.

Baroness Sugg: I certainly agree with the noble and learned Lord that we must make sure that the information provided to people is correct in order to help them save lives. I mentioned our project with Unilever, which aims to reach 1 billion people with the correct information about how best to protect themselves from Covid.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): I congratulate the Government on the Gavi replenishment—a great example of international co-operation delivering on a vital health initiative. WASH is an important ingredient in delivering SDG 6, as well as our objective of universal health coverage. What are the noble Baroness, the Government and DfID doing to ensure that we lead and get other countries to invest in WASH projects?

Baroness Sugg: I am grateful to the noble Lord for bringing up Gavi, which was a great success last week, and which brought the world together to raise over £8.8 billion for essential vaccinations. As he says, improving access to water and sanitation is its own development goal; safe water and sanitation are critical

[BARONESS SUGG]
to public health and are necessary elements of universal health coverage. It is also good value for money, and we encourage other donors and indeed the World Bank to continue investment. It estimates that for every £1 spent there are economic benefits worth over £4. Therefore, we target our aid well to vulnerable countries. Between 2011 and 2015, we helped 64.5 million people get access to water and sanitation. We will continue this work and continue to encourage other partners to invest.

Baroness Randerson (LD) [V]: I declare an interest, as my husband receives a grant for research on sustainable farming in Uganda. Almost 22 million people in Uganda do not have access to clean water. That is important for health but also for equality and education opportunities for girls in particular. How much funding have the Government allocated in the last year to address health and sanitation problems in that country?

Baroness Sugg: I am afraid that I do not have the specific amount of funding for that country but I will write to the noble Baroness with that information. I completely agree that we must ensure that, as schools reopen, all pupils are able to return to school, and providing proper health, hygiene and clean running water will of course be important for that aim.

Viscount Waverley (CB) [V]: My Lords, negotiating a broad network of water PPP awards similar to that which has worked well in Gaza could be a strategy. However, I draw attention to the use of the term “sub-Sahara”, which many consider to have overtones from a bygone colonialist and racist era and so to have had its day. Would it therefore not be better to exercise our minds on Africa geostrategically, to include north Africa and the Maghreb?

Baroness Sugg: I thank the noble Viscount for that question. While examples of donating water supply or treatment equipment have been successful in some cases, our programmes overall focus increasingly on more systems-strengthening and climate resilience, as they are part of our work on ending preventable deaths. I recognise that both “Africa” and “sub-Saharan Africa” are used as shorthand for a continent that is incredibly diverse in people, cultures and contexts, and our work is designed in collaboration with countries and partners to respond to that diversity.

Lord Polak (Con): My Lords, there is a practical and reliable solution. For the last 12 years, the charity Innovation: Africa has enabled remote villages to harness the power of the sun using Israeli solar and water technology. The solar panels power the pump, which is placed in the aquifer below ground. The clean water is then pumped into a tank and taps are installed throughout the village, providing up to 10,000 people with clean water from one system at a cost of about £40,000 per system. Thanks to Innovation: Africa, 1.7 million people in remote villages in sub-Saharan Africa have clean running water. Would the Minister agree to meet with Innovation: Africa to explore ways in which her department can help ensure that clean, fresh water can be delivered to the millions in desperate need?

Baroness Sugg: My noble friend highlights one of the ways in which we are helping people in rural villages, which the noble and learned Lord, Lord Hope, asked about earlier. I understand that Innovation: Africa works closely with UNICEF, one of our key partners in WASH. Its use of innovative technology is particularly encouraging, especially as it uses green energy to power it. To achieve our ambitious SDG 6 WASH targets will require a major increase of resources and capacity. To use those effectively we must make the most of domestic funding, contributions from households and attract new finance. The WASH team at DfID will be happy to meet with Innovation: Africa, and I will follow that up with my noble friend.

The Deputy Speaker: My Lords, all supplementary questions have been asked, so we now move on to the next Question.

Covid-19: Cancelled Medical Operations *Question*

11.28 am

Asked by Baroness Kennedy of Cradley

To ask Her Majesty’s Government what assessment they have made of the impact of cancelled medical operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Bethell) (Con) [V]: My Lords, NHS trusts were rightly asked to postpone elective activity to free up capacity to support the response to Covid-19. The latest data shows that there was a 30% reduction in the number of completed admitted patient pathways in March 2020 compared to the same month last year. Data for April is due to be published by NHS England tomorrow. The NHS is safely restoring urgent non-Covid services, catching up on the backlog, and ensuring that surge capacity can be stood up again should it be needed.

Baroness Kennedy of Cradley (Lab) [V]: My Lords, thousands of patients with non-Covid conditions are not getting the treatment they need, and thousands more with life-threatening diseases such as cancer are going undiagnosed every day. Yet we see reports that private facilities, which the Government are paying for, are either empty or hosting only a trickle of NHS patients. Can the noble Lord say how many private beds paid for by the Government are being used by the NHS, and what is the Government’s plan to stop waiting lists hitting 10 million by Christmas?

Lord Bethell [V]: My Lords, I do not have the precise figures which the noble Baroness asked for. However, I reassure the Chamber that the NHS is working hard to ensure that those who need urgent surgery, such as cancer patients, have it, and we have committed a substantial amount to the Help Us, Help You media campaign, which is having an impact in restoring confidence in returning to hospitals.

The Lord Bishop of Carlisle [V]: My Lords, given the disproportionate effect of Covid-19 on those aged over 75 and the likely knock-on effects of cancelled operations, will the Minister take steps to encourage

the reintroduction of routine GP health checks among people in this age group which, understandably, have been largely suspended during the pandemic?

Lord Bethell [V]: My Lords, the impact on the over-75s is, as has been described, profound. We have worked hard to try to protect those who are shielding. The reopening of GPs' surgeries is a priority but, at the moment, we are not encouraging those who are over 75 to make the journey to surgeries that are a potential source of infection. Therefore, we will not be taking the steps the right reverend Prelate described.

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford (Con) [V]: My Lords, as the waiting lists caused by Covid create huge pressures, harder-to-treat patients must not be left behind. Last month, Eurordis released a survey which included UK rare disease patients and found that nine out of 10 had experienced disruptions in care, while more than half who needed surgery had had it cancelled or postponed. Many rare disease patients are in the shielding group and many have degenerative conditions. Can the Minister set out the plans to improve access to care and communications about care for rare disease patients, and can he please undertake to meet with patient groups about this?

Lord Bethell [V]: The work of my noble friend Lady Blackwood on rare diseases is well known and acknowledged in the House. Those with rare diseases are in exactly in the kind of vulnerable groups that are being hard hit by Covid. They are given particular access to local support systems and they should have access to home testing services if they feel vulnerable to the effects of Covid. Further, I am happy to undertake a commitment to meet with the relevant stakeholder groups to discuss how we could be working harder to support them.

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): We do not seem to be able to hear the noble Lord, Lord Patel.

Lord Patel (CB) [V]: My Lords, I have unmuted my microphone and I hope that my voice is coming through. I am sorry for the delay.

As the Minister will know, several million patients are on waiting lists for surgery. Given the increased levels of hygiene safety that will be required, it is inevitable that productivity will be down. This means that there will be a need for the prioritisation of cases. Does he agree that the professional organisations should draw up advisory guidelines for clinicians, rather than leaving it to the individuals?

Lord Bethell [V]: The noble Lord may be interested to know that, frustratingly, waiting lists have gone down rather than up, from 4.42 million in February to 4.32 million in March. This is an indication of people not coming forward for operations that they may need, and it is something that we are keen to address. However, we are putting the decision-making on how to handle the lists into the hands of local clinicians, who will use a combination of clinical need and waiting list times to make their decisions.

Baroness Crawley (Lab) [V]: My Lords, which NHS trusts, following Sir Simon Stevens' letter to them of 29 April, have made full use of all contracted independent sector hospital capacity, and will the contract between NHS England and the private healthcare sector be renewed at the end of June?

Lord Bethell [V]: The noble Baroness has asked for a very specific figure, which I am afraid I do not have to hand. However, I can assure her that the private healthcare contract has provided us with incredibly valuable surge capacity and we will be looking at how to use that kind of capacity to protect the NHS from a potential surge in the wintertime.

Baroness Jolly (LD) [V]: My Lords, can the Government guarantee that there are safe spaces for all cancer services and ensure that these spaces are Covid-protected? Further, will the Minister update the House on testing numbers and the number and frequency of tests in hospitals and in cancer hubs in England? I understand that he may not have all the figures to hand, but I would be grateful if he could write to me and put a copy of the letter in the Library.

Lord Bethell [V]: The noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, is right to emphasise the importance of safe spaces. Cancer surgery requires a completely hygienic environment for those who have immune challenges. Safe spaces are found for all those who need to have cancer practices. They may not be in absolutely every hospital, but if one hospital cannot make that kind of offer, an adjacent or nearby hospital will be found to provide the kind of safe spaces that are needed to carry out the procedures she described.

Baroness Redfern (Con) [V]: When will treatment begin for post-operative patients who are waiting for chemotherapy, do we have instances where chemotherapies have been halted during their term of treatment, and will these therapies recommence? Do we know whether trusts are beginning to do this?

Lord Bethell [V]: The noble Baroness is entirely right to focus on those who are the most vulnerable. Data for March 2020 shows that cancer referrals began to drop although treatment levels did remain high, with 15,363 patients starting treatment following an urgent referral. That is the highest figure on record in a single month. So, although some treatments may have been cancelled, as she rightly describes, what I would like to convey is that a large number of treatments did continue, and we will be working hard to address any backlog.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB) [V]: My Lords, following on from a previous question about bed capacity, I declare an interest in that my son was involved in setting up the Nightingale Hospital Excel. What assessment has been made of bed requirements to keep non-surgical care completely separate from surgical care that needs to happen in Covid-light or Covid-free areas, and to ensure the frequent testing of staff, in particular highly skilled trauma surgical staff who may be moving between these two zones, so that they do not themselves become a cause of transmitting infection?

Lord Bethell [V]: I should first like to pay tribute to all those who have been involved in setting up the Nightingale hospitals. People have worked extremely hard to deliver a valuable service to the country. Bed allocation arrangements are made by local trusts and testing within the NHS is now intense. Decisions on the traffic of staff between safe zones and non-safe zones are taken by the local director of infection control.

Baroness Thornton (Lab): My Lords, it is important that the Minister informs the House about how beds there are in the private sector, how many were occupied, at what cost and whether there will be a renewal. Does the noble Lord share my concern that if there is a second spike of Covid-19, it will lead to further delays in life-saving operations? What contingency arrangements do the Government have in place for this?

Lord Bethell [V]: The noble Baroness is right to raise this concern. The bigger focus is less on the operational restraints, because the NHS has in fact done extremely well to keep the flow of operations going during this period. It is actually on demand. What we are most deeply concerned about is that patients return to hospitals and that their confidence in undertaking procedures is restored. That is why we have put a huge amount of emphasis on the marketing side of things. That is not to understate the importance of the operational side, but it is patient confidence that is our focus at the moment.

The Deputy Speaker: My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed and I apologise to the noble Lord, Lord Dobbs, and the noble Baroness, Lady Barker, that we have not been able to take their questions.

Free School Meal Vouchers Scheme

Question

11.39 am

Asked by **Baroness Lister of Burtersett**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact on children in poverty of not providing the free school meal vouchers scheme during the summer holidays.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Department for International Trade (Baroness Berridge) (Con) [V]: My Lords, the Government remain committed to ensuring that the most disadvantaged children continue to be supported while schools remain closed. The free school meal vouchers system has seen more than £139 million-worth of voucher codes redeemed into supermarket vouchers by families and schools as of Monday. This provision is ordinarily about providing healthy meals for children in school. As such, as schools close for the summer holidays, this scheme will come to an end.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Lab) [V]: My Lords, exceptional times require exceptional measures. Food insecurity among children has doubled under lockdown, yet DWP has provided no extra money for children. For all their inadequacies, free school meal vouchers

have been a lifeline for low-income parents struggling to feed hungry children. The holiday activities fund mentioned yesterday by the Secretary of State will reach only a tiny fraction of them. In view of the Children's Commissioner's criticism that the decision lacks compassion and is "exceptionally short-sighted", can the Minister explain why if Wales can provide this most basic support for children in poverty during the school holidays and more generously England cannot?

Baroness Berridge [V]: My Lords, the provision through the free school meal vouchers system is at a higher rate than what is normally provided to schools to provide free school meals, due to the recognition that families do not have the economies of scale of schools. On additional support to families, the noble Baroness will probably be aware that during this period there has also been an uplift to universal credit and to working tax credits, such that there is an advantage of just over £1,000 a year, which affects 4 million households. This is considerable support to families who, as we recognise, are struggling to feed their children.

Baroness Massey of Darwen (Lab) [V]: My Lords, we know that poverty leads to food insecurity for children. Last week the Trussell Trust reported an 89% increase in the need for emergency food parcels in April. Who will make up for this loss of vouchers for free school meals? The UK has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Do the Government now recognise their responsibility to the welfare of children, especially vulnerable ones?

Baroness Berridge [V]: My Lords, the Government clearly recognise our responsibility to vulnerable children and have enabled them to attend school during this outbreak. The vouchers system we outlined is in addition to the funding going to schools to provide free school meals on the premises. In addition, there has been £16 million through DCMS and Defra for food support through charities such as FareShare and WRAP. There has been considerable support to enable food provision for those in need.

Baroness Janke (LD) [V]: To meet the cost of the Government's Eatwell Guide to a healthy diet, the poorest decile of UK households would need to spend 74% of their after-housing disposable income on food. How will the Government ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable children have access to a healthy diet?

Baroness Berridge [V]: My Lords, funding of £9 million has been announced for the provision of holiday activity clubs, which include food, during the school holidays. We are currently in discussions with contractors regarding the continuation of Family Action and Magic Breakfast provision during the summer holidays.

Lord Balfe (Con) [V]: The Minister has outlined the extra money put into family budgets, and there are still people in poverty. Is not part of the problem a need for proper budgetary advice and help for families to manage better? In other words, it is a case not just of money but of the way in which it is spent and giving families assistance with their budgeting. Could we not look at an educational part of this programme?

Baroness Berridge [V]: My Lords, budgeting is indeed a skill needed by many households, particularly those on limited income. Before the Covid crisis hit, there was an almost 16% increase in the Budget to the Money and Pensions Service, which gives essential advice and support, particularly to those dealing with debt.

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock (CB) [V]: My Lords, 15.4% of children were eligible for free school meals in 2019, with 42% in pupil referral units and 37% in special schools. Many of these children's health and well-being would at least in part be protected if their entitlement to the equivalent of free school meals were to continue through the summer holidays to the autumn term. A high proportion of recipients are from BME backgrounds and many are child carers. Does the Minister consider it appropriate to go back to Her Majesty's Government and re-emphasise noble Lords' support for the continuing provision of the equivalent of £15 per child per week to promote a level of equality of access to food for children in the poorest households this summer?

Baroness Berridge [V]: My Lords, I always take back representations made by noble Lords and will take that one back. As I have outlined, there has been an increase in support through the universal credit system and working tax credits. For those who are furloughed, the national living wage is more than £3,000 higher than in 2016, which affects the wages of those put on that scheme. We are concerned to ensure that households are able to make provision at the moment.

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab) [V]: My Lords, the Children's Society has highlighted how the cost of living has increased for families due to the pandemic, as more children are at home while parents' earnings have often decreased, leaving many families struggling with the cost of food and other essentials. Demand for food banks has risen substantially, yet the Government think this is the time for yet more pressure for the millions of families across the country suffering financial hardship because of Covid-19 by withdrawing the free school meal vouchers scheme over the summer. With MPs from across the parties joining the call for the scheme to be extended to cover the summer holidays, this must surely be the Government's next U-turn. If not, how does the Minister suggest parents should feed their children without the vouchers scheme during these immensely difficult times?

Baroness Berridge [V]: My Lords, as I have outlined, the vouchers scheme was in addition to the funding given to schools to provide free school meals on the premises. It has always been the position that free school meals provision was when schools were open, and it is not expected that schools will be open throughout the summer holiday. There has been a £6.5 billion injection into the DWP budget and more than 1 million food parcels have been distributed through Defra and other government departments. There is support out there for those who need provision.

Lord Rennard (LD) [V]: My Lords, should not the Government negotiate a deal for some form of reimbursement to themselves from the large supermarkets

involved in this scheme, many of which are making good profits from the crisis? This could perhaps enable the scheme to be extended. In any event, the poorest children should be our priority.

Baroness Berridge [V]: My Lords, I will take back to my colleagues in BEIS the novel and motivational idea that the noble Lord outlines. As we have seen, those in the supermarkets have been essential workers during this time of crisis. As I have outlined, we are in discussion with Magic Breakfast and Family Action about breakfast club provision during the summer holidays.

Baroness Grey-Thompson (CB) [V]: My Lords, I declare an interest as chair of ukactive. Far fewer children than expected have been accessing school and school meals during the pandemic. This has left them in a perilous position. They now face up to 23 weeks without engaging in structured and enriching activities outside their home. Will Her Majesty's Government confirm that they will explore all options for keeping some schools' facilities open safely across the summer holidays, providing activity and food, to support the most vulnerable children?

Baroness Berridge [V]: My Lords, the latest statistics show that around 15% of vulnerable children are in school. The noble Baroness is correct that we are concerned about the sedentary nature of many children at the moment. On the phased reopening of schools, there has been specific guidance to encourage the use of outdoor space, and even team sports, where the appropriate hygiene measures are carried out among the different groups of children involved. DCMS now also has guidance on the phased reintroduction of outdoor activity and recreation.

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): My Lords, I regret that the time allowed for this Question has elapsed. I apologise to the noble Lords, Lord Blunkett and Lord Empey, and the noble Baroness, Lady Boycott, that we were not able to get in their questions. I thank all noble Lords; that concludes the hybrid proceedings on Oral Questions.

11.50 am

Sitting suspended.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

Noon

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): My Lords, a limited number of Members are here in the Chamber, respecting social distancing, and if the capacity of the Chamber is exceeded I will immediately adjourn the House. Other Members will participate remotely, but all Members will be treated equally wherever they are. For Members participating remotely, microphones will unmute shortly before they are to speak; please accept any onscreen prompt to unmute. Microphones will be muted after each speech. I ask noble Lords to be patient if there are any short delays as we switch between physical and remote participants. I remind the House that our normal

[BARONESS GARDEN OF FROGNAL]
 courtesies in debate still very much apply in this new hybrid way of working. Please ensure that questions and answers are short so that we can try to get in all the people who wish to ask questions.

Quarantine: Scientific Advice

Private Notice Question

12.01 pm

Asked by Lord Balfé

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to publish the scientific advice upon which the travel quarantine measures are based.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con) [V]: My Lords, SAGE, the Home Office's chief scientific adviser and the Chief Medical Officer are clear that when the rate of domestic transmission is high, imported cases represent a small proportion of the total number and make no significant difference to the epidemic. The Home Secretary has agreed to publish a summary of this advice in due course.

Lord Balfé (Con) [V]: In her exchange on 4 June, the Minister said:

"The science advice has been consistent ... It is for SAGE to determine when to publish its advice."—[*Official Report*, 4/6/20; col. 1531.]

With respect, no: Ministers decide when to publish the advice. The Government's measures are increasingly met with widespread derision and non-compliance. I therefore urge the Minister to say to SAGE that the advice must be published very soon if it is to have any credibility, otherwise the Government's strategy in this field will, frankly, collapse.

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: It is a matter for SAGE when to publish its advice. It published advice from 23 March. As I said in my Answer, the Home Secretary has agreed to publish a summary of the advice in due course.

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab) [V]: The noble Baroness makes it sound as though SAGE was rather lukewarm about this change. Could she tell us whether the national police chiefs' guidance was shared with it, namely that it would not be the role of the police to conduct spot checks on those who should be isolating, and that they will act only if the public health authority suspects that someone is not following the guidelines? They ask how the public health authorities will know this, since, as the Immigration Service Union says, Border Force officers will not be able to check basic information such as the address at which a new arrival plans to self-isolate. They say that it is a shambles, so was SAGE told how much of a sham these quarantine rules are and is that why we are not being given more detail?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: My Lords, I think that Parliament has been given a lot of detail on this. On spot checks, PHE will do dip sampling of

20% of arriving passengers. If information on where to contact people is not forthcoming at the border, a fine can be issued.

Baroness Hamwee (LD) [V]: My Lords, these regulations have been received with concern, incredulity and, I am afraid, contempt. Does the Minister accept that it is essential that the public have confidence in these measures, because the absence of confidence threatens the public's adherence to all the Government's measures?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: I agree with the noble Baroness. Indeed, I took the opportunity to speak to Border Force yesterday about how things were going at the border. It had no problems yesterday. Looking at the general public's compliance with the regulations thus far, there has been a high degree of not only compliance but support.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con) [V]: My Lords, could my noble friend tell me what assessment the Government carried out on the impact of imposing a travel quarantine now on unemployment, tax revenues and the country's overall health, and whether they will publish the results of that assessment? If no such assessment was made, how could this be considered a responsible decision?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: It is definitely for the benefit of the economy for these measures to be reviewed and lifted as soon as possible. Of course, we have to balance the public health risks with the need to get the economy moving. Of course, we will get the economy moving just as soon as we possibly can.

Lord St John of Bletso (CB) [V]: Can the Minister explain the divergences from other European countries that have not adopted such draconian measures and give us some indication of the road map for when these restrictions will be eased? Have the Government costed the economic impact from these measures at a time when we are seeing a general easing of other restrictions?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: Each country has its own methods of trying to control the virus, with some implementation of restrictions at the border. We know that Covid-19 will have a huge economic impact and we do not wish to keep some of the restrictive measures in place for any longer than we need to. It is absolutely the Government's strong desire to get the economy up and running as soon as we can.

Lord Rosser (Lab) [V]: In the Commons on Monday, when challenged about the practicality of the quarantine plan, the Home Secretary said

"first of all, this is not my plan; this is a Government plan".—[*Official Report*, Commons, 8/6/20; col. 15.]

That sounds like a nifty piece of political distancing. We are calling for a rapid 48-hour testing-led programme to allow people to safely exit quarantine more quickly and keep the country open for business; full publication of the SAGE advice on quarantining; a sector-specific support package to save jobs in industries at risk of

collapse from the current measures; and clarity on plans and timelines for so-called air bridges. Will the Minister recommend our proposals to the Home Secretary?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: My right honourable friend the Home Secretary talked about a government plan because the sort of measures we are putting in place need not only support across government but collective agreement across government. The noble Lord is right that the quicker the testing can be done—testing is speeding up all the time—the better. He will also have seen over the past few months that certain sectors have been more able to go about their business than others, the difficult areas being industries such as hospitality. On air bridges, we are talking to countries across the world about just this—where we can perhaps pair with countries that have similar rates of infection.

Baroness Doocey (LD) [V]: My Lords, inbound tourism brings in £9 billion from July to September, but industry experts expect this to drop to £500 million because of the quarantine restrictions. This will cost the tourism industry £650 million a week. The Centre for Economics and Business Research says that more than 90% of Britain's summer tourism trade will be obliterated. In that light, what specific support are the Government prepared to give to the sector?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: The noble Baroness will know, if she listened to my right honourable friend the Home Secretary the other day, that she is in constant dialogue with the Transport Secretary and countries around the world, looking at innovative techniques for lifting restrictions and, as the noble Lord, Lord St John of Bletso, mentioned, at air bridges and similar measures that could allow travel between countries.

Baroness Pidding (Con) [V]: My Lords, there has been much talk recently about bridges and travel corridors. Will the Government consider travel gates to block incoming travellers from certain countries, based on the science—a more targeted, risk-based approach to the screening of passengers?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: My noble friend is right. We are aiming for a risk-based approach, based on other countries' levels of infection and the public health of the people of this country. That is entirely what the strategy is about.

Baroness Wheatcroft (Non-Aff) [V]: My Lords, as other noble Lords have made clear, the logic of bringing in quarantine at this stage is hard to understand. Was this proposal put before focus groups before it was adopted? Can the Minister assure the House that the Government are following the science, not the focus groups?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: My Lords, mandatory self-isolation is certainly based on the science. The time to introduce restrictions is when infection rates in this country are low. We had some restrictions initially, when we hit the peak. Those restrictions were increasingly ineffective at controlling the virus. Now that we have got the infection rates low, it is time to introduce restrictions to keep the rate of the virus low.

Lord Craig of Radley (CB) [V]: My Lords, objection to and ridicule of this devolved policy is widespread. The SI for England is 22 pages, for Wales 26 pages. They are massively complicated—a valiant attempt to cover every other department's wish list of exemptions. Scotland and Wales have differing fixed penalties to the England-only SI. As there is no unified UK policy, would it not be better to scrap it now, and not even wait for the three-week review?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: My Lords, we would wish to instigate a four-nations approach, and we engage across four nations in an attempt to get unified approach. That has been our aim all along.

Lord Wood of Anfield (Lab) [V]: My Lords, on 4 April the EU and the UK experienced over 40,000 new Covid-19 cases, and the UK had no quarantine provision. Yesterday, the EU and the UK experienced just 16,000 new Covid-19 cases, a 60% reduction, and we now have a 14-day quarantine provision. How can there be any logic in insisting on quarantine for travellers from EU countries that have negligible numbers of new cases compared to ours, when transmission within the UK is overwhelmingly likely to come from UK residents and not foreign travellers?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: The noble Lord makes a point about different rates of infection and the strategies that we have employed. When the initial rate was low, we were trying to contain the virus. Then the peak happened, and measures at the border were seen to be very ineffective. Now that they are now low again, mandatory self-isolation comes in to keep them low.

Lord Moynihan (Con): My Lords, can the Minister confirm that the Government's policy is to relax quarantine rules for elite sports so that soccer clubs can compete in European competitions, Formula 1's plans for Silverstone can go ahead, and French horses entered for the Derby in three weeks' time can do so, with appropriate safeguards but without a strict fortnight's quarantine?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: My Lords, it is absolutely the Government's intention that if we can lift restrictive measures, we will. Many of us are keen to watch the football. I was supposed to be going to the Derby; I do not think I will see it in real time, but I might see it virtually. Based on the science, we are reviewing these things every three weeks.

The Earl of Clancarty (CB) [V]: My Lords, why are frequently flying business travellers exempt, when this increases the chances of spreading the virus? Does this not make a nonsense of the restrictions, and is it not another case of one rule for some but not others?

Baroness Williams of Trafford [V]: My Lords, there are certain exemptions for people such as hauliers. We need people to deliver food to this country. In all decisions that the Government make, there is a balance to be struck between public health and not only the economy, but getting essential goods and services to the people of this country.

12.16 pm

Sitting suspended.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

12.45 pm

The Deputy Speaker (Lord Faulkner of Worcester) (Lab): My Lords, a limited number of Members are here in the Chamber, respecting social distancing. If the capacity of the Chamber is exceeded, I will immediately adjourn the House. Other Members will participate remotely but all Members will be treated equally, wherever they are. For Members participating remotely, microphones will unmute shortly before they are to speak. Please accept any on-screen prompt to unmute. Microphones will be muted after each speech. I ask noble Lords to be patient if there are any short delays as we switch between physical and remote participants. I remind the House that our normal courtesies in debate still very much apply in this new hybrid way of working.

To manage proceedings, there will be an adjournment at a convenient point after 3.45 pm. After the adjournment, the debate will resume at a convenient point after 4.15 pm with the next speaker on the list.

Agriculture Bill

Second Reading

12.45 pm

Moved by Lord Gardiner of Kimble

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Relevant document: 13th Report from the Delegated Powers Committee

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Gardiner of Kimble) (Con): My Lords, in declaring my farming interests as set out in the register, it is clearly a privilege to open this debate. The policies that flow from the Bill seek to strengthen our agricultural and horticultural industries and protect the long-term future of food production in this country. They will help deliver a fairer return from a fairer marketplace for food producers.

Financial assistance will be provided for protecting or improving the environment and will allow the environmental land management—ELM—scheme to provide financial assistance for the delivery of outcomes such as cleaner air and water and thriving plants and wildlife. The Government will also provide financial support in connection with managing land or water to help mitigate flooding. There will also be support for action to improve animal health and welfare, reduce endemic disease, keep livestock and soils healthy, and support public access to and enjoyment of the countryside. Farmers and land managers will be rewarded for their vital work in enhancing our environment and looking after our landscapes.

The Government and food producers have important contributions to make when it comes to tackling climate change. These provisions will put our farmers at the heart of an ambitious enterprise: to meet the goals of

the 25-year environment plan and achieve the Government's world-leading commitment to reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. The National Farmers Union has already shown admirable leadership in its work on seeking net-zero emissions.

The Bill recognises at its heart that food production and a flourishing natural environment can—and must—go hand in hand. This is explicitly demonstrated in Clause 1(4), which places a duty on the Secretary of State to have regard to the need to encourage the production of food by producers in England, and in an environmentally sustainable way, when framing financial assistance schemes. It includes provisions for financial assistance to encourage farmers, foresters and growers to improve their productivity in a sustainable way. The Government will provide grants so that they can invest in equipment, technology and infrastructure.

I know that Ministers sometimes receive reports from the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee with some trepidation, but I am most grateful to—indeed, I thank—the committee for its consideration of the Bill, its overwhelmingly positive report and its commentary on an improvement to an earlier Bill. Of course, we will consider closely any residual issues and concerns raised by the committee.

In setting a seven-year agricultural transition period from direct payments to a new system, the Government wish to ensure a gradual move so that farmers can adapt. Over the past few months, the role of farmers and food producers in feeding the nation has quite rightly been on everyone's minds. Working as I do at Defra, I particularly want to record my gratitude to all who have worked so hard, from farm to fork, to ensure we have access to the food we need. The importance that the Government place on food security is recognised in the Bill, with a duty placed on the Secretary of State to lay a report on food security before Parliament at least—I emphasise at least—every five years. We would certainly not intend to wait five years before publishing the first report, which will of course take into account what has been learned from the current pandemic.

The Secretary of State will have the powers to act in truly exceptional market conditions, such as those we are enduring at present, or in extreme weather conditions if these result in a severe disturbance in agricultural markets. As we move from area-based payments towards payments for the delivery of public benefit, we must also make sure that our farmers are fairly rewarded by a fair marketplace for the food that they produce.

Part 3 of the Bill contains provisions to strengthen the position of farmers in the food supply chain. Fair dealing provisions will introduce statutory codes of practice to regulate those buying from farmers; we will look at the dairy and red meat sectors first. Farmers' position in the supply chain can also be strengthened by allowing groups of farmers to form producer organisations, which can access derogations from competition law, giving them the power to co-ordinate activities and become more competitive. The Bill contains powers to collect and share data, allowing the Government to strengthen existing market reporting services, and to provide information which will help farmers to make clearly evidenced business decisions and manage risk.

The Bill will enable the streamlining and modernising of the regulation of fertilisers. It also sets up the new multispecies livestock information service in England, which will provide the best livestock traceability. As a Minister with biosecurity in my brief, I think it essential that we enhance traceability.

The Bill also attends to a fairer distribution of the red meat levy, which I know has been an issue in Wales and Scotland. It will make pragmatic modifications to tenancy legislation, introducing more contemporary arrangements that will work for both tenants and landlords. It also contains powers to amend existing marketing standards, and to make new organics regulations and amend the existing regime so that these can be modernised to work better for domestic producers.

Part 6 provides powers to ensure the UK's compliance with its obligations under the WTO Agreement on Agriculture. Regulations made under this part will allow the apportionment, between the nations of the United Kingdom, of agreed limits on certain types of financial support. I should note that this clause refers only to the Agreement on Agriculture and not to other WTO treaties, such as GATT, which the United Kingdom is bound to as a WTO member.

Clauses 43 to 45 and Schedules 5 and 6 have been included in the Bill at the request of the Welsh Government and DAERA Ministers. I am pleased to present them on their behalf. The Scottish Government have chosen to introduce their own agriculture Bill.

The Government have made it clear in the joint letter from the Environment Secretary and the International Trade Secretary published on 5 June, which I asked to be circulated to noble Lords yesterday, that they are alive to the issue of trade standards. My honourable Friend the Minister for Farming in the other place has stated:

"In all of our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards."

I can confirm that all food—I emphasise all food—coming into the country will continue to have to meet existing import requirements as the withdrawal Act transfers EU standards on to the UK statute book. This specifically means that the import of chlorine-washed chicken and hormone-fed beef, for example, is prohibited.

I realise that this is a brisk run-through of some elements of the Bill but I want to keep my remarks fairly short, so that we have plenty of time for other contributions. The Agriculture Bill is the beginning of a journey that we acknowledge will take time. We will put farmers and land managers at the heart of that journey. It needs to be their project too; it will not work if it is not. We will support them through the agricultural transition by adequately rewarding them for protecting and enhancing the environment, while enabling their businesses to prosper in the production of outstanding British food and drink for domestic and international consumption.

In this context, given the immense challenges that this planet faces—an increasing world population; climate change and its impact; the imperatives of enhancing the environment; and sufficient food production—how should we best use scientific advances to aid us? We have to wrestle with all these challenges.

Innovation has been part of agricultural history, as have the traditions of good husbandry and custodianship. We clearly seek a blend of succeeding generations of farmers and new entrants. Coming from farming stock, I say that we ask much of the British farmer—as usual, at the very beginning, in contending with the weather. As some of your Lordships will know from an earlier consideration on derogation, this year had an exceptionally wet winter and spring followed by an exceptionally dry May.

I look forward to this debate because, by coming from all parts of the country, noble Lords will be well aware of the dynamics of their local farming sectors. I beg to move.

12.57 pm

Lord Grantchester (Lab): I thank the Minister for his introduction to the Bill. I declare my interests in having a career from dairy farming, through processing and manufacturing to retailing, as well as serving on a public-private partnership.

Agriculture has been subject to many crises and constant change, albeit incremental, shaping and responding to each reform package as a member state in the EU. With all areas being repatriated, the House rightly recognises that the Bill creates a rare opportunity to make a clear strategic leap into new but familiar territory by designing new support systems to underpin sustainable agriculture.

I congratulate the Government on this second, revised version of the Bill after the one originally proposed. The first Bill was roundly criticised for being a misnomer of a Bill. Although it was called an Agriculture Bill, it did not include much agriculture and provided only a delivery mechanism for environmental payments. That would have been a tremendous lost opportunity. This improved Bill provides better balance. It recognises the importance of food production in ongoing reforms, balanced with the need to refocus on environmental sustainability. With all trading blocs around the world supporting their agriculture, Labour recognises that the UK's departure from the common agricultural policy creates a unique opportunity to change the way that the UK supports its domestic farms and food producers, and welcomes the environmental focus underlying aspects of the new policy. We will work across parties to ensure that the final version of the Bill strikes the right balance between production and environmental protection. Labour endorses the concept of public money for public goods.

The Government set out their changed priorities in two important policy documents in February this year: *Farming for the Future*, and *Environmental Land Management*. My first question to the Minister is: having written these before the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic, do they wish to amend their approach in the light of its experience? My second question seems to follow: is food a public good? These two documents do not explicitly recognise that it is, yet with the experience of severe disruption in supply chains, access challenges to food banks and challenges to safeguarding vulnerable and shielded persons, debate may well move in the future towards recognising food as a fundamental right, with its provision in some aspects becoming a public service.

[LORD GRANTCHESTER]

The additions in the Bill now include provisions on safeguards on the support of domestic food production by focusing on soil protection, investments in technology and equipment, improving environmental sustainability, and innovation through future research and development; while reducing carbon emissions. Additionally, the Government have recognised the importance of food security by commissioning Henry Dimbleby to lead an independent review into the UK's food system. It could be argued this review should have appeared before the Bill to provide a back-cloth to the Bill's provisions. This review, with recommendations for a national food strategy, must not be delayed.

Does the Minister also recognise the importance of the UK's self-sufficiency? His department has been reluctant to do so in the past, such that the UK's self-sufficiency in food has declined to 53%. We welcome the Bill's provision that the Government must report on food security, but call on the Government to recognise that, in relying on imported food, it is exporting decision-making on food policy to overseas countries with differing priorities. This may not be consistent with the Bill's focus on the environment.

We also welcome the importance of providing a better balance of economic returns to agriculture through transparent and fair markets. The coronavirus disruption to supply chains once again has exposed poor behaviour, especially in the food service sector, where enterprise risk was pushed down on to the primary producer. While recognising the benefits that have come through the retail market with the work of the Groceries Code Adjudicator, how and through what mechanisms will the statutory code of practice for contracts, outlined in the Bill, be enforced in this food service sector?

Competition law needs to be re-examined in light of the pandemic experience. How will the obligation to establish fair dealing be brought forward? Bearing in mind the Groceries Code was the responsibility of the Department for Business, can the Minister say which department will take overall responsibility for business practice enforcement to make it effective?

The key feature of the Bill is to replace direct payments with environmental land management, characterised as providing public support for public goods. While we welcome these provisions, the policy document and the Bill are both scanty on the final details of what ELM will look like. I know these provisions will form the basis of many questions for other speakers. Everyone will praise the intentions of the Government. Environmental degradation is abhorrent. But there are many concerns regarding baseline standards without meaningful enforcement through cross-compliance for basic environmental conditions to receive payment and how this can be replaced with meaningful incentives to enhance the countryside if the food producer does not want to enter into any scheme.

Direct payments have provided a large element of financial support to a lot of farmers, especially in the uplands. The first change to agricultural experience in the transition is a cut next year to its funding, with few alternative schemes being ready. If agriculture is to be encouraged to take up environmental improvements, these schemes must be seen to pay, with schemes

recognising opportunity costs of value rather than being based on income forgone. The Government must learn from having already experienced a huge shortfall in the expected take-up of environmental stewardship schemes recently.

Aspects regarding climate change mitigation must also be a fundamental priority. I welcome such projects as the carbon credit schemes on woodlands and warn against fixed, bureaucratic approaches that fail to recognise local farming conditions.

The improved balance of the Bill will nevertheless be a severe challenge to achieve. The Bill omits, and needs, a vital third element and focus to provide better stability. This key element would be provided by the introduction of food standards into the Bill. For agriculture to thrive, for the countryside to be enhanced, food standards must underpin the provisions in the Bill and be maintained. I want to make it clear that dealing with the issue of standards is one of our top priorities. Domestic standards of production are a clear commitment and all imported produce must comply with food, environmental and animal welfare standards that domestic production has to adhere to. This has been the key concern of every submission, letter and email I have received on the Bill. I thank everyone and all the organisations who have sent me their thoughts.

The joint letter issued recently from the Secretaries of State of Defra and DIT still does not recognise the strength of feeling that a clear majority of the public want the certainty of the law to put this commitment beyond dispute, prevarication and back-tracking. Labour will look to support this commitment by writing amendments also into the Trade Bill. We will be tabling an amendment on the matter, and I expect to see several others tabled at Committee. We wish to work with all voices around the House who share this concern, to find the correct formulation to write this into law, be that through a food and trade standards commission to adjudicate on equivalence of standards or through other statutory provisions.

The Bill has been recognised as a framework Bill that is scantily dressed in detail. Your Lordships' Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, in its 13th report of the Session, outlines the major transfer of powers from the EU to Ministers, bypassing Parliament and devolved legislatures. The skeletal framework of the Bill gives extensive powers for future regulatory changes without clear detail and with correspondingly few duties. Yet the Government acknowledge that the new agricultural support system will take time to develop. We will wish to draw out in Committee as much detail as possible on relevant principles, policies and criteria underpinning ministerial decision-making that will eventually arrive through statutory instruments. As your Lordships know, statutory instruments are not generally subject to amendment.

There are so many aspects of the Bill that time precludes me from discussing. This is a significant piece of legislation, and it is disappointing that speakers are under such time constraints. The three key tests of the Bill are that: first, it must secure a safe and traceable supply of nutritious food; secondly, it must ensure ELM schemes are effective, supporting jobs, investment and research for a sustainable environment

and planet; and, thirdly, it must insist on high standards, clear equivalence and a level playing field to enhance the health of the nation.

1.08 pm

Baroness Parminter (LD) [V]: My Lords,

“God made the land for the people”.

I was reminded of that rallying cry from the Liberal anthem “The Land” as I considered this Bill. There have been many political struggles down the years over the ownership and management of land, of which nearly three quarters in the UK is farmed. This Bill rightly seeks a new consensus on how we manage the sometimes competing demands of farmed land and how we reward those who steward it on the people’s behalf.

So, whilst we are saddened this has been necessitated by our leaving the European Union, Liberal Democrats welcome the new approach proposed by the Government of paying farmers and land managers public money for delivering public goods: namely, protecting the environment, on which we depend, to produce healthy food; enhancing biodiversity; and tackling the impacts of climate change—all this at the same time as maintaining the patchwork quilt of fields and rolling hills which create a sense of local place, so valued for our physical and mental well-being. But this is only an enabling Bill, and much remains unclear about how those welcome ambitions will become more than aspirations.

In the past, the more land you had, the more money you received. Thankfully, in the future, payments will depend on delivering agreed legal targets. But, despite the welcome multiannual financial plans, there is no requirement for a budget to be set for the individual component schemes or clarity on the long-term funding framework for farmers.

While the Bill allows for drawing up targets and metrics to deliver the public goods, there is no clarity as to how the new measures will be regulated and enforced. It has been estimated that, at present, farms have just a one in 200 chance of being inspected each year by the Environment Agency. The system already needed radical overhauling, as the government-commissioned review by Dame Glenys Stacey outlined. In future, with a far more complex new system to monitor, it doubly needs it.

Yet the Government have sat on the Stacey review since 2018 and the Bill is silent on any objectives or indications of how a new regulatory framework and anybody administering it might exercise its functions. The Government managed to set these out for the Office for Environmental Protection in the Environment Bill. It is deeply disappointing that the Agriculture Bill gives no sense of how we can guarantee the delivery of the environmental and animal welfare ambitions in it.

It is essential that those ambitions are delivered. Tackling Covid-19 has reminded us how vital it is that our farmers contribute to public health goals by supplying healthy food, while helping us tackle the nature emergency and the worrying decline in biodiversity and wildlife—there has been a 54% drop in farmland birds during my lifetime—and mitigating the effects of climate change by planting trees and restoring peat bogs. The agriculture sector accounts for about 10% of the UK’s

greenhouse gas emissions, and we must bring those down, including by cutting on-farm food waste. If food waste was a country, it would be the third-biggest emitter of CO₂ on the planet. Among other amendments that my Liberal Democrat colleagues will speak to at later stages of the Bill, we will introduce one requiring that the Secretary of State’s five-yearly UK food security report includes data on how much food is wasted, since we will not be food secure if we produce plenty but much of it is wasted.

Those ambitions will not be delivered either if all government policy does not support them, including future trade policy. Existing UK agriculture policy, agreed as a member of the European Union, has been pivotal in guaranteeing consumers the safety of their food and respecting the welfare of livestock. It has kept out pork from pigs confined in sow stalls, beef from cattle injected with hormones to enhance their growth and chlorinated chicken to wash away the shame of poor husbandry. The Government say that they are sincere in their commitments to maintaining those standards, so why not put it in the Bill? Liberal Democrats will work with others, including the Labour Front Bench and anyone else in the House, to support amendments to the Bill to ensure our high environmental protections and animal welfare standards are not compromised in trade negotiations, which would also fatally undermine farmers who seek to do the right thing for our health, our animals and our countryside.

No financial support or policy changes on productivity measures should undermine the delivery of other public goods. I will oppose any attempt to use the Bill to overturn existing legislation on gene editing, which would be a serious step backwards for animal welfare and public trust in our food. We need to retain the European model of regulation that we are currently signed up to, where no gene editing is allowed outside the lab and mandatory labelling is required, and we should not enable trade deals with countries such as America, where products from genetically modified animals can be marketed. Rather than amending this Bill to obtain even more productivity and profit from individual animals, who are sentient and have intrinsic worth, I hope that this House will endorse the aim of the Bill to support sustainable agriculture that respects the welfare of farmed animals and enhances biodiversity. The direction of travel in this Bill is welcome, but there is more to be done to ensure that we end up rightly rewarding the careful stewardship of the people’s precious countryside.

1.14 pm

Lord Kilclooney (CB): My Lords, living in rural Northern Ireland in the county of Armagh, better known as the garden of Ulster, I have a natural interest in the Bill. I also have an interest in it having served on the agriculture committee of the European Parliament, although that service was in the middle of the last century.

I have watched developments in the common agricultural policy; I have watched the development of the European Union. More recently, the United Kingdom has contributed £20 billion to the EU budget, of which about £8 billion comes back, £4 billion of that to the farming industry in the United Kingdom.

[LORD KILCLOONEY]

As a result of Brexit, this is the first real United Kingdom agricultural policy for about 50 years. This is due to the end of the application of the common agricultural policy. There are three fundamental questions which still need to be answered—in fairness, the Minister answered one of them, but I want further clarity on the issue. First, will Her Majesty's Government's support for the agricultural industry in the United Kingdom continue at the same level as exists from the common agricultural policy at present? Secondly, will the quality and standards of agriculture and food in the United Kingdom decline after we leave the common agricultural policy? Thirdly, will there be provision for the import of cheaper foods, creating unfair competition for our own home producers here in the United Kingdom?

This is a comprehensive Bill that will require much detailed examination in Committee, but there are a number of issues in relation to Northern Ireland that I wish to mention. Agriculture is the main employer in Northern Ireland, employing one in eight people. Rural towns and communities depend on the success of our 25,000 farm enterprises, but beef production income has fallen by £36 million in the past year alone. Income from milk has also fallen. Many farmers are now finding it difficult to stay in business.

Farm structure in Northern Ireland is very different from that in England, hence it is important that agriculture is a devolved matter. For example, farms in Northern Ireland are much smaller than in England. Intensively farmed poultry and pigs are a major product. Near where I live, we have Moy Park, employing 4,000 people dealing with poultry alone.

There are three issues that I wish to mention to the Minister today. One relates to the Northern Ireland protocol, in which I am sure he is well conversant; namely, can the Government give an assurance that there will be no checks or tariffs on Northern Ireland agricultural exports into Great Britain, as 50% of our exports are into the British market? It is very important that that is maintained, so I hope that there will be no checks or tariffs. Secondly, can the Government confirm that they do not want lower standards of food safety than in the European Union, as Northern Ireland has to retain the EU's standards under the protocol? Such lower standards would result in reduced costs of production and make it more difficult for Northern Ireland agricultural producers to compete in the GB market. Finally, on Article 10.2 of the EU Northern Ireland protocol, will UK support for Northern Ireland agriculture be unquestioned, or will the exemption from the EU state aid rules become null and void if the joint committee fails to reach an agreement? Does this in practice mean a continuing EU veto over UK support for Northern Ireland agriculture?

1.18 pm

The Lord Bishop of St Albans [V]: My Lords, I am pleased that the long-anticipated Agriculture Bill has finally arrived in your Lordships' House. There are many good and laudable parts of the Bill, not least the fair trading provisions for farmers and concerns for the environment and wildlife.

This House knows that rural England requires flexibility, and the complications and unintended consequences caused by the European Union's cap have been well rehearsed. I have repeatedly raised the issue of food security in your Lordships' House, which must be a top priority for any Government.

We have been reminded of this again recently after the recent lockdown following the Covid pandemic. Shop shelves were stripped bare within hours and you could not buy some products such as flour for weeks. We know we cannot be fully self-sufficient in food as a nation, as nowadays we demand many products that are best produced in warmer climates. However, we can learn from our recent experience and think about how as many people as possible can have access to ethically farmed, good quality, locally sourced food. This is an agricultural issue, an environmental issue and a social justice issue.

The possibility of cheap imports providing even cheaper food is being trumpeted by some and a trade deal with the States has long been thought of as an opportunity to deregulate our farming. As the Bill progresses through its various stages, we will want to test the legislative guarantees to reassure us that these worries will not be proved correct. I will want to explore why the reviews into food security will be so infrequent rather than undertaken on an annual basis.

Elsewhere in the Bill, we will also seek clarity. Environmental land management schemes, with public money for public good, remain a cornerstone of the Bill, yet a cornerstone with so little clarity will fail to support legislation. The definition of biodiversity in the Environment Bill—a piece of legislation this Bill fails to acknowledge—remains unclear, as does this Bill's lack of definition of the phrase "public good". Moreover, the tapering of the schemes remains opaque, despite many requests for clarity. Upland farming, for example, is dependent on similar schemes, yet, as far as I can see, remains undervalued by the Bill. Furthermore, issues such as peat restoration and water obstruction which fail to consider legal implications remain unfinished. While welcome, the Bill will need a much greater level of clarity as it passes through its various stages if it is to receive support from this House.

1.22 pm

Lord Taylor of Holbeach (Con) [V]: My Lords, I declare my interests in the Bill as published in the register. The Bill is one of the most important for the countryside and for farming for many years. It does not just tinker with the system. It is not just an Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, with which many noble Lords will be familiar. It is a direct consequence of our 31 January departure from the EU. As such, it is a great opportunity to reinvigorate our farming industry as we in the UK would want it, free from the suffocation of the common agricultural policy.

There is a real need to give farming a boost—a breath of fresh air. Recent events have lessons for us. It is a paradox of the global world: just as the supplies of PPE dried up as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, so can our dependence on cheap food imports from around the world expose us to a similar risk.

The structure of the Bill is essentially that of an enabling Bill, but it is important to note that it does not weaken current commitments to the public good. Farms such as ours support far more trees, hedgerows, spinneys, field margins and nature areas than in my day. It is also important to note that the joint letter that noble Lords received from Liz Truss and George Eustice, Secretaries of State respectively for International Trade and Defra, clearly commits that there will be no lowering of standards, either in animal welfare or food safety. Chlorinated chicken is not on the table.

There is one area to which I would like to see a similar commitment—one in which there is extensive support from both scientists and farmers and, for that matter, here and in Europe. It is breeding for enhanced yields and reducing our use of fertilisers and pesticides—a double whammy, but a positive one. I refer, of course, to gene editing, which is an acceleration of plant breeding that is supported not only by our world-leading scientists here, but also in Europe. The Prime Minister spoke of the technique on the day he was appointed. He used it to demonstrate the perversities of the European justice system.

The agency delivering this game changer would not be multinational agro-giants but institute spin-offs and small SMEs, such as the ones that I am familiar with in my area. The Minister will know that the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture strongly endorsed these techniques, which have a great potential in the developing world. As an industry we would be delivering a greener environment and food security for the nation, and playing our part in feeding the world. I welcome the Bill.

1.26 pm

Baroness Young of Old Scone (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I declare my interests as chairman of the Woodland Trust, chairman of the Royal Veterinary College, a member of the Commission on Food, Farming and the Countryside and vice-president of the RSPB.

I want to say three things on the Bill. As noble Lords have said, it is a once in a lifetime opportunity. I know that the Government regard it as an enabling Bill, but such landmark legislation should have a bit more real meat on the face of the Bill to tackle the important future for farming, food, the environment and climate change. I welcome the Bill's commitment to public money for public goods, but Ministers must ensure that the environmental land management schemes do not result in a basic level of payment that does not really deliver for the environment but looks like the same old farmers' support system. There is a real risk of that.

Payments for agricultural productivity which are allowed under the Bill should explicitly be for sustainable productivity. The Bill has too many clauses where the Secretary of State "may" do worthwhile things, such as have an environmental land management scheme or provide financial assistance for public goods. The Bill should say that he "must" in these circumstances—we need duties, not simply powers.

My second point is that the Bill must have as its key principle support for a thriving and sustainable food and farming sector, while delivering public goods. But

we know that the negotiation of a free trade deal with the USA could jeopardise the Conservative manifesto commitment that imports will not be permitted to the UK of food produced to lower environmental, animal welfare, food safety and employment standards. To do this would risk undermining UK standards and create unfair competition. Simply to slap a higher tariff on such imports, as is rumoured in the press, would not remove that risk. Trade Ministers continue to reassure us—we have now had a joint letter from the Trade and Environment Ministers. I quote the noble Lord, Lord Grimstone, a Minister in the Department for International Trade, who said last week:

"There will be no compromise on high environmental, animal welfare and food standards."

We are also told that that might be contrary to World Trade Organization rules. Should that not have been thought of by the manifesto writers before they wrote their assurances? Will the Minister tell us what is going on? If there are such strong commitments, surely the Bill should be amended to require agri-food imports to have been produced to equivalent standards to those in the UK.

My third point is one that many noble Lords will have heard before, because it is my current hobby-horse. The list of public goods in Clause 1 that the agricultural sector is to be asked to deliver is very extensive, but these are not the only pressures on land, and they are growing. Land is needed for increased food security, carbon storage, biodiversity, flood management, trees and increased timber self-sufficiency, recreation and health, and built development such as housing, infrastructure and other needs. The Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership found that, to meet a growing UK population's food, space and energy needs, while protecting the nation's natural capital, the UK would need a third more land—7 million hectares. I therefore call on the Government to commit in this Bill to develop a land use framework for England, within which these competing needs can be reconciled. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have land use frameworks already, and it is long overdue for England.

1.30 pm

Lord Teverson (LD) [V]: My Lords, I declare my interest as a co-chair of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Nature Partnership. In some ways, I have a slightly different view, and have always been pretty critical of the state aid that the agriculture and farming industry has received, largely unconditionally—some £3 billion to £4 billion a year. Many of us think that that money could have been spent in much more effective ways, whether in the National Health Service or social security, or in all the other areas that are so demanding on the Treasury. We have a real chance now, outside the European Union, to change that.

At the same time, I am very aware that as well as the climate change crisis facing us globally, there is also a biodiversity challenge for ecosystems and ecosystems services, not just globally but here in the UK. I remind Members of the *State of Nature* report by the Wildlife Trust, which, to give just a few examples, pointed out that 40% of species in the UK are currently in decline, some 13% are at threat of extinction, and one-quarter

[LORD TEVERSON]

of our mammal species are at risk. The reasons for this are due in part to climate change, but the main reason identified is land use for agriculture. Of course, 70% of England, and slightly more of the UK as a whole, is under agriculture and farming management. It was in looking at those trade-offs that I made a personal decision: it is important to direct that subsidy, or state aid, at this crisis, as we have started to direct many other resources at climate change.

I very much welcome the environmental land management scheme set out in the Bill, although I would like to see a lot more detail on it. I believe that this is one way to make sure that we start to meet the biodiversity and ecosystem challenges across our nation—it is not the only way, but as it is the only way the Government are proposing, I support it. This is an emergency and we need to get on with it. For that reason, I speak probably in the opposite direction to some of those involved in the industry itself, and ask why the transition is seven years. It seems to me that, for an emergency, that is an extremely long time. Why can we not take five years to move across to the different system, to make sure that we keep our ecosystems safe and maintain everything that our economy depends on?

I welcome that the Bill mentions agroecology, which is a new way of looking at agriculture and whole-farming systems. I hope that ELMS will take seriously that whole-farming systems approach. My question for the Minister is this. There have been a number of trials of ELMS. How do we see those now? I am concerned about whether farmers will take up these schemes, so that we can have a real effect on our environment.

All environmental measures need to be a long-term commitment; it is no good growing trees if we cut them down in five or seven years. How do we ensure that these improvements, be it peatlands or whatever, are maintained over a long period? Reflecting in particular on my noble friend Lady Parminter's excellent speech, I wonder also how we will enforce this. We are not good at enforcing environmental regulations in the United Kingdom at the moment, something the Government really need to confront.

1.34 pm

Baroness Browning (Con) [V]: My Lords, I very much welcome the commitment given by my noble friend in his opening remarks to the pledges made in the letter of 5 June from the two Secretaries of State about food standards, particularly in relation to food imports. It is worth remembering that, across a range of areas, the benchmark of EU standards, which we will incorporate into UK law and adhere to, is one that we have signed up to in the EU. But in addition to EU rules, several measures have been taken unilaterally by the UK Government in the past—such as the banning of sow stalls and tethers, and veal crates—which were not universally welcomed within the EU. I say to my noble friend: do not just rest on the laurels of the EU. Let us look across the piece at how we can improve and enhance our standards as we go forward, both for the domestic market and for imports. Pesticides, veterinary medicines and issues relating to zoonotic diseases all have to be monitored and need ongoing improvement.

Turning to food supply, the Bill makes welcome reference to the small producer. In his opening remarks, my noble friend referred to producer organisations. These have been tried over many years: some have been very successful, and others have failed. The farming community in particular has everything to gain from adding value to food products at the farm gate, rather than leaving a long chain of people to take a slice of the profit. But my noble friend should note the very small producers—farms that produce regional, local food products with which those areas are familiar. Over the years, we have very much admired this in continental countries such as France. There is benefit in adding value at the farm gate, before the product leaves.

This is true not just for supermarket sales but for those very important farmers' markets, farm shops and food boxes, all of which have grown in popularity in recent years. I hope we will build on that. The advantages are enormous: the food is fresh; it saves on transport costs, which helps the environment; and the people who buy the food get to talk to the very people who produce it. There is an educational element to this. I am a former cookery teacher who is appalled that cookery classes, such as we used to know them, were banned—I am afraid that that was done by a Conservative Government. Domestic science is often derided, but, my gosh, it is a very important life skill. I hope my noble friend will give attention to those who are producing all the raw ingredients that not only help economically but help the health of the nation.

I want to add a word of support for the point made by my noble friend Lord Taylor of Holbeach. As an Agriculture Minister, I introduced the first GM product in this country, way back in the 1990s. It all fell apart, as we know, for all sorts of reasons. But with the right controls I believe that there is much to be gained from looking at this science, particularly in respect of plants. We must make sure that we are not left behind because of people's fear of the word "gene".

1.38 pm

The Duke of Somerset (CB) [V]: My Lords, I declare my farming interest, as in the register.

There are many substantive issues in this Bill and around ELMS, and I start with standards. The empty shelves which were so apparent at the start of the lockdown should focus our minds, so I welcome the belated acknowledgment of food production as an aim in the Bill, but I ask: what sort of food production? The Minister says that the Government can square the stated promise of not reducing our standards of welfare, stocking densities and environmental concerns with doing trade deals with countries with lower standards. Therefore, if there is to be one standard for imports and another for home-produced food, it is vital that labelling regulations are updated to give transparent and full information to the shopper, who tends to buy primarily on price considerations. Care also needs to be given to how consumers in cafés and restaurants are properly informed of the origins of their foodstuffs.

The Government have been clear that they intend to take advantage of Brexit freedom from EU red tape and will phase out cross-compliance. So again there is

a dichotomy between moving away from the stifling rules and regulations that benighted the CAP and the demand for a high-cost regulatory regime to ensure continuation of our high standards. We must avoid even worse red tape than currently strangles our enterprises. The NFU's suggestion of a farm standards commission to address that seems laudable.

I hope that ELMS will be far-reaching, including embracing, for example, emerging technologies, such as leaf recognition to target individual plants when spraying. The further development of robotic fruit and vegetable picking is vital if the shortage of foreign labour, so exacerbated by our foolish Brexit policy, is to be avoided.

We are seeing a gradual shift in diet in the UK, not just with less meat being consumed but with demand for locally produced food sold in local shops. The coronavirus has encouraged this trend and people are becoming more conscious of their health. In the post-virus world, we must embrace and encourage this localism, breaking the unfair near-monopolies of the big supermarkets, with their aggressive purchasing tactics.

Cleaner water is clearly targeted in the Bill. However, floods continue to ravage settlements every year. We need to slow up floodwater flows and catch the excess higher up in the hills. Rewilding is a topical discussion and one of the best ways of controlling water is by reintroducing bends into our streams, as well as reintroducing beavers. The successful introduction of beavers to the River Otter in Devon points the way back to better river management regimes. Can the Minister confirm that Defra's intention is to expedite and encourage the licensing of these native animals, which naturally slow water and create rich environments for wildlife, thus regenerating biodiversity?

The Bill mentions productivity in forestry. I believe that we need to encourage more planting of both conifers for commercial wood use and broadleaf trees for landscape and environmental reasons. However, indigenous broadleaves cannot thrive alongside the grey squirrel. Can the Minister kindly indicate the department's support for the current immuno-contraception research and rollout?

The UK agriculture industry needs consumer buy-in to support the higher cost of our standards. That means getting the general public to understand farming constraints. I would like to see encouragement in ELMS for farm tours and school groups, and the expansion of permitted footpaths to augment our already world-leading rights-of-way network. There is much to welcome in the Bill. Let us expand and use it to the fullest extent.

1.43 pm

The Earl of Shrewsbury (Con) [V]: My Lords, I declare an interest as a member of the National Farmers Union, and my two sons are involved in both agriculture and land management.

The Bill is a major step forward in laying the foundations for a bright future for agriculture, food production and security, animal welfare and environmental land management. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get it right and we must grasp the issues. I know that Her Majesty's Government wish for a speedy passage

of the Bill in order to facilitate payments to farmers, but that must not stop us scrutinising the Bill most carefully.

I welcome this opportunity to break free from the burden of the common agricultural policy, under which farmers and owners are rewarded based on land and not on outcomes or public good. I believe firmly that the thrust of monetary reward should be targeted towards small and medium-sized farms, those who farm in less-favoured areas, and hill farms. That comprises much of what I voted to leave the EU for, along with at last being able to be in charge of our own affairs.

In the very short time available, I will touch on three subjects: animal health and welfare; food standards; and tariffs. British agriculture and its products, and the manner in which they are produced, have an envious reputation worldwide for excellence. The prevention of disease among farm animals is absolutely critical in ensuring a bright and profitable future for British farming. I know that my noble friend the Minister has a special interest in biosecurity matters, and that is of course a key area. The cost of animal diseases to the British economy and the farmer can be crippling.

When I farmed sheep, the major problem was foot rot, which is still endemic in the national flock today. Sick animals are less productive, have reduced welfare and place a major burden on farmers, and the quality of the end product is compromised. In this Bill we have a real opportunity to reduce and prevent the burden of disease. I shall be tabling an amendment in Committee addressing the health and welfare of livestock, which I hope the Government will look kindly upon.

With regard to food standards and tariffs, I am grateful to my right honourable friends the two Secretaries of State for their joint letter to colleagues yesterday. It was helpful. However, I have received a large number of representations from farmers and others who come from rural communities or who hold an interest in food production and consumption, and many bodies with a related interest, even including the Shrewsbury and Atcham Labour Party. All are furious, as I am, that the parish amendment in the other place was voted down recently.

The joint letter from the Secretaries of State says:

"This UK Government will not compromise on our standards ... our manifesto is clear".

However, none of us would ever be naive enough to view politics as a squeaky-clean business. Indeed, its waters are always somewhat murky. A manifesto can be interpreted in many different ways to suit those implementing it. Words and language can have more than one meaning. Legislation can be altered by numerous mechanisms, some not requiring a vote. For instance, in trade law a free-range egg and a caged egg are considered the same when it comes to the risk imposed specifically by the egg. However, they are both simply eggs. The Government have said that they will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare or food standards. That is absolutely excellent and very much to be applauded, but much more detail and action are needed.

1.46 pm

Lord Whitty (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I welcome the somewhat belated arrival of the Bill in this House, and I welcome its general sense of direction. However, we have only half the picture in the Bill. We do not yet know the trading environment in which we will be operating and in which these measures will be delivered; nor is the mechanism for delivery and enforcement clear.

During the Brexit campaign, one lot of Brexiteers foresaw a future of cheap food for consumers coming from trade agreements with low-cost countries, while another group envisaged a renaissance of British agriculture where we made our own rules to attain a high degree of self-sufficiency, protected from the burden of Brussels bureaucracy on the one hand and European competition on the other. Of course, those positions were contradictory but they had in common an assumption of a seriously reduced burden of regulation. Cheap food and self-sufficiency both meant lower standards.

Those pressures are still there, but thankfully Ministers have taken a third position: maintain our standards and subsidise public goods. However, we do not know the trading context and the Bill does not really make clear how we deliver a radically different, sustainable and healthier food production system in this country.

As a point of history, the CAP was never popular. We have been in the system for nearly 50 years. Just half way through that I became a Minister for Agriculture when we switched from the much-derided and distorted production subsidy system to the almost equally derided land-based system. There were some supposed advantages of the switch in the Fischler reforms of 2005 but they were not fully realised. At the time, we thought that we would be moving to a new system of multilateral trade agreements in the Doha round. In practice, that never materialised but would have required a substantial dismantling of the production subsidy. As I said, that never happened and we are now in a much more anarchic world trade position.

Applying the direct payment to all agricultural land meant that food, welfare and environmental standards could be made to apply to all agriculture: you lost the subsidy, or part of it, if you did not comply. In practice, regrettably that system of cross-compliance was never properly implemented here or across Europe. However, the fact is that the Bill takes away some of that universality, and that is dangerous, unless we have a wider plan to which we are working, as my noble friend Lady Young said, for an overall framework for land use.

There are three or four omissions from the Bill to which I want to return. First, the defects of the last CAP reforms were seriously compounded in this country by the failure to administer the system effectively. The RPA seriously failed, yet the Bill gives no clarity over how the new system, much more complex and granular, will be administered or what the relation of that is to the machinery to come in the environment Bill.

Secondly, we need tougher measures against the overchemicalisation of farming. I have heard that the reason why pesticide regulation is not explicitly referred to in the Bill is that we have a perfectly adequate

domestic system for pesticide regulation. We do not. There are dangers to human health as well as damage to air, soil and water, livestock and biodiversity if we do not reduce the dependence on chemical solutions.

Thirdly, for a new era in agriculture we need to ensure a new generation of those who work the land. We need to make it easier for new, younger farmers to come into the business without necessarily having inherited the land. I want to see a revival of county farms. We also need a wider home-based, skilled and better-paid workforce on the land. Our immigration policy will make dependency on overseas labour impossible for a range of jobs, from seasonal fruit pickers to livestock vets. We need to upgrade the whole domestic labour force. I hope to return to these issues at later stages of the Bill.

1.51 pm

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP) [V]: My Lords, we begin this debate at a time when the subject of the Bill is of acute urgency. That is not just for the obvious reason—the looming threat of a crash-out Brexit and the need for farmers to have certainty about what is happening in a few months' time—but because it is being debated with our countryside and food system in a state of emergency. The nature crisis, the collapse of biodiversity and bioabundance, that has left the UK one of the most nature-deprived nations on earth; the obesity and health crisis associated with nutrient-poor diets; and the dominance of the supermarkets in what we eat: these are the issues that the Bill could and should be tackling.

Instead what we have is a shell, a statement of a few principles that are not generally bad in themselves and are sometimes even admirable, and certainly somewhat improved since earlier iterations of this legislation, but there are few commitments to action. This is a grade D effort, not even a pass mark, when what we need is a sterling, standout, brilliant Bill, something—I am sure the Government will agree with me on this—that is world-leading.

The limitations of our arrangements in your Lordships' House, imposed not only by Covid but by the usual channels, have ensured that many Peers with valuable contributions to make—my noble friend Lady Jones of Moulsecocomb among them—have been excluded from this debate. I know they are pushing for a second day of this debate and I hope that is secured. Given the extreme time restrictions on today's speech, I am going for a checklist of issues that my noble friend will be covering: safeguards on import standards, ensuring that agriculture reaches net-zero carbon as soon as possible, and animal welfare standards.

My focus will be on the farming system and the food system. When farmers hear criticism of the system they often take it as criticism of themselves, but we know that they have been betrayed by decades of failed government policies. They need a Bill that gives them a real choice to build back better. The Government say they support agroecology. Words are good but a direction to the Secretary of State to support whole-farm agroecological systems is far more important.

The Bill also lacks a commitment to organic agriculture. The EU's 2030 biodiversity strategy plans for 25% of agricultural land there to be organic. The EU is also

looking at a 50% reduction in the use of pesticides and cuts to mineral fertiliser use. If the Government want to be world-leading, they have to do better than that. Crucially, we need to ensure that the payments for productivity in Clause 2 do not undermine progress on biodiversity, climate and animal welfare.

Some are arguing that we should downplay nature and sustainability and dial up food production, but that is a false dichotomy that risks doubling down on a food system that is contributing to a perfect storm of a spillover of diseases from wildlife to people, and, like the proponents of genetically modified organisms and crops, it chases after a failed industrialised monoculture. Just as there is a growing consensus on the need to measure economic progress with indicators far more useful than GDP, we must adopt new indicators for agriculture. We need to think about people nourished per hectare, not tonnes of biomass.

Protection for the basic infrastructure of farming—farmers—is also missing. They need financial security for long-term planning. The idea of multiannual financial assistance in the Bill is good but guarantees are needed.

Let us see a commitment to many thousands of new entrants. We need to see the county farms supported. We need to see the green belt used to the best advantage and, as other noble Lords have said, a comprehensive land-use strategy. Then there is democracy. Let us give Northern Ireland control, and let us bring in people's assemblies to oversee agricultural policy.

We have learned that our holidays this year will be significantly curtailed. Good. Now we need the department and the Government to take the time to listen to the expertise of this House.

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con): I remind the noble Baroness of the speaking limit.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle [V]: We need to stand up for what the people and the environment desperately need: a good, world-leading agriculture Act.

1.56 pm

Viscount Ridley (Con) [V]: My Lords, I declare an interest as the owner of a working farm in Northumberland. I support the Bill. I see it as an opportunity to make farming more sustainable environmentally, ecologically and climatically as well as commercially and technologically. So I welcome the emphasis in the Bill on productivity. I seek assurance from the Minister that as far as possible the environmental land management scheme will work by results, not by intentions. One of the great mistakes of subsidies in the past is that they have rewarded pious intentions rather than successful results.

To be sustainable, agriculture needs innovation in precision farming, robotics, drones and other technologies so as to use fewer chemicals more precisely targeted. It needs innovation in genome editing particularly—a precise new breeding technology that enables plant breeders to achieve exactly what they have achieved in the past but much more quickly and precisely, thereby reducing the dependence of crops on chemicals.

There has been a huge debate in recent years between the advocates of land sparing and land sharing. The land sharers are those who suggest that we should farm badly and have wildlife alongside us. The land sparrers say no, farm as well as you can but set land aside. The argument has been won by the land sparrers. Evidence from Cambridge University and elsewhere has shown clearly that you get not only more wildlife but fewer emissions if you farm as well as you can and then set land aside. That is what I try to practise on my own farm, where we farm as well as we can in the field but leave generous field margins for wildlife and we leave particular meadows—flower meadows, water meadows and so on—also for wildlife. As a result we have increasing numbers of skylarks, yellowhammers, tree sparrows, brown hares, butterflies and bumblebees. If we were to try to feed the world using organic and agroecological methods, we would need to cultivate 82% of the world's land area instead of 38% as we do today.

The Government have rightly committed to maintaining standards, and a lot of amendments to the Bill are driven by protectionism disguised as animal welfare. Free trade is a huge export opportunity for agriculture. We already export £24 billion worth a year and British lamb, which is world-beating, is competitive in the American market and has a huge opportunity there. Stocking density for poultry in the US is roughly the same as here and there is less campylobacter per head in the US. We should work to improve these standards internationally through the OIE, the world organisation for animal health. The UK has lower standards in some areas—for example, it has lower standards than New Zealand on stunning in abattoirs. We have nothing to fear and lots to gain from world trade. As the noble Baroness, Lady Parminter, and my noble friend Lady Browning both mentioned, the issue here is that the European Union has forced us to adopt lower standards. It has forced us to spray more on crops such as sugar beet and potatoes by denying us opportunities in biotechnology.

I quote from a farmer's email sent to me today:

"Farmers not only can but will do the green if we're in the black, give farmers back the responsibility and ownership and all may well be amazed at the results Reignite our once bright curiosity to innovate ... Allow us to disrupt from within, rather than imposed disruption from outside."

2 pm

Baroness Humphreys (LD) [V]: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord for outlining the provisions as they apply to Wales in this Bill. I very much welcome the inclusion of Schedule 5 on Wales, which provides Welsh Ministers with the powers to provide for the continuation of direct payments to farmers after 2020, giving some security to our farmers in these difficult times. As the Welsh Government intend to introduce an Agriculture (Wales) Bill, expected after next year's Senedd elections, these are transitional powers, with a sunset clause of 31 December 2024, allowing for consultations with interested parties and the production of a White Paper. Again, I welcome that decision.

Agriculture is of course a devolved matter, and this Bill covers areas where the Senedd believes it has competence, particularly in relation to the WTO agreements on agriculture, but which the UK Government

[BARONESS HUMPHREYS]

believe are reserved. I would be grateful if the noble Lord could update us on the present position of both parties on this issue. Will an LCM be required, or will the matter be resolved through a bilateral agreement? If the latter, can the noble Lord say how such an agreement would operate, and confirm whether either way forward has received Senedd approval?

Farmers in Wales have welcomed the inclusion of food security in the Bill and, in particular, the duty placed on the Secretary of State to lay a report before Parliament

“at least once every five years”.

They were, however, concerned about the frequency of the reporting requirement. In their evidence to the Senedd’s Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, leaders expressed concerns that a five-year cycle would not

“sufficiently reflect the food security risk to the UK”,

and that the period would be too long,

“particularly through a transition period that could prove to be challenging.”

The lack of a requirement on the UK and Welsh Governments to publish a response and to take action as appropriate was also seen as a deficiency in the Bill. These are issues, along with the inclusion of the devolved Administrations in the methodology planning for the report, that I hope we can discuss in more detail in Committee.

The CCERA committee report also highlights the concerns of farmers’ leaders in the matter of fair dealing with agricultural producers and others in the supply chain. Clause 27 of the Bill is aimed at addressing unfair practices in agri-food supply chains, which disadvantage small, individual businesses operating without strong links between them. The discretionary powers that this clause gives the Secretary of State were queried and a strong, alternative case was made for extending the powers of the Groceries Code Adjudicator in relation to fair dealing with agricultural producers along the whole supply chain. Have the Government given any consideration to this or discussed this alternative with the Welsh Government?

In the matter of identification and traceability of animals, broadly welcomed by farmers, can the noble Lord say whether it is indeed the case that the new multispecies livestock information system will be run by what is essentially the present Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board? If so, how will this UK board, operating in a devolved policy area, be accountable to the Welsh Government? Finally, what steps will be taken to ensure compatibility between the new livestock information system and the Welsh electronic IDCymru system?

2.04 pm

Lord Carrington (CB): My Lords, I declare my interests as farmer and landowner, as set out in the register. I broadly welcome this Bill and will confine my remarks to those areas that have been less widely addressed. I start from the premise that this Bill should principally focus on agriculture.

Public money for public goods is an excellent mantra, and support is directed at the range of activities listed in Chapter 1 of Part 1, on which environmental land

management schemes will be based, together with measures to improve productivity in the sector and supporting ancillary activities. However, the seven-year transition period becomes a problem if financial and other details are too sketchy for farmers and land managers to have enough information on which to base investment decisions. We know what basic payment will be paid in 2021, but not in the remaining years.

Similarly, we know that the ELM scheme currently being piloted will not be available to roll out until 2024. Absolutely no financial or other information is available to enable farmers to calculate the likely return of implementing a scheme. Remember, without profit there is a risk that they are not taken up and land is abandoned. Without the BPS, 24% of farms make a loss; return on capital in farming is around 1%, well below returns in other parts of the food industry. Farmers need profits to survive. No doubt farmers on good land will thrive without BPS, as will those in parts of the country where diversification can be driven by good location and so on. But those on the poorer land and in less desirable places will really struggle, and many will leave the industry. My first point is to reduce these uncertainties by providing clarification on the remaining BPS payments and early information on the likely financial returns from ELMs. Accordingly, a delay in implementation to 2021 would make sense.

My second point is the issue of skills, which should be covered by a clause of its own, rather than coming in the catch-all clause on productivity. Work is currently being done on this by a group ably led by the noble Lord, Lord Curry. The establishment of an industry professional body to lay down, monitor, measure and advise on common standards is crucial to the industry and requires government funding to underwrite its role. Such an amendment will be tabled.

The proposed five-yearly review of food security is excellent and, once the methodology is established, one hopes that it will become an annual or biannual event. Although not directly specified, the review should cover both skills in the industry and the profile of participants. Currently, farming is characterised by a high average age, with a third being over 65 and only 3% under 35. An unattractive career image, based on low median earnings, needs to be watched.

My final point relates to intervention in agricultural markets. It is very narrowly drawn and excludes exceptional weather events or animal disease. Intervention seems to depend on reduced market prices, although some events could lead to higher prices, which are not available to farmers if they have nothing to sell. I request that the Minister look at widening the definition of intervention.

In farming, there is an old adage: timeliness is godliness. This should be a guiding principle of this Bill, as the importance of food security is increasingly recognised.

2.08 pm

Lord Colgrain (Con): My Lords, I refer to my farming interests as set out in the register. There are a number of aspects of this Bill that are causing concern to the farming community and on which I have had many representations. I am sure that many noble Lords will

want to continue to discuss the principal ones among them, such as food security, high animal welfare standards, the timetable attached to the reduction of the basic payment scheme in advance of any financial details consequent on the introduction of the new ELMs, and the need to maintain domestic food production. There are other aspects of the Bill that lack clear explanation. Two principal areas of concern are the definitions of natural capital and greater public access. It is uncomfortable progressing with this Bill when such critical areas lack clarity. However, will the Minister give a response to three other aspects of the Bill in particular?

The first is the degree of financial support the Government will undertake to provide for our agricultural colleges and other places of education. Given that the university and college structure has already come under severe and sustained financial pressure, which I fear will only increase, can he assure the House that support will be maintained for the current apprenticeship schemes? These will be important at any time, but given the anticipated high rate of national unemployment envisaged across the country, particularly among the young, such schemes have a vital role to play for both rural industry and the individuals who enrol. We must provide a well-educated labour force to bring about the technical and scientific changes that we will seek to introduce to maintain our competitive global position in agricultural production.

The second question relates to forestry. All the mainstream political parties included ambitious tree planting targets in their manifestos before the last election. The reality is that unless more funding is provided, both for initial planting and subsequent maintenance, there is no realistic likelihood of even a small percentage of these targets being achieved. Can the Minister give some comfort on this point, too?

Lastly, as a result of the recommendations put forward last year by the ad hoc committee on the rural economy, of which I was a member, the Minister has undertaken to give an annual report on rural-proofing. I suggest that Defra undertakes a similar annual report on food security, rather than the five-yearly report proposed in the Bill.

2.11 pm

Baroness Quin (Lab) [V]: My Lords, this is an important Bill that aims to shape the future of farming in our country and promote a food and farming industry in harmony with the environment and which is environmentally sustainable. In this respect I think it builds on the work that many farmers are already undertaking. I am certainly aware, in my own part of the world, that there are farmers who have enthusiastically, over and above any financial incentive, adopted measures to promote the environment in various ways—providing habitats for birds such as the curlew, the lapwing and the endangered grey partridge, or for endangered animal species, such as the brown hare and our beloved red squirrel.

I also support the aims of the Bill in increasing our own food production, particularly in horticulture. When I was an Agriculture Minister some years ago, I was enthusiastic about the role horticulture could play in

our country and I hope that the Bill will promote that even further. The Bill, however, presents a lot of challenges for farmers, and I echo the concerns raised that we need to work with farmers—who have had a lot of bureaucratic hurdles over the years and a lot of difficulties with deferred payments to contend with—so that the new system is brought in fairly and with a proper, carefully thought-out transition.

Agriculture is a devolved matter, as we know, and I very much respect that, but as a supporter of decentralisation I hope that in England the Bill will be sensitive to the needs of different regions. Here in Northumberland, we feel very close in many ways to agriculture as it is practised in the Scottish borders, not far away. I believe that co-operation between the devolved authorities will be tremendously important, not least in safeguarding the future of the UK's own internal market, but also in learning from each other and sharing good practice.

Very valid criticisms have been made on the question of standards and I look forward to supporting the amendments that will be tabled by my noble friends Lord Grantchester, Lady Jones and others in Committee and on Report. It is important to have standards enshrined in the Bill. The biggest challenge to the Bill, however, is the Government's own trade policy. In this, I very much echo the words of my noble friend Lord Whitty.

We are currently negotiating with the European Union. It seems to make environmental sense to cut down on air miles and to trade with our nearest partners. Already, most of our food exports go to the EU, including something like 94% of our sheepmeat. In recent years, the market for lamb has increased more in European countries than in countries outside the EU, so it is vital that we get our trade arrangements with the EU on to a very good footing for the long-term future. It would be crazy to try to leave the EU without a deal—to crash out—and to give our farmers export hurdles as a result. I urge the Government not to let British agriculture down by allowing substandard food imports. I also urge them to prevent our farmers having difficulties in the future in accessing our nearest and biggest export market, in Europe, on which we depend.

2.15 pm

The Earl of Caithness (Con) [V]: My Lords, I thank my noble friend for his introduction of the Bill. First, I pay tribute to three people from whom we shall not hear during our discussions on the Bill: the Countess of Mar, Baroness Byford and the Earl of Selbourne, who have retired. We will miss their expertise, wise counsel and first-hand experience in agriculture. However, I welcome the interest in agriculture from those who do not usually take part in debates on this subject. Sadly, one-third of those who put their names down to speak cannot do so because of the unusual and regrettable way in which this House is now being run. Can my noble friend confirm that there will be no curtailment of debate whatever in the following stages, so that the House can fulfil its function properly?

Like others who have spoken, I have concerns not only over environmental and welfare standards for trade agreements, but also that the Bill should provide for proper environmental standards in the UK with

[THE EARL OF CAITHNESS]

appropriate regulations, long-term funding and certainty, so that farmers are properly rewarded. In the last 50 years, the amount of land available to feed each person on this planet has dropped from two acres to less than half an acre, and it is still falling. The UK is only 75% self-sufficient in indigenous-type foods. Therefore, food security and food strategy must be included in the Bill. I agree with my noble friend Lord Ridley that high-yield farming and improved biodiversity are not mutually exclusive. The Allerton project has scientifically demonstrated that more than successfully for more than 25 years.

Farming is currently an administrative nightmare. I want to focus on one key practical point of the Bill, which is the scale of change and adjustment for farming as it moves from the arrangements inherited from the EU CAP to those founded on markets in food production. It will become more of a marketplace for farmers to sell public goods to the state acting as buyer on behalf of society, as well as probable private sector activity. The outcome will be a much less standardised industry than the one we have created since World War II, as we move away from full-time commodity production. Achieving that will be a major call on all those involved, not only government and farmers. Thus, I hope my noble friend, like me, will endorse the Welsh Government's observation:

"Advice should be seen as an investment in the capacity of farmers and farms rather than a cost".

Farming needs a climate positively supportive of sustained, useful advice, with the necessary conversations and time for reflection and delivery of everything from cost control, the adoption of new technology and generational change to repositioning the business, implementing a diversification project, accepting that land should be let out or understanding the value in public good contracts. This will involve both the private and public sectors and we must ensure that it happens.

This is a watershed moment for British agriculture, and this is a hugely important Bill. Although frustrating in many respects, because it is largely an enabling Bill, it puts in place the legislative framework for many years to come. I support it, but I also say to my noble friend Lord Gardiner, who, with his officials, has, as usual, been so helpful with briefing and information, that it would be disappointing and utterly inappropriate if all amendments, particularly the many cross-party ones that will be tabled, were to be rejected.

2.20 pm

Lord Carter of Coles (Lab) [V]: My Lords, this is an important Bill and certainly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reform the funding of agriculture in this country. It is confirmed by the number of noble Lords speaking in the debate, which is in contrast to the occasion when one of the Minister's predecessors, Lord Walton, came to the House in December 1940 to make what he thought was an important speech only to find seven Members in attendance, their main interest being in the allocation of jam. I declare an interest as a farmer, with other rural interests. In the interests of time, I will touch briefly on three issues: security, standards and sustainability.

Agricultural subsidies are rife throughout the world and cost over \$500 billion a year. Often, their purpose is to support rural economies and underwrite food security. Covid-19 has shown that in many areas, globalisation can lead to national shortages. While it has not dramatically affected the food supply here, it has been comforting to see how well the food supply chain has functioned in recent months—our thanks should certainly go to those who have kept the shelves full.

On food security, we are 60% self-sufficient but, despite the dramatic performance of our agricultural exports, we run an annual balance of payments deficit of about £24 billion. We welcome the review of sustainability and security but the question is, what level of self-sufficiency should the country aim for? I would be grateful if the Minister commented on that. Also, in the course of policy formulation, what attention is being paid to our ability to pay for the high level of imports that we sustain?

Many noble Lords have spoken eloquently about food standards, and we are absolutely clear—everybody I speak to is clear—that there must be no reduction in those. The joint Secretary of States' letter yesterday offered some comfort. However, the key is to see how this is dealt with in the Trade Bill, and of course the Government's intentions, as noble Lords have indicated, remain a matter of concern. The key will be the regulatory framework we put in place to oversee those, and as we work our way through the Bill and the amendments, we will get a better picture.

The sanitary and phytosanitary standards are more visible. One of the things we need to be aware of as we drive for more productivity and efficiency is that we do not want to drive standards down. We want to ensure that those who work in the production and, more importantly, the processing of food have the right working conditions and standards to do their jobs. We must ensure that those standards are maintained.

Finally, I come to the sustainability issue: getting the balance right between environmentally ambitious policies and the need to have a highly productive, quality agricultural sector. It is commendable that the Government have recognised that this will take time, and the transition period is very welcome. However, until we see details of things like the ELMS project, as other noble Lords have indicated, it makes it extraordinarily difficult for farmers to plan. Farming is a long-term activity, as is environmental investment, and the quicker we can see details of the success of the pilot schemes and understand the finer detail, the better we will be able to go forward. Similarly, on issues such as productivity and investment, we need to understand how this will come about and which sectors will be supported, how that money will flow through and how it will go over the coming seven years.

When Lord Walton came to the House in 1940, his objectives were to ensure that the nation had enough food of sufficiently high standards, and of course we wanted to survive. The threats we face have changed, but we should ensure that this legislation is true to the same principles: food security, food standards and sustainability.

2.24 pm

Lord Tyler (LD) [V]: My Lords, I have no interests to declare but for years I shadowed Agriculture Ministers Gummer and Hogg—now the noble Lord, Lord Deben, and the noble Viscount, Lord Hailsham—and represented a predominantly farming constituency through the BSE and foot and mouth crises.

This is an enabling Bill but is really a legislative pig in a poke. Perhaps inevitably, but with dire consequences, it is entirely dependent on its context. From Clause 1, in which the Secretary of State is given a permissive funding role, the only certainty is uncertainty. That uncertainty combines the forthcoming recession following Covid-19 with the potential failure to achieve a satisfactory Brexit deal in just 28 weeks' time, creating unprecedented chaos for the UK's food supplies. That recession, as we already know, will be harder-hitting than anything the country has experienced in our lifetime. Anyone who believes the Government will be willing and able to invest on the scale necessary to make the Bill work is surely living in a fool's paradise. In the worst possible economic environment, the Government are determined to ditch the tried-and-tested partnership with our neighbours in favour of surrender at the feet of Mr "American farmers first" Trump.

We have all seen the Secretary of States' letter but frankly, they did not support the Parish amendment, and on the rebound from Brexit, how can they really stand up to Trump? In the words of the NFU president, this could result in us

"opening our ports, shelves and fridges to food which would be illegal to produce here"

and

"would be the work of the insane."

Now, Trump's negotiators want us to give up origin labelling—so much for consumer choice.

In the unanimous briefing I have received, I especially welcomed the personal evidence from Juliet Cleave, a livestock farmer in my old constituency. In my four minutes, I obviously cannot do justice to her passionate defence of British agriculture. However, one sentence stands out:

"Unfair competition in the marketplace not only undermines the rural economy but will lead to further consumer confusion."

In that context, Ministers seem to have failed to secure reciprocal protection for traditional food products such as Cornish pasties, Melton Mowbray pies and Scotch whisky, which are all currently subject to the excellent EU GI scheme. I was assured last year that this would be guaranteed, but that looks like another broken Brexit promise.

With a few weeks to go, the Government are charging hell for leather towards failure to secure a satisfactory deal—or indeed any deal at all. Farmers, consumers and the environment could all be the first victims. The Bill is a totally inadequate corrective. In any circumstances, this would surely be folly. Whether Covid-19 will be still fully with us or will have begun to fade by December, to charge over the cliff without even extending the transition would be ludicrous lunacy.

2.27 pm

Lord Krebs (CB) [V]: My Lords, in *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift wrote of the King of Brobdingnag:

"And he gave it for his opinion, that whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians put together."

That is precisely what Norman Borlaug and his fellow scientists did in the middle of the 20th century. The green revolution was a miracle. A combination of genetics, agrochemicals, irrigation and mechanisation meant that between 1960 and 2000, although the world population doubled, the amount of food produced per person increased by 25%. But we now know that this revolution came at a cost: damage to habitats, biodiversity, soils, the climate, freshwater, and farm animal welfare. That is why this Bill is so important and welcome. It gives us the framework for resetting agriculture in this country—for embarking on what has often been called the doubly green revolution. This means harnessing all the power of science and technology to produce more with less: more food with less impact on the environment, the climate and animal welfare. However, the Bill leaves as many questions as it provides answers. Here are just some of the points that should be explored in more detail in Committee. Other noble Lords have also mentioned them in their speeches.

First, how will the delivery of the public goods listed in Clause 1 be measured, who will do the monitoring and enforcement, and what sanctions will be applied to farmers who fail to comply? Will the office for environmental protection have a key role in this?

Secondly, there will inevitably be trade-offs. For instance, increasing productivity may imply extracting more from the land for our consumption and therefore leaving less for the rest of nature. By whom and by what process will these trade-offs be computed? For example, the noble Viscount, Lord Ridley, mentioned the debate about land sharing versus land sparing. Will there be a transparent analysis of this approach to managing the trade-off?

Thirdly, the delivery of a cleaner, greener, more productive agriculture will require investment in science and technology, as well as knowledge transfer. What is the Government's plan for enhancing the necessary science base, including gene editing, and ensuring that this new knowledge will be taken up by farmers?

Fourthly, as many noble Lords have already said, the Government claim that food safety, animal welfare and environmental standards will be the same for domestic and imported food, but what independent scrutiny of this commitment will there be?

Finally, it is often said that the UK has high animal welfare standards. However, we should be aware of the reality that many other European countries are already ahead of us. For example, beak trimming of hens is banned in six other European countries but not here. France and Germany will ban the castration of piglets without anaesthetic by the end of next year, but we have not made this commitment. Does the UK intend to catch up with the best in the world, or will it join the race to the bottom in the pursuit of new trade deals?

2.31 pm

The Earl of Lindsay (Con) [V]: My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend for introducing the Bill. In the time available I will raise four brief points and then turn to the important role that standards will play in negotiating trade agreements.

First, do the Government intend to publish an impact assessment before the Bill has finished its parliamentary stages? It is irregular for a Bill, even a framework enabling Bill—and especially a Bill of this consequence—to be sent to Parliament without a primary-stage impact assessment at the very least.

My second question arises from the welcome inclusion of food security. However, like others I believe the required reporting cycle should be more frequent than at least every five years. I also believe it should include reference to emissions, climate change impact and supply chain sustainability to ensure a more complete understanding of the realities. Will my noble friend consider this?

My third question is a United Kingdom question, and I declare my interest as a Scottish farmer. While fully accepting that trade is a reserved matter, I believe the Bill has missed an opportunity to clarify the involvement of devolved nations in setting WTO-compliant ceilings and the assessment of impacts from quotas and tariffs. Will my noble friend look again at these arrangements? In the same vein, I add in passing that this Bill is also an opportunity to embed the principles of fair funding for intra-UK allocation—as detailed in the review by the noble Lord, Lord Bew—to add some transparency to the methodology of how any future budget will be allocated.

My fourth point is that, like many others, I believe this Bill is an opportunity for the Government to adopt an amendment that would enable future access to precision-breeding tools such as new gene-editing technologies.

I now turn to the important role that standards will play in negotiating trade agreements. I have two points. First, I ask my noble friend whether the Government's welcome commitment that trade negotiations will not compromise the UK's high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards can be understood as referring to UK production standards as a whole. This is critical as, where any production standards are lower than those required of UK producers, imports will impact on the ability of UK producers to compete on a level playing field.

My second point relates to how the importance of maintaining standards in negotiating trade agreements might best be addressed. The UK's enviable reputation for high standards in food and farming has been achieved through successive Governments' support for a national framework of standards, measurement and accreditation, collectively referred to as the United Kingdom Quality Infrastructure, UKQI. Here I declare an interest as the chair of the UK Accreditation Service, UKAS, which is the UK's national accreditation body and a key component of the UKQI. UKAS accreditation is central to ensuring the effectiveness of standards through underpinning their implementation with a robust verification and certification system.

Furthermore, UKAS and BSI—the national standards body—operate within an international framework, as accreditation and standards are global activities. This mutual recognition of standards and accredited conformity assessment underpins many international trade agreements. Should a trade standards commission be established—and I believe there is a good case for doing so—one of its roles could be to look at how accreditation and linked mutual recognition arrangements underpinning standards should be utilised, protected and, where appropriate, enhanced, as a central part of trade negotiations and agreements.

2.35 pm

Lord Hain (Lab) [V]: My Lords, in a nation where 50% of food is currently imported—fully 30% from the European Union—the protection of high standards on imported food cannot be overestimated. Anyone who cares about the quality of the food we eat, animal welfare and the environment should be very worried about this Bill, which threatens the very survival of British agriculture, putting both its UK market and its important export markets in the European Union in jeopardy and sacrificing Britain's high food and animal welfare standards and with them our farming industry.

Legal protections to guarantee animal welfare, food hygiene rules, agricultural workers' rights, environmental protections on the food we import and targets for reaching net-zero emissions for the agriculture industry are all deliberately omitted from the Bill. Presumably, this is to preserve the prospect of future post-Brexit trade deals with the United States and Pacific Rim countries, which may initially lead to cheaper imports but at a devastating long-term cost to both UK producers and consumers.

The truth is that if existing food standards are not maintained for imports, the UK's agricultural sector will be unable to compete and our farmers will be faced with a choice of either lowering standards or going out of business. Import prices would then rise, leaving the country dependent on food imports of compromised quality.

Sadly, a majority of MPs voted against proposed new Clause 2, an all-party amendment requiring new international treaties on the import of agricultural and food products to comply with World Trade Organization safety rules and the UK's own standards. Significantly, it was proposed by the chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Conservative MP Neil Parish, and backed by the British Veterinary Association, the National Farmers' Union, the RSPCA, the Wildlife Trusts, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, the Soil Association and the World Wildlife Fund.

Speaking against the proposed new Clause 2 on 13 May, former International Trade Secretary Liam Fox gave the game away, saying that

“the US would walk were the proposals to become law in the United Kingdom, and it would be swiftly followed by others ... They do not want the incorporation of UK rules to become a prerequisite to trading agreements with the United Kingdom.”—*[Official Report, Commons, 13/5/20; col. 323.]*

Our high standards are viewed by some outside the EU as a barrier to trade, but having a requirement to uphold environmental standards as part of the Agriculture Bill would surely help prevent a race to the bottom.

The *Financial Times* reported on 14 May that “the Department for International Trade was preparing to offer a ‘big concession package’ to US negotiators in the coming months that would reduce the cost of some agricultural imports to unlock a trade deal with Washington.”

Such concessions to the US would effectively impede the prospects of a comprehensive trade deal with the European Union, which provides vital export markets to British farmers. For example, nearly three-quarters of all Welsh food and drink exports and over 90% of Welsh beef and lamb exports were destined for the EU in 2018. I therefore ask the Minister to give a categorical commitment to negotiate agreements with the Welsh and other devolved Governments at all stages of future negotiations.

I agree with my noble friends Lord Whitty and Lady Quin on the need to prioritise a trade deal with the European Union to protect our farmers’ important export markets and our food and environmental standards.

2.39 pm

Baroness Northover (LD): My Lords, I thank the Minister for his undoubted commitment to this area. I speak as the daughter of a tenant farmer and having had the privilege to serve in Defra during the coalition. The Bill lists potential public goods and its environmental emphasis is welcome, but little is actually mandated, measured or enforced, as we have heard, and so much will come via secondary legislation. We know that SIs cannot be amended and are almost never rejected.

Above all, as again we have heard, there are a number of elephants in the room, and the prime one is our departure from the EU—our biggest market and the source of much agricultural labour. Minette Batters, the NFU president, rightly identifies the uncertainties here. We do not know what our relationship with the EU will be in only a few months’ time, quite what our immigration system will be, or the nature of any trade deals with other countries. There will be huge challenges for any Government with a huge public debt that will need to support health, social care and our failing industries. Agriculture and the management of land might slip as a priority, however important food security may seem at the moment. That is the backdrop to this Bill, affecting an industry that is, by its very nature, long term and less flexible than others.

There is the seven-year commitment on direct payments, but the notes explain that these could in fact be reduced. The transition becomes meaningless. Can the Minister clarify that? The Bill mentions that financial and other assistance might be made available in exceptional market conditions, but, by implication, it might not. The EU has been strong on rural support. All the powers here seem to be what the Secretary of State no longer needs to do. Can the Minister comment?

The Bill states that high standards will be set regarding food safety, animal welfare and environmental management, but without it being mandated, as we have heard. Where is the regulator here?

We are not in a strong position in trade deals, yet, for example, the standard use of antibiotics may mean that simple infections become untreatable—the next and even more lethal pandemic. That is something to tackle globally, which we were better able to do as part of a large bloc, the EU.

The tenanted sector farms one-third of the agricultural land of England and Wales. That is very vulnerable now. I recall the frequent and long walks my father took with the bank manager. Can the Minister tell us how tenants will be better protected under this Bill—not just tenancies, but their business models, especially in less productive areas such as upland farms?

As we leave the EU, but without new trading arrangements, agriculture is in a very challenging situation. So much of how this industry will fare may depend not on the apparent intentions of the Bill and the undoubted intentions of the Minister, but on these wider decisions.

2.43 pm

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con): My Lords, I declare my interests. I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak at the Second Reading of such an important piece of legislation and congratulate my noble friend the Minister on his eloquent introduction to it.

We currently have the highest standards of production for animal health, hygiene and welfare. These standards must not be compromised or negotiated away. I refer to those of us who remember the unilateral sow stall and tether ban introduced by a Conservative Government in the late 1990s, yet we continued to allow imports from other EU countries and elsewhere that used them. Consumers voted with their feet, choosing the lower-priced, imported products that did not meet our high standards. As a result, 50% of our pig producers left the market. Now we face similar challenges to our home-produced chicken, beef and flour at the risk of inferior imports that are not produced to our high standards.

I have had a letter, as I am sure many have, from the chair of the FSA, Heather Hancock, in which she clearly states:

“The FSA will publish its risk assessments and its risk management advice to Ministers, who would then decide whether to accept this advice.”

After that, all that would be required to change the existing regulations or authorisations would be for statutory instruments to be laid in Parliament—a mere swipe of the pen and an SI, and our standards could be changed overnight. No primary legislation would be required. For the avoidance of doubt, let us put the case in the Bill for our current standards to be maintained and matched against any imports under any future trade agreement.

I raise the issue of vets and their capacity to meet increased demand for veterinary certification and supervision on import and export checks. This is a very serious issue. I hope my noble friend will today give the House a commitment that we will have enough vets in the UK to provide this service.

Many noble Lords have referred to the sketchy information available on ELMS at this stage. I welcome my noble friend’s commitment to introduce mitigation against flooding as a public good, from which farmers and others will benefit. We have certainly benefited in North Yorkshire from the Pickering Slowing the Flow scheme, but will my noble friend address the issue of reservoirs in the Bill and the stringent requirements of operation, particularly in its review of the Reservoirs

[BARONESS McINTOSH OF PICKERING]

Act 1975? How will water storage on farmland be regulated under ELMS? If pilot schemes for ELMS are to start only in 2021, when will the results be known?

I will also raise the position of tenant farmers, who make up 47% of farmers in North Yorkshire and the north of England. Will they continue to benefit under the scheme? Is there a danger that they might be excluded since they do not own the land? What, also, is the future for hill farming?

I pay tribute to our farmers, who work all hours and produce food in all weathers, particularly in this crisis. Now that we have left the European Union, we are not bound by public procurement rules. Will my noble friend ensure that all our schools, hospitals, prisons, care homes, shops, restaurants and homes source our food from the UK to our high standards of animal welfare and hygiene? Will he agree to set up an international trade commission, independent of government, to set the criteria to be met in any negotiation on international trade? Will he agree to defer the phasing out of basic farm payments for one year, particularly in the light of Covid-19? Will he agree that agriculture, horticulture and forestry activities must lie at the heart of farm policy under the Bill?

2.47 pm

Baroness Henig (Lab) [V]: My Lords, we all agree that taking back control of our agricultural policy is a defining moment for British farmers and all of us in the United Kingdom. There is agreement that we must lay the strongest foundations possible in the Bill, based on existing high standards of animal welfare, food production, agriculture and environmental standards, which we have established. We must build on them for the future.

We know that we face a climate change emergency, which is having a global impact on land use and food production, and that there are great concerns about the harmful overuse of antibiotics and pesticides. We must all work together to develop sustainable environmental and agricultural policies to deal with the problems facing us and to help farmers to maintain and improve standards. We must not let them be undermined in any way.

Like many others, I am concerned that, having taken back control of our agriculture from the European Union, the Government appear to be on the brink of giving much of it away to the United States in a trade deal that will have little benefit for the United Kingdom, but which will pose grave threats to British farmers, who already face the likelihood of tariffs on food and animal exports to the European Union. The British public have made it clear repeatedly that they do not want to buy chlorinated chicken or beef treated with growth hormones, however cheap they are, so why are we discussing these products with the United States? In the other place, Ministers and government supporters argued that this was an issue for future trade Bills, not for this Bill, but issues of food standards, food hygiene and animal welfare are central to the Bill.

In the other place, there was an attempt to put the Government's verbal assurances that no changes in standards were being considered into legal form. This was going too far for the Government, but I have no doubt

that such an amendment, and many others, will be put forward here in Committee. To help me understand the Government's position more clearly and guide me on how potential amendments might be framed constructively so as to gain government support, I should like to ask the Minister some questions. He does not need to answer them at the end of the debate, but I would be grateful if he could come back to me in writing.

First, what advice have the Government received on the options available to the United Kingdom to set animal welfare and environmental standards for imports in a way that is consistent with World Trade Organization rules? As previous speakers have said, this is an important area where we urgently need clarification.

Secondly, to what extent do the Government's plans to develop a 21st-century agricultural policy also incorporate international trade? Thirdly, have the Government analysed the impact of changing food standards on the United Kingdom's farming and broader food sectors? If so, can this analysis be published?

Fourthly—and importantly, as many speakers have pointed out—to what extent do the devolved Administrations have powers over their own food standards? What discussions have so far been held on this issue? Have the Government discussed with potential trade partners an alliance to improve animal welfare and environmental outcomes through trade agreements?

Lastly, what analysis have the Government made of a typical United States text on food within a trade agreement and whether accepting it would mean the United Kingdom having to change our own food rules?

We should all be in agreement on this Bill in terms of grasping the considerable opportunities that it offers, but warm words and vague promises from the Government are not enough. We need greater certainty on standards and on the Government's strategy in this area, which is what my questions are aimed at finding out. Depending on the Minister's response, I might seek to bring forward, or support others who bring forward, a number of possible amendments in Committee to strengthen this most important framework Bill.

2.52 pm

Earl of Devon (CB): My Lords, it is a pleasure to be back in the Chamber for such a crucial debate. Thanks to many for their tireless work in getting us here in hybrid form; however, I am concerned that this key legislation is the guinea pig for our new system and that it will not get the scrutiny it deserves. I trust that the usual channels will be sympathetic and not rush it through this House. Many more expert voices than mine are silent today. They must be heard.

I refer to my interests as a farmer in Devon, a county renowned for its green and varied landscape, with an ancient tradition of livestock farming. Devon has many small family farms for which basic payments, through no fault of their own, have become key to survival. If we get this wrong, Devon will suffer, causing untold environmental, economic and cultural damage.

The transition to ELMs over the next seven years is particularly concerning. BPS payments decrease from 2021, but ELMs will not be in place until 2024 at the earliest, and 2028 for most. What do farmers do in the interim? Those on marginal farms may simply stop,

abandoning farmland to scrub; perhaps this is government policy. Others will do what they can to remain solvent, which means intensifying production and increasing environmental degradation. Even those who farm profitably will hold off capital and environmental improvement—why risk investing now in things you may be paid for in five years' time?

The result will be the exact opposite of what we need: a decrease in productivity and environmental outcomes, when both need dramatic improvement in the face of international competition and a net-zero target for farming by 2040. Will the Government recognise these dangers and adjust the transition period to avoid them?

Many people have noted that this is the first time since 1947 that we can legislate for agriculture as a sovereign nation—a Brexit dividend for our green and prosperous land. Given coronavirus, comparisons with 1947 are apt. Only months ago, Dieter Helm wrote:

“Food security is largely an empty slogan of lobbyists ... It should not be taken seriously.”

He might not say that now, as the nation is acutely aware of food availability and food quality, given the ruthless effect of Covid on those with poor diet. Never has access to healthy, sustainable, affordable, local food been more important.

However, this is not 1947. We were not just an island on the edge of Europe then. We were the centre of the British Empire, with access to food from around the world on terms that we dictated. We lack that bargaining power now. As we negotiate trade deals, we must ensure that our domestic food supply is regularly—annually—monitored and strengthened and that our standards are protected.

The Government resist setting standards, citing existing legislation and a reluctance to tie negotiators' hands, but both national opinion and history are against them. Ignoring the irony of this Government relying on retained EU law to defend their position, the suggestion that agricultural legislation is not the place to address international trade is just wrong. As Devon warmly remembers, we have been legislating the import and export of wool for more than 500 years, and it was through robust legislative intervention that British farming technology led the agricultural revolution. We did it then and we can do it now.

Finally, this is the Agriculture Bill, not the environmental land management Bill, and the focus must remain on farming. We need a long-term vision for our farms. With more time in Committee, I look forward to discussing soil, carbon, agricultural tenancies, young farmers, gene-editing, productivity and more. But I lack the time now.

2.56 pm

The Duke of Wellington (Non-Afl) [V]: My Lords, I declare my agricultural interests as detailed in the register.

It is because of my agricultural interests that I know how much anxiety there currently is in the farming industry, particularly among livestock farmers. Negotiations continue with the European Union to secure a free trade agreement, and we wish our negotiators every success. But, should there be no deal and we

have to trade with the EU on World Trade Organization terms, the effect on livestock farmers will be most serious. There are tariffs on beef and lamb going into the EU. Currently, three-quarters of all beef exports from this country go to the EU; the proportion is even higher for sheep meat. Tariffs into the EU will inevitably reduce the prices that farmers receive. Most of the livestock farmers in the four nations of the United Kingdom are small to medium-sized, and they are the ones who will suffer most.

From the Government's figures for 2018-19—the latest that are available—it is clear that nearly all livestock farms lose money. This is then compensated by basic payments and agri-environment payments, but even after these payments, in 2018-19, the average income of a livestock farmer in a less-favoured area was £15,500 per annum. This is substantially below the minimum wage, and farmers usually work very long hours. Despite these figures, the Government propose to reduce the payments by 5%, starting next year in 2020-21. I cannot see in the Bill any proposal that will support the small to medium-sized livestock farmer from now until the introduction of the environmental land management scheme, which will start in 2024. Therefore, will the Minister try to persuade the Treasury that the lowest band of basic payment—that is, up to £30,000 a year—should be frozen for the next three years?

Is it not in the public interest that the uplands of this country be farmed in a sustainable way, extensively grazed, mainly grass-fed and capturing carbon, as pastures do? This must surely be a public good deserving of public money. Then, while facing a reduction in public support, these same hill farmers are also threatened with tariffs on sales into Europe and a free trade agreement with the United States of America. The latter may well, as part of a larger deal, allow American beef into this country; it is produced to lower standards and will come in at a price that UK farmers will find it difficult to compete with. In the same way that UK fishermen were, we must admit, sacrificed to achieve our entry into the then European Economic Community, so our livestock farmers may still be sacrificed for a US trade deal and no deal with the EU.

When the Minister sums up, I hope that he will reassure me and other noble Lords that the prospects for our smaller hill farmers are not as bleak as they, and I, fear.

3 pm

Viscount Trenchard (Con): My Lords, I thank my noble friend the Minister for introducing this important debate and I declare my interests as listed in the register.

As the second-largest net contributor to the European Union, for many years we have complained vociferously about the common agricultural policy, which still accounts for around 40% of the EU's budget. The Government have undertaken to maintain the level of financial support received by farmers during the current Parliament, although the basis for the payments will change. Farmers need to plan for the future and they need to know how the Government's new land management scheme will work. Can the Minister tell the House how farming businesses will be able to replace their lost income for

[VISCOUNT TRENCHARD]

the three years from 2021? I also ask him to resist the misguided calls being made by some noble Lords to introduce into the Bill measures that would bind this country into retaining full dynamic alignment with EU rules, including its controversial SPS regime. I am not advocating in any way that the UK should lower its food standards, but standards are not two-dimensional: higher or lower. The EU applies some unreasonably strict rules that do not make standards higher, but they do make them more expensive and cumbersome to comply with.

In some areas, the rules are protectionist in their effect, which means that EU consumers have to pay higher prices than they should. For many years, the EU has put too much weight on the precautionary principle. I cannot understand why we have become obsessed with chlorinated chicken as being symbolic of poor standards in animal welfare. Aside from the fact that US poultry farmers tend to use peracetic acid nowadays, the evidence shows that the incidence of campylobacter infection in the UK is nearly five times the level in the US, as already mentioned by my noble friend Lord Ridley. Further, the level of salmonella infections is significantly higher in the EU than in the US. If there was any doubt about the safety of using chlorine to wash vegetables for sale in supermarkets or to keep drinking water and swimming pools safe, it would obviously be banned.

I do not have time to mention the large number of myths which have been put about with regard to US animal welfare standards, but actually, permitted poultry stocking densities in the US and the UK are roughly comparable. As for beef, the UK Veterinary Products Committee concluded that it was unable to support the opinion of the European Commission that the risks from the consumption of meat from hormone-treated cattle may be greater than previously thought.

The UK, as an advocate for free trade and for proportionate regulation at the WTO, should ensure that its own SPS rules, unlike those of the EU, are compliant with the WTO's SPS regime. This allows countries to maintain standards that are stricter than international ones, but only if those standards are justified by science or by a non-discriminatory lower level of acceptable risk that does not selectively target imports. The UK buys chicken from Brazil, Thailand, and Poland, which is an EU member state. Noble Lords who disagree with me should perhaps investigate stocking densities in any of those countries.

Our new free trade policy, including agreements with the US and Japan, will provide new opportunities for farmers to export their high-quality food products, especially those including lamb, to new markets where they will rightly find strong demand.

The Deputy Speaker (The Earl of Kinnoull) (Non-Aff): Lord Judd. No? Lord Naseby.

3.04 pm

Lord Naseby (Con): My Lords, I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box because I know that he is absolutely dedicated to the whole of the farming industry. I have lived in Bedfordshire for half a century or thereabouts

and I represented a part of Northamptonshire for a quarter of a century or thereabouts. I talked recently to our local farmers and heard one simple message: they are worried. They are worried about the transition and climate change, but they wished me to communicate to the Minister that despite all that, they support the NFU's proposal for a UK trade, food and farming commission.

I want to concentrate on three niche areas, the first of which is horticulture. It was once a thriving and booming industry until rising energy costs and competition with Holland almost killed it off. As you look around the landscape of Bedfordshire and the south of Northamptonshire, you see that it is one of decaying glasshouses. There must be a way to restore horticulture, which is so important to us for food production. This means that obviously we will have to work with renewable energy, and I hope very much that that will be done with further financial and other extra help from Her Majesty's Government because it will help enormously on our food security. Alongside that, we must have an understanding of the need for temporary labour to be imported in and out of the country to help with harvesting.

The second area is forestry. I declare an interest as someone who has 40 acres of woodland where I have been working with the Forestry Commission through a 10-year management agreement with a small local company called Astwick Forestry, which is run by a wonderful man, Mr Hart. There are exciting opportunities in the world of forestry. The Urban Tree Challenge is strongly supported by my noble friend on the Front Bench, and we now have the exciting round two coming up for open and small woodlands. There is the woodland carbon scheme where others could buy the sequestration to offset their existing emissions. The market for this is one of huge potential and demand, and it is good to see that the Government have set up an additional scheme worth £50 million—the Woodland Carbon Guarantee scheme—to accelerate the growing of trees for carbon capture. That is an embryonic area of forestry which has so much potential for the future. However, I worry a bit about the frequency with which diseased rootstock comes into this country from, dare I say, the continent and other parts of the world.

Thirdly, I turn to a real niche industry. Here I declare another interest in that I have 100 vines at home, which make about 24 bottles of English sparkling wine a year, so I am a niche grower. But there are far bigger growers in Sussex, Kent and other parts of the United Kingdom. We should remember that the Romans produced wine here with great success, so I think that this is an excellent and exciting area. It is interesting to note that in a blind tasting, some of our best production comes alongside, dare I say, French champagne, although I am a member of the *Ordre des Coteaux de Champagne*. This is a young industry which needs understanding and I hope that the ministry will listen carefully to the pleas of this really niche industry.

3.08 pm

Lord Burnett (LD) [V]: My Lords, I declare my interests as set out in the register. I live in a rural area and for many years I used to farm on my own account.

I had the honour to serve as Member in the other place for Torridge and West Devon, where I still live. It is one of the most rural constituencies in England and part of it comprises a large swathe of the Dartmoor National Park. I have observed over many years how the United Kingdom's agricultural industry has made substantial investments of time and money into animal welfare and environmental protection. We rightly have high animal welfare and environmental standards. We concentrate whenever possible on the extensive rearing of livestock and we produce high-quality products.

Given the time constraints in the debate, I shall concentrate on the beef and sheep sector. If there is no agreement with the European Union by the end of this year—and media reports suggest this is likely; even the Governor of the Bank of England has warned banks to prepare for no deal—then the prospects for UK agriculture are extremely bleak.

The sheep sector faces a very damaging period, lasting for years. Approximately 40% of our total sheepmeat production is exported to the European Union. We import very little sheepmeat from the European Union. If we leave the EU without a deal and on WTO terms, our exports to the EU will carry an ad valorem tariff of between 40% and 60%. This product is very price sensitive. Exports will be severely cut and there will be chronic oversupply in the UK. The price of sheepmeat will plummet, leaving our sheep farmers' stock values decimated. The continuation of the basic payment scheme and other support will not even start to make up the difference.

As to beef, we are net importers from the EU. I understand that we are proposing an ad valorem tariff of approximately 12% on imports of beef into this country from the EU, whereas our exports of beef to the EU will carry an ad valorem tariff of between approximately 40% and 60%. This means that we shall be in the ludicrous position of subsidising imports. Trade in beef products will be severely disrupted, and with dire consequences for our farmers. Stock values may drop substantially.

The pressure will be on the Government to make alternative tariff-free or low-tariff arrangements with non-EU countries. There will be overwhelming pressure on the Government from other sectors of the economy to complete a trade agreement with the United States. My understanding is that any trade agreement would have to be ratified by both Houses of Congress. Senators and members of the House of Representatives from rural areas could refuse to ratify the agreement if the necessary access for their constituents to agricultural products from the UK was not included. The pressure on the Government to conclude an agreement with the US will be overwhelming. Despite their fine words, Ministers come and go. Unless we impose the most compelling and robust statutory prohibitions on the Government, we shall be flooded with cheap, hormone-fed beef that is reared with scant regard for animal welfare and with other products that are equally substandard. For example, there are many crop sprays permitted in the United States which have been outlawed in the EU, and therefore in Britain, for years.

The Government should agree an extension on the transition period until satisfactory arrangements between us and the EU have been agreed, for all businesses in

the country not just the agricultural sector. It is not in our interests to import substandard food that will be damaging to the British people. Agriculture in the UK employs, directly or indirectly, approximately 4.1 million individuals. If the Government do not heed those of us who counsel caution, there will also be substantial consequential losses for rural and urban Britain, of jobs, business and other opportunities.

Our farmers produce, and should be encouraged to produce, the basic necessity of life: namely, food.

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist: Please can I remind the noble Lord of the speaking limit?

Lord Burnett [V]: We owe it to everyone in our country to ensure that we maintain an agricultural sector that continues to provide high-quality, safe food and which continues to respect the environment and animal welfare.

3.13 pm

Lord Cameron of Dillington (CB) [V]: My Lords, I declare my farming and landowning interests.

I have a lot of good things to say about this Bill but no time to say them. The change to ELMS and the wider approach to the food chain are great—it is about more than just production on the land—but, despite the paper *Health and Harmony: The Future for Food, Farming and the Environment in a Green Brexit*, there seems to be little in the Bill about nutrition and health.

I will focus my remarks on my worries. First, I worry about the imminent vacuum in our support systems. ELMS is still a long way off. Farmers do not know what it will mean for them. Changes in land management take a long time to implement. A farmer would be mad to start preparing or training now for something that may or may not come in by 2027. Meanwhile, the single farm payment will be mostly gone before farmers know what the Government want them to do to survive. In all fairness, the Government cannot abandon one support system before the way forward on the next is clear.

Secondly, it must now be obvious to everyone, including the Government, that reviewing our nation's food security only once every five years, after what we have just been through, is madness. I will say no more at this stage.

Thirdly, I would like a clear message in this Bill that we will move forward to allow gene editing in our research programmes. This is a way of speeding up the natural methods of farm breeding to ensure that we can improve the environmental and nutritional outcomes of feeding our ever-expanding human population, both at home and—more particularly, as far as I am concerned—in the developing world.

Fourthly, everyone knows that we must have a clause in this Bill that looks carefully at the importation of goods that would be illegal to produce in this country. Every department, including the DIT, is signed up to this red line, as is the Prime Minister and the vast majority of the voting public, so what objection could there be to putting something on the face of the Bill to make it more difficult for future Administrations to

[LORD CAMERON OF DILLINGTON] renege on that? In my view, it would make trade negotiations easier. If it is not a matter of discretion during discussions but is the law of the land, then everyone knows precisely where they stand and it disappears as an issue.

My final area for amendment is to introduce a clause allowing Ministers to support businesses and communities in rural areas. Why do we want such a clause in an Agriculture Bill? Because currently it is hard for a family farm to survive on food production or land management alone. We must help the farming households to find cash for jobs off the farm, to ensure the survival of the farm itself. I am not saying that the Government must spend their agricultural budget on the wider rural economy; I am just saying that Farming Ministers should have that arrow in their quiver for use in certain areas or circumstances, should it prove beneficial. To have it there can do no harm.

3.16 pm

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts (Con) [V]: My Lords, I thank the Minister for his very clear introduction. An advisory speaking time of four minutes is not long to tackle the far-reaching provisions of this Bill, but I want to use a few of my precious seconds to protest to the Whip on duty about how the Bill is being handled. It is not just the four-minute limit; more importantly, a good number of our fellow Peers from all parties have been scrubbed from speaking at all. Things have reached a pretty pass when Members of your Lordships' House are prevented from speaking at Second Reading of a Bill of this magnitude. Please do not play the pandemic card in reply. It will be perfectly possible to extend this debate by another half day to enable all who wish to speak to do so. Our fellow Peers deserve no less.

In my remaining time, I will focus on Clause 17 and food security. I remind the House that I am a controlling shareholder in a company that owns a modest amount of farmland. On 14 May, there was a very interesting debate in your Lordships' House on food security, ably moved by the noble Baroness, Lady Boycott, and equally ably replied to by the Minister. However, given the scale of the challenges we face to our future food security, through a combination of 40% increase in the world population—some 4 billion people—the impact of climate change and risks to the ability to move food around the world, Clause 17 is far too bland and insecure. We need not expressions of hope but, as the noble Baroness, Lady Young of Old Scone, said, duties on the Government.

I will give three quick examples. First, there needs to be a stated government policy on what level of food security is sought. Currently, it is about 50%. Is that the right level? Should it be higher or lower? The public are entitled to know.

Secondly, the clause says nothing about water. The Environment Agency tells us that we will run short of water within 20 years, and that we are entering, in the words of the chairman of the Environment Agency, “the jaws of death”. Significantly for our food security, the shortage of water will be most acute in the south-east of England, where some of our most productive farmland is located.

Finally, the clause makes no reference to the number of mouths that will have to be fed 20 years or so from now. What will the population of the United Kingdom be? Those numbers are stark. The ONS projection suggests that the population of the UK 25 years from now will be 72 million people, an increase of about 6 million, equivalent to two and a half cities the size of Manchester today. To provide the necessary homes, offices and other space for those people is likely to require us to tarmac over an area the size of Bedfordshire.

One of the challenges faced by all Governments is the inevitable public bias towards the present at the expense of the future. People find it hard to give proper weight to problems that lie 20 years away and are, unsurprisingly, inclined to focus on the short-term challenges they face, but if the pandemic has taught us anything it is that an absence of strategic thought and planning can carry a heavy cost, so I shall end with that great Jewish saying, “Start worrying. Details to follow.”

3.20 pm

Baroness Mallalieu (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I remind the House of my interest as a small-scale upland sheep farmer and as president of the Countryside Alliance. This is potentially a good Bill that travels in the right direction, and I am grateful to my friend the noble Lord, Lord Gardiner, for introducing it, but it is a very bare framework with far too many delegated powers and far too little real detail. It could and should be improved by some additions.

First, our current food, environmental and animal welfare standards were surely not put in place simply to protect the market for our farmers or because we were required to adopt them while we were in the EU. They are there for the benefit of our consumers and we are keeping them post-Brexit presumably because we think they are good and necessary. The Conservative Party's manifesto at the last general election stated that there would be no compromise on them in our trade talks, and the letter we all got yesterday from the two Secretaries of State said the same, as did the Minister in opening. To allow products which do not meet our standards—even if, as has been suggested in the press, tariffs might be imposed on them to help our producers compete financially—would betray the promise made to the people of this country that they would have good, safe, ethically produced food to our own high standards. If, as we are being repeatedly told, there will be no compromise, will the Minister tell us why that is not simply being put in the Bill? As the noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh, and the noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, said, the amendment in the other place proposed by Mr Neil Parish was supported on all sides of the House and it, or one like it, needs to be put in the Bill.

At long last we have an opportunity to shape our own agricultural destiny, and the choice is stark, facing, as we do, the end of direct payments under the CAP. It is no exaggeration to say that the single farm payment has been the difference between a loss and break-even for many small and medium-sized family farms, particularly in the uplands where there is very little but livestock farming to turn to. That point was made by the noble Earl, Lord Devon, and the noble Lord,

Lord Carrington. If you cut direct support to those small farms, as New Zealand did, they go under, and farming becomes the province of large commercial enterprises. Under the Bill, that direct support is reducing and is guaranteed for only a very short time. As others have pointed out, there is then a lacuna in support, and we have no details or figures with which farmers can plan for the future, as plan they must.

The Bill must recognise that the production of food to a high standard, which British farmers primarily do, is the main benefit to us all from our agricultural industry, as well as landscape maintenance and enhancement, wildlife habitat preservation, access to the countryside and so on. We, the public, directly or indirectly, derive benefit from that we should all contribute to its cost. However, productivity and profitability have to go hand in hand with the new environmental land management schemes or they will fail. In my area, Exmoor National Park, I am very encouraged by the trial and test called Exmoor's Ambition, which is partly funded by Defra. It has been running since 2019 and goes on until next year. It works closely with farmers and land managers to define and develop the public good outcomes which will be required under the ELM scheme, and how farmers will be paid for them. We all want to know the results, and I hope the Minister will be able to tell us how those trials are going and if anything is emerging from them as yet. Those schemes must be devised and designed—

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist: Perhaps the noble Baroness could bring her remarks to a close.

Baroness Mallalieu [V]: I hope they will be devised by farmers, not just by recent environmental studies graduates sitting in an office, which has sometimes been the case with other schemes.

3.25 pm

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB) [V]: My Lords, this Bill is silent on pesticides and herbicides, yet they are toxic to insects and wildlife. Some may prove carcinogenic, even at a very low dose, and the current regulations on these chemicals need to tighten, not lapse. Several noble Lords have addressed the urgency of this and said that we must value high-quality, ethically farmed UK food. Maintaining current standards and practices will not be enough.

Focusing on issues pertinent to Wales, I thank the Minister and his department for working with the Welsh Government to add to the Bill the powers requested to introduce an agriculture Wales Bill in the next Session. It will allow continuity of support for Welsh farmers and the effective functioning of the UK single market going forward. It will include powers to simplify or improve the basic payment scheme to farmers beyond 2020 and to modify retained direct EU legislation on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy and support for rural development.

Schedule 5 to the Bill, the Welsh schedule, will enable Wales' animal health and welfare framework to be supported by legislation. The framework is based on "prevention is better than cure", with health improvements

through the vet and farm plan that promotes joint working for animal welfare, linked to planned maintenance. The agriculture Wales Bill will echo the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, with awareness of Wales' global responsibilities, such as through the network of antibiotic champions to decrease antibiotic use.

The intention behind Clause 27 is to counteract unfair trading practices and to prevent market abuse—that is, larger players in the market exploiting those in relatively weak market positions. However, if this is a reserved power, there must be consent from the Welsh Government because those powers intersect with devolved matters for Wales, including agriculture and agricultural productivity and sustainability. Can the Minister confirm that the Government will strengthen the requirement to engage with the Welsh Government by amendment, as required in the legislative consent Motion, which my noble and learned friend Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd and I support? My noble and learned friend, being unable to speak today, has written to the Minister asking when the draft common framework on agriculture will be available and whether it will contain a dispute resolution mechanism. The UK internal market must function appropriately, enabling the devolved Governments to determine matters such as standards and subsidies.

Although the Explanatory Memorandum recognises that organic production is a devolved competence, the Secretary of State seems to be able to legislate on organics. This confusion needs clarifying by amendment to ensure that the Secretary of State can make organic production regulations falling within devolved competence only with the prior consent of Welsh Ministers.

Regarding the World Trade Organization Agreement on Agriculture, there remains disagreement between the UK Government and the Welsh Government on whether the WTO clause is wholly reserved. Can the Minister confirm that a bilateral agreement has been reached to require the UK Government to consult the devolved Administrations before bringing forward regulations under this power?

Subject to amendments ensuring consultation and such a framework, I hope we can support the Bill.

3.29 pm

Lord Duncan of Springbank (Con) [V]: My Lords, I broadly welcome the Bill, which is timely. I have several questions on which I would like some clarification, if I may. At present, my noble friend will recognise that the agriculture funding system within the EU works to a seven-year timetable, allied to the multiannual financial framework. How will the future funding cycle then be determined within the UK itself, and how shall the devolved nations be involved in the determination of that cycle?

I note the important contribution of the noble Lord, Lord Bew. In his review of farm payments north of the border, he was able to restore a degree of amity between Scottish farmers and those in the rest of the UK. It will be recalled that this was simply because the then Secretary of State for Defra mistook his UK role for his English farming role. There will need to be greater clarity to ensure that this does not happen again.

[LORD DUNCAN OF SPRINGBANK]

I have only a few specific points. Coming this late in the debate, I am afraid that several noble Lords have raised them; I will therefore echo those points. First, I echo the points made by the noble Earl, Lord Lindsay. Will there be a primary stage impact assessment? It will be important, given the scale of the change that the Bill represents, to have a full appreciation of how it will interweave with the future development of policy.

Secondly, I welcome strongly the notion of delivering support for public good. But public good is a nebulous concept and the measurement of it will be a challenge. Noble Lords will be aware that one of the great criticisms farmers have had of the common agricultural policy is its bureaucratic base, along with the measurements and involvement of bureaucracy in establishing conformity to policy. It is often this part that has caused the greatest frustration for farmers, so it would be useful to get some sense of how this public good will be measured and what sanctions might be anticipated for the failure to deliver public good.

My final point rests on perhaps the greatest question yet to come, that of climate change. Farmers will be at the forefront of decarbonising, so I would welcome my noble friend's comments on how he anticipates the evolving agriculture support policy interweaving with the UK Government's ongoing commitment to net zero. These elements will become very important and critical in helping farmers themselves to move in this direction. Those are my points.

3.32 pm

Lord Liddle (Lab): My Lords, this is major legislation and I am sure that the goal of having a better set of arrangements for agriculture than we had under the common agricultural policy, including better environmental land management, has wide support on all sides of this House. However, it is easier to state these goals than to work out how you will make them work. The question just asked by the noble Lord, Lord Duncan, about how public benefit will be measured, regulated and rewarded is very relevant.

Within this policy are two big unresolved tensions. On the one hand, the Government want something better than the common agricultural policy and when Michael Gove was Secretary of State, he set out ambitious objectives for something better. On the other hand is the Government's ambition for global Britain and their determination to use the new freedoms of an independent trade policy as a result of Brexit to make up for the loss of access, or more constrained access, which there will undoubtedly be, to the EU single market.

The Government tell us that there will be no detriment to the EU standards that are now incorporated in UK law. We have the letter before us from the two Secretaries of State. I am not trying to argue that they are in some way misleading us; in fact, I have great personal respect for the noble Lord, Lord Grimstone, who has become the Trade Minister in this place. But our Ministers are rather naive about trade negotiations and will find that in the force majeure of trade—particularly if we get a bad deal from the EU, which I think we will—they will be under enormous political pressure to demonstrate that they can do deals elsewhere. Those deals will generally be bad deals for British agriculture. They

will involve either some sacrifice of standards or increased quotas—for example, for Brazilian beef, US beef and that sort of thing—which will cause a lot of competitive pressure in certain parts of the industry.

That brings me to the second tension—that between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations. Environmental land management strikes me as a matter that should ideally be devolved, but the UK will control the trade negotiations, which will determine a lot of the standards to be applied. My forecast, which I am afraid is pessimistic, is that what happens in the trade negotiations on agriculture will be a cause of huge tension with the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It will set off political consequences that could threaten the unity of the United Kingdom. I am sorry to be so pessimistic but, while this is a good Bill, it is fatally flawed.

3.36 pm

Baroness Ludford (LD): My Lords, I regret Brexit, but I support the targeting of financial support to farmers to secure environmental enhancement, food security and safety, and the welfare of animals and plants. I hope that small family and hill farms will get a better deal, as opposed to the cereal barons and city-owned megafarms that the CAP seems to favour. However, I will put down a few markers.

First, I fully concur with my noble friend Lord Tyler's concern over the protection of GIs. Can the Minister tell us the Government's plans in this respect, whether for Cornish pasties or other products? Secondly, there should be no threat to the production and marketing of kosher and halal food in the wake of Brexit. Thirdly, I fear that the Government will torpedo British farmers' and consumers' interests by giving in to US pressure on food standards. As others have said, the US produces food to standards that many of us regard as very bad practice and which EU law prevents. Even if the response was, "We won't ban them but will require them to be labelled", that is not an adequate substitute in all cases—and anyway, we know from the experience over GMOs that the US will fight that tooth and nail.

The Government have made much of their manifesto promise, reflected in a letter from the two Secretaries of State, that they would

"not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards."

The problem is that this pledge was set in the context, and with the caveat, that the Government would not so compromise

"In all our trade negotiations."

As we have heard, Neil Parish, the Conservative chair of the EFRA Select Committee, clearly did not trust the Government. Hence, he was among those—my colleague Tim Farron was another—who tabled amendments in the other place last month to try to avoid the commitments being, as he put it,

"traded away on the altar of cheap food."

If the Government's pledges meant anything, why did they rally their troops to defeat those amendments?

I fear that the Government are leaving themselves plenty of wiggle room. There are reports of a plan to apply tariffs on lower standard products, apparently

with the idea that US producers would thus find it uneconomic to send them here. What is the state of play on this reported plan and how does it accord with the manifesto and ministerial pledges? In any case, as the *Times* columnist Clare Foges put it well on Monday, the pledge not to lower our standards through trade negotiations does not prevent them doing so through domestic legislation; hence the refusal to agree a level playing field in the EU negotiations.

Given the experience in the other place last month, it would seem that the Government could rely on their loyal lobby fodder to get a diminution of standards through. As it was put in the *Financial Times* yesterday:

“For Mr Johnson ... a deal with the US is a strategic imperative ... Washington’s price will be ... a decisive British break with EU rules and regulations. It is looking more and more as if Mr Johnson is ready to pay this price.”

Mr Johnson might be ready to pay that price, but it is British farmers and consumers who would take the hit. As my noble friend Lady Parminter said at the beginning of this debate, Liberal Democrats are determined to stop that—as, apparently, are noble Lords across the House.

3.40 pm

Baroness Worthington (CB) [V]: My Lords, I am very grateful to be able to participate in this important Second Reading debate on the Agriculture Bill and I thank the Minister for introducing the Bill. I would like to take a moment to echo comments from other noble Lords about the inability of our colleagues to participate in this Second Reading debate and to echo the hope there will be no further curtailment of debate around the Bill and the scrutinising of this important framework legislation. It represents a once in a generation opportunity to set a new framework for how we reward farmers and how we manage our land and food systems.

Time is short, as many people have commented. I want to address my comments to the issue of climate change and the ability of this Bill to help us to make some significant strides forward in how we domestically address this issue and by setting world-class policy standards for other countries to adopt and take on. This is the promise of the ELM that the Bill introduces—that we will be shifting from a system focused on public money to support production and move it towards supporting public good. I fully support the Government’s intentions here and, as others have mentioned, I would like to see more detail about the definitions of what ELM will cover and how it will operate.

The principle is a good one and, unlike many sectors of the economy where we are seeking to address climate change, there is often a large debate about how we can price in externalities of climate change—how we can add costs of greenhouse gas pollution to a sector which is currently not paying them. Here, with agriculture, we have the opportunity to redeploy public money that has already been allocated, so it is a fantastic opportunity to align our need to keep land productive, to support farmers, to increase our food security and to improve our balance of trade, and at the same time address climate change.

There is a need for us to explore where there is that great overlap between productive land and high-carbon land. I think it was the noble Viscount, Lord Ridley,

who pointed out there are different camps when it comes to how we should use our land. We should be trying to direct our public money towards those uses of land which achieve a triple bottom line: rural development and jobs, high-carbon stocks on our land, and increased food security. I think that points us towards investment in the whole system of agro-ecology, where we are producing food and maintaining high biodiversity standards on our lands. Those are the sorts of areas we can explore in Committee and hope to get more flesh on the bones of this important framework legislation.

In the time remaining I want to touch on the context of this Bill being passed with so much uncertainty, both in relation to the trade deal we are expecting with the EU and other potential trade agreements with countries such as the US. It does feel as if we need to be writing some clear legal standards into this legislation to enable to us to conduct those negotiations from a position of strength and not have the potential rolling-back of high environmental standards. In a sense, we need to ensure we can erect a green wall around our own high environmental standards and have those standards upheld for the benefit of the environment and for our rural communities.

The other issue I am concerned about is the shift away from the payment systems we have today; we will lose the stick, as it were, of cross-compliance, where if farmers receive a payment, they are required to adhere to certain environmental standards through cross-compliance. That will be removed, and I am concerned about potential backsliding and who will oversee any potential loss of environment benefit. We have to see a net gain in environmental terms from the Bill and we should be seeking to put in place clear measurements and enforcement mechanisms to make sure that we deliver the things we are expecting from the public money we will continue to spend in this area. I thank noble Lords and look forward to Committee.

3.45 pm

Lord Dobbs (Con): My Lords, I would first like to apologise to my noble friend on the Front Bench; there was a little confusion earlier and I was unable to be here for his opening remarks. I know that it does not fuss him, but I would like to apologise anyway. I also declare my interest: my earliest memory as a child is of my father’s business. He raised chickens and grew tomatoes and cucumbers, and even had a few pigs—until the business went bust.

I will start with three points. First, the fundamental purpose of farming, which we must never forget, is to feed the people. Secondly, the common agricultural policy is one of the worst food deals since Eve plucked the apple and handed it to Adam. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, competition and free markets have lifted vast parts of the world out of starvation and food shortage. Even more than that, competition has provided and continues to provide a wider range of food, at a lower price and of higher quality. It comes about through endless innovation rather than through endless regulation. It is a point that my noble friend Lord Ridley made with such passion and excellence, and it is the inexorable lesson of the last 200 years.

[LORD DOBBS]

We owe our farmers a great vote of thanks; they form an exceptional industry, but I believe that the best is yet to come. Of course, they face a process of change, and that brings with it uncertainties—and opportunity. So I welcome very much the seven years of transition that the Bill offers—I think it will be needed—and I also welcome the emphasis on the environment. Good farmers do not need lectures on environmental standards—of course they do not—but I do welcome the encouragement to them that the Bill offers.

There is a game being played by some with this Bill; it is called a distraction technique. You will recognise it. Great magicians have it, jobs hanging around cash machines waiting for an elderly lady have it. Everything is not what it seems, and every argument is not what it seems. We hear, “We must stop the race to the bottom.” What race to the bottom? Show me it. “What about chlorine?” I hear. Good question; we wash a lot of our foodstuffs in chlorine anyway, we wash our children in chlorine in swimming pools, and we actually drink chlorine. Today, at a British supermarket down the road, you can buy a whole chicken for £1.87—a chicken which satisfies all our safety standards. It also satisfies consumers—and that, I remind you, is the first and finest purpose of agriculture: satisfying consumers.

One of the many advantages that Brexit will bring to us is better labelling. Imagine that on the shelf in your local supermarket you have a chicken labelled, “Bred in Britain and Produced with Pride”, and that alongside it there is a chicken that says, “Chlorinated in Kansas”. No doubt which one, if noble Lords will excuse the pun, is going to fly off the shelves. Chlorine is not a problem.

We are looking for a brighter, greener, more innovative future, and this Bill helps farmers produce that. I wish it well—even if it comes 60 years too late for my father.

3.49 pm

Lord Morris of Aberavon (Lab) [V]: [*Inaudible*]*—*family farm in three counties of Wales, and in Suffolk.

My Lords, this Bill is a sea change from its ill-fated predecessor. That was heavily criticised by the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee of your Lordships’ House, which expressed its dismay at the major transfer of powers from the EU to Ministers of the Crown, bypassing Parliament and the devolved legislatures in Wales and Northern Ireland. Not for the first time, Whitehall sought to claw back powers that I had won for the Welsh Office as Secretary of State for Wales and that formed one of the building blocks for the Welsh Assembly.

The briefing from Defra, for which I am grateful, makes it clear that leaving the CAP will enable the devolved Administrations to design policies that will meet their own needs. Wales and Northern Ireland have asked the Government to extend certain powers in the Bill to them. I ask the Minister to summarise what they are. Provided they do not undermine the principle of devolution—that it is the Welsh Government who decide what is best for Welsh farmers, the Welsh countryside and Welsh consumers—I would welcome them.

I support the emphasis placed by my noble friend Lord Hain and the noble Baroness, Lady Finlay, on the need to involve the Welsh Government in any international negotiations which concern Welsh produce. I hope to expand on that at a later stage.

There is value within the United Kingdom single market for standards and assistance to be on the same lines if so desired.

My next point is on the maintenance of the high standards that we now have for food production and the protection of consumers in this country. The noble Earl, Lord Shrewsbury, raised animal health. We have our occasional epidemics and my family have been too close to foot and mouth in the past. Another problem has been BSE. Tuberculosis in cattle has not been properly resolved. We have gone backwards in this area. I do not want a lowering of our standards to accommodate a general trade deal, which the Government seem determined to get. The issue is not solely chlorinated chicken or hormone-fed beef; British farmers, wherever they are, are proud of the standards that we have in this country. We do not want to see the door opened to lower-cost, poorly produced food imports.

It was said in the Commons that imports produced to lower standards than ours pose a real threat to UK agriculture. Without sufficient safeguards, we could see British farmers significantly undermined, while turning a blind eye to environmental degradation and poor environmental standards abroad. Agricultural goods should be imported into the UK only if the standards to which they were produced are as high as or higher than the UK standards. I welcome the assurances on this point.

The small farmers of Wales, Cumbria and elsewhere operate on fairly thin margins. I welcome the emphasis on the environment for all our people, but we must remember that the countryside can be enjoyed by everyone only if there are people living there. I trust that in the disbursement of funds to agriculture, this will be borne in mind.

3.53 pm

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (LD) [V]: My Lords, I declare an interest: my stepson is a farmer in Scotland. I also associate myself with a remark made originally by the noble Earl, Lord Lindsay, and followed by the noble Lord, Lord Duncan of Springbank: that it is surprising that no impact assessment is before us.

Noble Lords may, like me, have received a briefing from the National Farmers’ Union of Scotland—16 of the Bill’s clauses apply to Scotland—and it has sought to have a particular point made in this debate: that where the Bill, or indeed Brexit, creates new financial and regulatory frameworks, Scottish interests must be represented.

It is plain from the debate so far that there is real anxiety that little protection is offered to domestic producers from cheaper imported food produced to lower standards. We heard what the Minister said, which I of course accepted; we have seen what Ministers have written about, but I have had a lot of ministerial letters in my time and, to be quite blunt about it, their effect normally lasts only until the subsequent letter, which begins “In view of changed circumstances...”

I cannot understand why the all-party amendment proposed by Neil Parish MP in the Commons was not accepted by the Government. At one step, they could have removed the anxiety and suspicion that the Bill has created in this matter.

But of course, it is more than ministerial letters; the Government's manifesto promises that

"we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards."

We know the extent to which the Government feel obliged to meet the terms of their manifesto, so how can they possibly meet them in the circumstances that we are discussing? There is only one way in which it can be done, and that is that in any trade treaty it should be an essential—and I use that word in the legal sense—condition that the promise is met in terms.

I have already said that 16 clauses in the Bill apply to Scotland, and I want to finish by referring to Clause 17, on the duty to report to Parliament. Food security has been a live issue in recent weeks, but it seems to give the Government far too wide a measure of discretion that the obligation arising under that clause should be only at five-yearly intervals. I heard what the Minister said, that there might well be occasions when an earlier report was made to Parliament, but is this not a matter of such significance and importance that the obligation should be met annually? Food security is a strategic requirement of every Government; this Government should recognise that.

The Deputy Speaker: Before the speech of the noble Lord, Lord Trees, I should advise the House that the noble Lord, Lord Judd, will now speak as the first speaker in the second section of the Second Reading of the Agriculture Bill and before the noble Duke, the Duke of Montrose.

3.57 pm

Lord Trees (CB) [V]: My Lords, this Bill is of colossal importance. It will involve a revolution in our countryside and affect our food supply, the environment, the rural economy and the lives of many thousands of people. I have never before had so many emails from the public about amending a Bill. Thus, it is regrettable that we are given such little time to scrutinise it in the House.

That said, there is much to welcome in the Bill, but it also raises major questions. I will focus on those pertaining to animal health and welfare and the sustainability of livestock farming, notably of cattle and sheep.

The Bill proposes support for

"protecting or improving the health or welfare of livestock".

As a vet, I welcome this. While it is intrinsically the ethical thing to do, it also addresses other key goals in the Bill, notably increasing productivity, safeguarding food security and mitigating climate change. Proper control of enteric worms in sheep, for example, can reduce greenhouse gases by 10% per unit of production. It would however be helpful to know more about how this support will be delivered, what the baseline is, and how improvement will be measured. I ask the Minister to answer those questions, if need be in writing.

Cattle and sheep farming are a pillar of the rural economy, particularly in our upland areas, and help maintain the countryside we love. But there are more than just aesthetic or sentimental reasons to value this activity. Cattle and sheep turn grass into products that we can eat, and which provide wholesome, nutritious food, contributing to our food security. Cattle and sheep are maintained at high standards of welfare and husbandry, from birth to slaughter. The use of antibiotics is minimal, and only for disease control. In the UK, across all animals, antibiotic use has fallen by 53% in recent years, and is well below the O'Neill commission target. What about greenhouse gases? Data from the FAO shows that UK cattle emit 75% less CO₂ and methane per kilogram of meat than the global average. Finally, grazing animals put back into the soil nutrients and essential fibre.

Our grazing livestock enterprises are not only important for our rural economy and the maintenance of our countryside but are incomparably good for animal welfare, compatible with afforestation and initiatives to improve biodiversity, which I welcome, and produce food in a much more environmentally friendly way than many other global systems—think of cattle reared on cleared rainforest. Yet this aspect of our farming is most vulnerable to the reduction in direct payments. If we allow the importation of livestock products without requiring the same high level of animal welfare, environmental standards and food safety that we demand of our own farmers, we risk destroying our indigenous system. This would be to export poor welfare and poor environmental standards, and would be deleterious to climate change mitigation globally. It would be a classic example of knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing.

I would like to hear from the Minister how the Government will respond to calls either to enshrine legal minimum standards in the Bill, or to establish a trade, food and farming commission, to which a former Secretary of State was committed, and what powers it might have.

4.01 pm

Sitting suspended.

4.31 pm

The Deputy Speaker (Lord Faulkner of Worcester) (Lab): Welcome back, my Lords. We resume debate on the Second Reading of the Agriculture Bill. The first speaker I will call is the noble Lord, Lord Judd.

We do not seem to be connecting with the noble Lord, so I shall call the noble Duke, the Duke of Montrose.

4.32 pm

The Duke of Montrose (Con) [V]: My Lords, I must thank my noble friend the Minister and his officials for the time they have spent briefing us on the interpretation of the Bill. I also declare my interest as a hill farmer and livestock breeder in Scotland.

The legislation before the House has not been shy in hiding that it is purely an enabling Bill for the Secretary of State. Fortunately, it allows us a fair bit of scrutiny but, at the same time, I am struck by the absence of any hint of common frameworks for the devolved

[THE DUKE OF MONTROSE]

Administrations. In April 2019, the Government reckoned that there were 21 policy areas where negotiation was needed on common frameworks. Can the Minister say in how many of those areas frameworks have been achieved and how many more are left in consideration?

One thing that has obviously been put to one side in the Bill is any sense of a common framework for carcass classification, which, given the quantities of the product that are traded between the devolved components of the UK, would seem like an obvious area for consideration. What effort will be made to achieve some common direction here? The noble Lord, Lord Grantchester, pointed out the missing Dibleby review of food policy. It is not easy to make sense of the finer points of an agricultural Bill without a clear assessment of the current role that both agriculture and food are expected to play.

The present message coming through to me is that farmers are being clearly told that we must guard the purity of any water and contribute to the national target for net zero carbon emissions, but much of the other side of the equation is missing. Unless there is a scientific breakthrough, there can be no doubt that this will mean a loss of land for productive capacity, and it is hard to see that happening without a loss of farm units and national self-sufficiency. The upside of Brexit is supposed to be trade. The farmers in this country would be very ready to compete but their basic request is for a level playing field.

I think that we all received the joint letter from the Secretaries of State saying how the Government promise to maintain our high standards, but they have already rejected the opportunity to put those on the face of the Bill. If the standards that we wish for come to be seen in any way as restrictive to trade, I am still puzzled to know how they will be enforceable in the face of any WTO charge. The boundaries that we are trying to maintain do not infringe any sanitary or phytosanitary issues. I hope that the Minister will make it plainer to us what the Government would like to see.

Another factor that we are dealing with centres around trading with the United States. We are in the middle of a drive for agriculture to contribute to net zero carbon equivalence. Money and research are going into this topic on both sides of the Atlantic and, in the US, much of it is to do with achieving faster growth rates and using additives that are not allowed under EU rules. The effect of this will be that United States beef could claim a lower carbon footprint than we can achieve in this country, especially if the US can find an ecological way of transporting it.

The Deputy Speaker: I now call the noble Lord, Lord Judd.

4.36 pm

Lord Judd (Lab) [V]: My apologies for the disruption to services, but I am afraid that my computer went down completely just before I was called. I record my warmest appreciation to everybody who has worked so hard to make sure that I am able to join the debate—thank you. My relevant interests are all unremunerated and are in the register. I should perhaps specifically

mention that I am a vice-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on National Parks and a vice-president of the Campaign for National Parks.

While there is a great deal to be welcomed in this Bill, and the Minister is personally to be congratulated on the part he has played in bringing it before us, there is still a great deal to be put right. Too much is aspirational or only indicative. With teeth and sufficient scope, ELMS could prove a significant step forward. Does the Minister therefore not agree that this must inescapably entail more effective alignment of the Bill with the Climate Change Act and Paris Agreement?

We need practical provision to meet the challenge of food security and muscular methods of enforcement to ensure that public payments for public goods are really delivered and not just a theory. We need specific identification of such public goods: for example, quality of air and soil, reduction of pollution, well-being of uplands, provision of our vital precious landscapes, enhancement and development of woodland and remaining wilderness, peat bogs, the countryside in general, public access to that countryside and rights of way, and urgent regeneration of biodiversity—plants, animals, insects and wildlife. As has been mentioned by several noble Lords, we need stringent regulation of imported foodstuffs, to make certain that our higher standards are not in any way undermined, not least in any trade deal with the United States. We should also spell out and reinforce the responsibilities and duties of the national parks, areas of outstanding national beauty and other special sites in developing a complementary policy in these spheres.

The National Trust has reminded us that soil degradation in England and Wales cost the economy £1.2 billion per year, that between 2009 and 2014 the distribution of British bee species declined by 49% and that farmland birds—

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist: May I remind the noble Lord, Lord Judd, of the speaking time limit?

Lord Judd [V]: My Lords, it would be sad if this potentially very significant Bill were to become, in the end, just another recycling of good intentions. It needs muscle and teeth. This House must now get down to the task of providing that muscle and teeth. That is very much our responsibility in the weeks and months ahead.

4.41 pm

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op) [V]: My Lords, I am delighted to speak at Second Reading of the Agriculture Bill. As we have heard, it is the first major reform of agricultural policy for many years. As we form new relationships, it will determine new systems to support our farmers and growers and protect the environment. What is most important for agriculture is to maintain high standards of quality. Our aims should be standards at least as good as those of the European Union, if not better, and that we maintain food security.

There is no benefit for the UK in our farmers and growers seeking to deregulate, lower standards and take part in a race to the bottom. We want the highest

possible standards for food produced and consumed in the UK. We also need to ensure that where we export food, it is recognised as some of the best in the world. I support my noble friend Lady Mallalieu's point that Ministers' welcome commitments should be in the Bill. I cannot understand why they are not prepared to do that.

I pay tribute to our farmers and growers and their work during the Covid-19 crisis. They have worked with others in the supply chain to keep food on the nation's table. I support the aim of the Bill to provide public money for public good but, as my noble friend Lady Young of Old Scone said, this must be for doing real public good and not a continuation of the old regime in all but name.

I was pleased that the noble Lord, Lord Gardiner of Kimble, confirmed that there is no possibility of chlorine-washed chicken or hormone-injected beef being imported and allowed to be consumed in the UK. It is good to hear that, but can he go further and confirm that, in all the food that we produce and import in the UK, there is no possibility of standards being any lower than those of the EU and that, in fact, the Government intend to go further and, where possible, introduce even higher standards? Will he confirm that, in looking for those higher standards, there will be no possibility of unintentionally weakening standards? The weakening of standards of imported foods would devastate the livelihoods of our farmers and growers and increase the risk to the general population.

I very much support the aims of the Bill to support and regenerate biodiversity and to support public understanding of the environment. Will the Minister set out for the House how he sees that being achieved? Further, will he outline how he sees the powers of the Bill helping to prevent, reduce and protect us from environmental hazards, such as flooding, which have been more and more of a problem in recent years?

Also, will the noble Lord set out how he sees public access to the countryside being maintained and improved? Will he confirm that farmers and growers will be able to receive financial assistance to create new public paths and make improvements to existing routes to enable more people to get outdoors and enjoy our wonderful countryside? The Bill should work to help our precious path network be better maintained. Where farmers and growers are encouraged to do that, they should be properly rewarded for doing so.

I am conscious that I have asked a number of questions. If the noble Lord cannot answer them today, I would appreciate a letter being sent to me and to other noble Lords, and a copy being put in the Library of the House.

4.45 pm

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, we are having a very long and complicated discussion on a Bill that is a framework. It is long and complicated because it is a framework. We basically have a series of good intentions here—and good intentions are the road to hell. If we do not get some clarification during the Bill's passage, noble Lords will have a very busy time voting. I think the Minister knows that and he might want to have a chat with the person who drafted the Bill. Clause 1(1) goes up to paragraph (j); agriculture is first mentioned at paragraph (i).

The Bill talks about how we are to deliver all these wonderful things for the environment. How will we do that? The delivery system is potentially there: it is those who farm and work the land at the moment. They do not know, or are unsure, how they will be supported. British agriculture has needed support from the state, either multinationally or by the nation itself, to make itself productive since about 1870. It was called the great agricultural depression, when the steam engine opened up the prairie and the pampas to production. We have been in decline since then. We cannot compete. It is historically proven. There is a lovely document in the House of Commons Library that shows this.

How will we make sure that the farmer is there to deliver the public good for public money? We must make sure that they know what they are doing. Farmers are currently concentrated on food production. That is what they do, that is what they have been trained to do and that is the culture. To move away from that, they will need the support and encouragement of the state, and a degree of certainty. At the moment, that is not there.

We have another ritual dance when a Minister says, "I'm not going to do that", but it is not in the legislation. We then come back to the Minister and say, "Yes, but you won't be there for ever, although you have a wonderful attitude and we know you wouldn't do it yourself." It has always been true and it has always been there. We need something in the Bill that defines what we will do here and how the farmer should be supported.

To put it bluntly, we have had many sets of briefing come in. The NFU states the worries and problems of food producers. We should be able to carry on doing this; that is what we do. Then I got one from the Ramblers' Association that says: if we are supposed to be providing access to the countryside as a public good, why do we not make sure that we pay landowners to make sure that there are public paths to be used, with all the public health advantages et cetera? If the farmer is there and told that they will be supported, that might just work. We might get gates and solid paths around the edge of the fields. If we do not know what is going on, we will not get interaction from the farming community and those who work the land. We have to try to build that trust and give it a firm basis. The fact that a Minister thinks that it is a good idea and will not change it will not help, very often.

Ministers generally last a couple of years in post and civil servants about the same length of time, but planning on this has to be decades long to really get it going. Will the Minister bear in mind, when amendments are moved during the passage of the Bill, that that is the sort of encouragement we will need to make sure that our delivery system, the farming community, is much more compliant?

4.49 pm

The Earl of Sandwich (CB) [V]: My Lords, first, I pay tribute to all the farmers who have suffered during this pandemic, coming on top of last winter's floods. Ambridge was slow off the mark, but after the initial shock, most farmers responded well. Many have found alternative local means of survival. They are complaining

[THE EARL OF SANDWICH]

about lockdown less than others because they have to be outdoors, feeding the nation, but they rightly complain about some aspects of the Bill.

I come from a generation horrified by the food mountains and fortress Europe of the 1970s, with the obvious inequalities in farming, the waste and the lack of protection for developing countries. I belonged to organisations that campaigned against these things. We can now say that they succeeded, although there is always more to be done. The UK, among others, shifted the argument away from deserving French farmers to a wider demand for a greener Europe less dependent on subsidies. Here we are, still benefiting from the old system but gradually dismantling it at last in favour of policies that help the environment and the planet.

Since then, my wife and I have inherited largely tenanted farmland, and have come to see the other side of the picture: the continuing importance of direct farm payments in the family farm economy. The Bill is necessary but the gradual phasing out of these payments is absolutely essential, especially when you think about how much agriculture has been set back by the virus.

I will support any Lords amendments on standards and welfare. Noble Lords may have noticed that MPs from the West Country have been heading such amendments. They are no more than common sense coming from MPs who represent people who live and breathe farming. They also reflect the views of a large number of farming organisations, as has already been mentioned.

I read Victoria Prentis's response to those amendments. She argued that they are "well-meaning" but will have "unintended consequences" and said that "all EU standards" will become part of domestic law by next year. These are merely reassurances. How can she know that? She said that the proposed new clauses would disrupt our food supplies and risk our potato and whisky exports. How can she know that? After the transition, anything could happen. We are already deep in negotiation with the US. As the noble Baroness, Lady Young, the noble Lord, Lord Hain, and other noble Lords said—remembering TTIP and the EU's own battles—we will be under considerable pressure to lower standards.

Vets are also concerned about the preventive use of antibiotics in farming, which is due to be banned in 2022. When George Eustice describes US animal welfare as "woefully deficient", he is thinking of mass medication with antibiotics. I can understand differences between Ministers on these issues but this may be one that Defra got right and the Trade Secretary got wrong. I read the joint letter.

On forestry, I have sympathy with the successive government attempts to combine better management with more respect for wildlife and the environment—excluding squirrels, of course. Nowadays, there is no shortage of jargon in the Forestry Commission's draft woodland plan.

What about the lack of investment? With climate change, there was euphoria about trees saving the planet—many organisations took advantage of that—but even before the virus came along, any enthusiasm in

the Treasury had vanished. Where has the money gone? Perhaps too much goes into deer fencing, planning for deer fencing and consultancy of every kind.

Finally, I expect that the Minister has had a briefing from the Ramblers. The association makes a lot of demands but it has a point about funding for rights of way. As an owner, I have generally found RoW officers extremely co-operative, but the machinery seems to turn slowly. Can we have an assurance that rights-of-way matching grants will be more generous and more forthcoming?

4.54 pm

Lord McCrea of Magherafelt and Cookstown (DUP)

[V]: I draw noble Lords' attention to my interests in the register and express my total disappointment that my noble friend Lord Morrow could not participate in this debate, even though he had prepared for it.

Under the Bill, the Government would be required to report on the state of the nation's food security every five years. Surely this is a relevant and important measure in the light of the empty shelves and food queues that we have experienced in recent months—something that I had never experienced before in my lifetime. However, I am convinced that farmers throughout the United Kingdom believe that this should be strengthened in the Bill and made a yearly requirement instead of a five-yearly one. By doing so, the Government and producers would have a clear understanding of how much of our nation's food comes from domestic producers, thereby assisting us in our endeavours to be as self-sufficient as possible. I believe that this would be in the national interest, and I encourage the farming industry to be both stable and efficient in future.

With Brexit, the United Kingdom is fundamentally reassessing its trade relationship with partners in the European Union and the rest of the world. I have no doubt that many see major opportunities for the United Kingdom but undoubtedly there are also challenges. These trade negotiations coincide with one of the most serious crises that the world has faced in a generation, in the form of the coronavirus, and the ongoing challenges of climate change and biodiversity decline. A future trade policy that undermines our farmers will mean that a common goal of a more prosperous, sustainable and nature-friendly food and farming sector will be made much harder to achieve, and our nation's already declining food self-sufficiency and security will continue to be eroded. The UK will also have missed an opportunity to set out its stall as being serious about tackling its global footprint and being at the forefront of sustainable production and climate-friendly farming across the world.

If UK farming is to face a future as a vital strategic sector, producing the food that we eat and meeting the challenges of climate change, food and security and the high expectations of the UK public in the way that we treat our farm animals and wildlife, the Bill must not undermine that very goal by allowing in food imports that fail to meet its high ideals. As in Northern Ireland, farmers and growers across the United Kingdom are very proud of their high standards of production. It is important that UK farmers are not in any way unfairly disadvantaged through the imposition of high costs, direct or indirect, that are not shared by overseas

competitors exporting food to the United Kingdom. It is therefore imperative that the Agriculture Bill is amended to ensure that agri-food imports are produced to environmental animal welfare and food safety standards that are at least equivalent to those required of producers in the United Kingdom, which are so highly valued by the British public.

The British Government stated that they had no intention of allowing the UK's high standards of production to be undermined after the UK left the European Union, but that will be the outcome of allowing the import of food produced at a lower standard. UK consumers will be left hostage to food on the market that will be unsafe and our UK farming industry seriously undermined. If the Government fail to amend the Bill accordingly, I believe they will be failing not only our food-producing industry but the UK consumer.

4.58 pm

Lord Jopling (Con) [V]: My Lords, I remind the House of my farming interests.

I must say that when I read the Bill I came to the conclusion that others have come to: I found it principally focused on environmental issues rather than farming issues. Of course I regard the environmental issues as vital; indeed, I remind the House that I was the first Minister ever to put agricultural chemicals under statutory control, and I was the instigator of the very successful environmentally sensitive area scheme that was later adopted throughout the CAP. However, this is an Agriculture Bill and, as others have said, it is, frankly, vague on the economic future of British agriculture.

I first worked in the industry as the 1947 Act was taking effect. I remind the House that it was introduced because, as a result of the war, we were perilously short of homegrown food—hence food rationing continued for many years after 1945. In the early 1970s, before we joined the EC, it was succeeded by support for the agricultural industry through tariffs on imports that matched the CAP arrangements that continue until today. Of course, that has been supplemented by the direct payments arrangements. It is strange that the objectives for agriculture in both the 1947 Act and the common agricultural policy bear significant similarities—the objectives of supporting food production and self-sufficiency—but the Bill, frankly, does not perpetuate these worthy aims.

True, the Government have committed to

“guarantee the current annual budget to farmers in every year of the Parliament.”

I welcome that—and ask the Minister if he will enlarge on that pledge—but after that period, at the end of the Parliament, the future is vague.

There is a question that worries me that I have been putting for four years. In our Brexit negotiations with the EU and other trading nations, we seem likely to move to a situation in which the industry is kicked in the teeth twice over, with the prospect of cheap foodstuffs being imported free of tariffs and, frankly, with dodgy safety guarantees. For instance, the Government tell me there is no scientific test to tell whether beef has been implanted with hormones, yet our post-Brexit exports to the European Union would have to jump its common external tariff.

Given this very serious double threat—together with the phasing out of the direct payments scheme, which is crucial to the farm incomes of a great number of farmers, particularly in the marginal and upland areas—it is hardly surprising that farmers view the future with anxiety and a sharp lack of confidence. The Government really must as soon as possible address this uncertainty and give us details of what the ELMS will provide. We need to know this now.

5.02 pm

Lord Rosser (Lab) [V]: We have been in lockdown now for over 11 weeks, and most people have remained in their immediate locality. For those able to do so, exercise and getting some fresh air has been an important ingredient of each day. Walking has staged something of a comeback, whether along local streets, in local parks or—for those fortunate enough to be close to more open countryside—along local footpaths, as people simply enjoy the pleasure of being out and about in such an environment. On top of the constraints of the lockdown, the good weather has clearly been a key factor.

From what I have seen in my locality, it looks as though numbers of people have discovered at least some public and permissive footpaths in their neighbourhood that they were not previously aware existed and have greatly enjoyed the pleasure and opportunity of more extensive walking in their own area than they had previously fully appreciated were there and available. This is something we should seek to build on as one of the few pluses from the constraints of the lockdown and is surely in line with government objectives of promoting walking.

I raise this in the context of this Bill because, as my noble friend Lord Kennedy of Southwark said, one of its objectives is to protect and improve access to the countryside. Agriculture accounts for 70% of land use in the UK—land that contains a significant proportion of the nation's paths. It is important that access to our countryside for all should be safeguarded, promoted and, where possible, extended. We do not want to see our network of public footpaths and permissive paths diminish. Indeed, we should be looking to grow the network.

In saying that, I appreciate that there can be tensions between those who want to visit and enjoy our countryside and those who earn their livelihood from the land. On the one hand, some owners of land or their tenants do rather less than they might to maintain ready and easy access to footpaths. On the other hand, there are people who cause problems for those who earn their livelihood from the land by not keeping to public footpaths and permissive paths, even where they are clearly marked and signposted—an issue made even more of a problem if they have a pet animal with them, usually a dog, which they fail to keep under control.

Can the Minister say how the Government intend to use the provisions of the Bill, not least with its focus on public money for public goods, to promote and further extend responsible, realistic access to our countryside for all? That objective must surely also be in keeping with the cross-government goals of improving the overall health and well-being of the nation. Is it the Government's intention that farmers will be provided with proper financial support where they are making

[LORD ROSSER]

improvements to the accessibility of existing routes or paths on their land or where they provide new paths of value to the public: for example, to avoid the need to walk on adjacent country roads with fast-moving traffic or to link up existing paths? Is it also the Government's intention that those who receive public payment should be expected to fulfil legal duties to keep paths on their land clear? There is also the important issue of providing financial support for improving access to our countryside for those less physically able, including wheelchair users.

I would really appreciate a response from the Minister on the issues and questions I have just raised, either when he replies to the debate or subsequently.

5.06 pm

Lord Thomas of Gresford (LD) [V]: I was a party to the 34th report of the Delegated Powers Committee in the last Session, reporting on the previous, abortive Agriculture Bill. The committee viewed that Bill as a major transfer of powers from the EU to the Executive, bypassing Parliament and the devolved legislatures. A skeletal framework means that there is no policy content. That Bill contained some 40 separate regulation-making powers, exercisable for the indefinite future and with no sunset clause. To cap it all, the Minister could create undefined criminal offences with a penalty of up to two years' imprisonment.

As the current committee makes clear in its 13th report, some of those criticisms have been met in the redrafting of the Bill, and we should be grateful for that. One important issue is that Defra has recanted on its desire to send farmers to prison and has reduced the proposed penalties for such criminal offences as it may dream up merely to an unlimited fine. Nevertheless, although there are desirable improvements, this remains a skeleton Bill, as the current Delegated Powers Committee points out and as my noble friend Lord Addington mentioned a moment ago. At some unknown future time, the Minister will slot a package of policies into this frame, as and when he has worked them out. He will introduce a series of unamendable SIs for minimum scrutiny and, save for one issue only, with no consultation.

The Government's intentions with regard to the future shape of British agriculture as a whole remain obscure. We see it through a glass darkly, not face to face; as the noble Lord, Lord Jopling, said, it is vague. Clause 4 requires the Government to place before Parliament a multiannual plan, covering seven years in the first instance and setting out the Government's strategic priorities—but this is for England. Will the multiannual plan even consider its implications upon Wales and Scotland? What about the relationships generally between Scotland, Wales and England—a point raised by the noble Duke, the Duke of Montrose? Three separate agricultural regimes will be developing in Great Britain. How will this internal market operate or co-operate? What will be the rules and how will they be determined? My noble friend Lord Campbell of Pittenweem called for Scottish participation in fashioning these rules, and equally, there must be Welsh.

If in Wales we want to support upland family farms through generous subsidies, does the undercutting of Cumbrian sheep prices cause any problem? If the

English Government want to subsidise, say, cheese production in Cheddar or Cheshire, what happens in Caerphilly? How level will the playing field be?

Since the border with the EU has now been firmly placed some 30 sea miles west of Holyhead, I will follow the noble Lord, Lord Kilclooney, in also asking how Northern Ireland agricultural production will be integrated with the rest of the United Kingdom, forms or no forms.

I have to say that these are terrible times for farmers in Wales. They are shortly to be cut off from their European markets, losing direct access for three-quarters of their exports. The pandemic has lost them supplementary income from, for example, restored farm cottages and buildings from which they can extract at least some income, simply from the view. They separately, and desperately, need support and an injection of confidence in the future. This Bill will not assist them.

5.10 pm

Lord Curry of Kirkharle (CB) [V]: My Lords, my interests are as listed on the record. I have farmed as a tenant in Northumberland all my life. Much has been said already about the significance of this Bill: to take a blank sheet of paper and have the opportunity to shape how our countryside is going to be managed for the next two, three or four decades is a huge privilege and an immense responsibility. The Bill must be fit for purpose. The direction of travel as outlined in it is absolutely correct.

In 2001, I was responsible for a report on the future of food and farming, and on page 74 I wrote these words:

“Public funds should be refocused on public goods.”

I am therefore delighted that after nearly 20 years, we are making progress. This Bill, along with the Environment Bill, present an opportunity to create an exciting new vision for the management of our precious countryside. There is huge ambition within our farming and food sectors to re-establish ourselves as world leaders in agri-food science and to be innovators in sustainable food systems; to be renowned for our health, safety and high welfare standards and ethically produced food; to have consumers both here at home and abroad who value what we produce; and to be connected with the countryside and the value and the benefits that it delivers. We can clean up the water and the air and we can improve the quality of our soils and help to capture a lot more carbon. We can help to restore habitats and deliver a wide range of vital outcomes, targeted on a geographical basis. We can help to mitigate the impact of climate change. Why should we not be first past the post in achieving net zero carbon emissions? We can deliver these outcomes if the schemes are designed correctly and if the Treasury recognises the huge potential of investing far greater than the current level of spend in the countryside.

I would like to address three concerns and to support many more which have been referenced in this debate. First, we will not realise this exciting ambition if our market and our confidence are undermined by the importing of cheap food, negotiated in hastily signed trade deals which are not subject to our standards. Repeated reassurances by Ministers, even in recent letters, that this will not happen are not enough. We need a commitment in the Bill or a standards commission.

Secondly, I turn to the proposed timetable. Seven years of transition looked like a sensible approach when it was announced four years ago, but the distractions which have taken place since put that in serious doubt. The pilot ELMS have just got going. Farmers know that their current support systems are going to be dismantled but they have no idea how the new schemes will be designed. They have no knowledge of the definition of the value of the public goods that they will be encouraged to deliver, and there is much to do. The scale of the change is unparalleled and time is short. Farmers need advice and time to make correct decisions about their future. We are not ready. If the Government are wedded to the transitional process which is to start next year, an additional year should be added to allow a smoother transition—eight years instead of seven. The gap between the demolition of the BPS and the availability of ELMS in 2024 is a serious problem, so my plea to the Minister is, “Mind the gap.” It is better that we take time and succeed in delivering this exciting new programme, than rush it and fail. There is too much at stake.

Thirdly, despite the focus on productivity, there is no reference in the Bill to skills and training, as mentioned by my noble friend Lord Carrington. Having a highly skilled and professional industry is essential to improving productivity, reducing carbon emissions, maintaining high welfare standards and the successful application of ELMS. This should be included in the Bill.

Like the noble Earl, Lord Lindsay, I regret the fact that there is no impact assessment attached to the Bill. I also support concerns that have been expressed about tenant farmers, and will raise these in Committee.

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist: I remind the noble Lord of the speaking time.

Lord Curry of Kirkharle [V]: In closing, I thank the Minister for his willingness to discuss the Bill in his usual open and friendly manner. It is appreciated.

5.15 pm

Baroness Redfern (Con) [V]: My Lords, I thank the Minister for his introduction. I welcome this Agriculture Bill, executing as it does the most major reform of the industry for over 50 years. No doubt it may prove challenging during transition, but the Bill will help build a brighter, better, greener future for British farming, clearing away the rigidities, complexities and perversities of the CAP. Moving away from a focus on the amount of land ownership to outcomes, it will be a catalyst and a driver to prevent any further decline in our self-sufficiency. The Bill will make improvements and create more robust and resilient domestic agricultural and horticultural sectors, giving scientists, farmers, plant breeders and animal breeders the same access to new gene editing technologies as the rest of the world.

I welcome within the new framework the important inclusion of environmental protection and the health and welfare of livestock and plants. After years of being subjected to the rules of the CAP, our environment has suffered. Policy which has been implemented in England, for instance, has discouraged tree planting by farmers, and of course agroforestry is not a short-term

investment, as forests and woodlands are vital to supporting valuable habitats which have been eroded in the course of different farming directives and quotas. Consequently, farmland bird populations have suffered.

The health of our soil, on which future food production depends—quality and quantity—has been eroded. This should have significant importance in the Bill. There is much greater emphasis on removing certain practices and improving sustainable farming practices, including removing the dependency on pesticides, to ensure the protection of not only soil but water and air, as climate change is reflected in our ecosystems coming under increased pressure.

I welcome the commitment to increase food security, and to improve transparency and fairness in the agri-food supply chain, together with increased protection for agriculture producers selling to business purchasers and the protection of market standards. Of importance in the Bill is the requirement for regular reporting to Parliament on food security, including on where food comes from, its availability and the resilience of the food chain.

With overall annual funding remaining at current levels for this Parliament, and with a transitional period to phase out direct payments in England, we will maximise the potential of land for food production and the delivery of public goods. To deliver all this, greater support has to be given to those trying to access jobs and to helping new, talented entrants get into the sector, ensuring that they will be the future custodians.

With agriculture occupying over 70% of the land mass, investment and growth is necessary in our rural economy, not only for food production but for diversified industries such as renewable energy, tourism and the manufacturing sector, which generates £121 billion for the UK economy. Investment in new technology and equipment will also be necessary, to reduce costs, drive up food production and increase profitability.

I cannot stress enough the importance of having in the Bill a provision that all food imported into the UK must have been produced to standards equivalent to ours. Endorsing high standards of animal welfare must be embedded in the Bill. The same is true of the environmental protections associated with good food production that are required of our producers, and there must be an ability to ban imports that do not meet these ethical high standards. I will be so pleased when shipments of live animals are banned. This is not protectionism; it is about welcoming future trade deals, so long as they are on fair and level terms.

Finally, there is a need to keep customers well informed, with attractive information and labelling, so that they can easily make informed choices. In supporting our industry, from farm to plate, we all can gain.

5.19 pm

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): My Lords, I do not have any interests in the register in relation to agriculture these days, but I have a lifelong interest in agriculture and farming, having grown up on my father's small tenant sheep farm back in the 1960s and 1970s. Even now, I acutely remember the onslaught of the European Union in the mid-1970s and the way in

[LORD MCCONNELL OF GLENSCORRODALE]

which the common agricultural policy, even on small farms such as ours, almost immediately started to have an impact on the long-term decision-making of the farmers in our immediate community. While the European Union has been good for the UK in so many ways—obviously, it is important to maintain and, in my opinion, improve the high standards mentioned by other noble Lords in this debate—nobody should mourn the loss of the common agricultural policy. This is an opportunity for us to set our own agricultural policy and legislation in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister said in May, shortly after his return from hospital and when looking to the future out of lockdown, that we need

“a fairer, greener and more resilient global economy”.

He said that we need “to build back better” and that there is

“every need for us to work together to get our shared goals back on track, including ... the Sustainable Development Goals”.

Those are the bold aims set out by our Prime Minister, and where better to start than in the Fisheries Bill and the Agriculture Bill that your Lordships’ House will debate over these coming weeks and months?

I was very pleased to hear the Minister’s commitment on behalf of the Government to link this legislation and our onward agricultural policies with the target of zero emissions. I would, however, be interested in how he sees this new legislation, and the policies that the Government will pursue, linking the agriculture and environment strategies to the sustainable development goals. It will be interesting to explore that in Committee and later debates on the Bill.

The second issue I want to raise is the relationship with the devolved nations. It is welcome that this newly drafted Bill makes appropriate amendments and rectifies some of the concerns over the earlier Bill, published in 2017, particularly on the red meat levy but on other issues as well. The Bill rightly respects Scotland’s autonomous jurisdiction in agriculture. Although agricultural policy and agricultural funding may be devolved to the Scottish Parliament and Government, there will be aspects of UK government legislation and policy, not least in relation to the operation of the internal market and on other standards, where what happens in Scotland, England, Wales and, indeed, Northern Ireland will have an impact on each other. The co-ordination of those policies and decisions will be vital.

Therefore, will the Minister say something more in his conclusions about how the Government see decision-making operating in the UK context, where the Bill does not relate specifically to English legislation but to UK-wide legislation? How will the UK Government ensure that, in determining the future steps in that legislation, the different devolved Governments will be involved properly—on a consensual basis, we hope—in helping to determine the way forward? If we can achieve that at the same time as securing higher standards and working towards the sustainable development goals, the Bill will be a very worthy transition from where we have been.

5.23 pm

Lord German (LD) [V]: My Lords, I echo the views of many speakers in this Second Reading debate: we need to ensure that imported foodstuffs do not undercut the high standards of UK food production. Perhaps the Minister will say whether he supports the view of Liam Fox, who said that putting such matters in the Bill would mean that

“the USA would walk away”

from a trade deal with the UK. Having had responsibility for constructing a trade deal with the USA, he may well know how the Americans were thinking so, like the noble Lord, Lord Hain, I think Liam Fox gave the game away: support chlorinated chicken and the like, otherwise no deal with the USA is possible. Does the Minister agree?

I wish to address the devolution aspects of the Bill, particularly as they concern Wales. In Wales, direct payments to farmers account for a much higher proportion of farm profits than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Direct payments account for an average of 81% of Welsh farm profits. This is very understandable, given the small family farm and upland nature of the farming industry in Wales: 40% of all Welsh lamb produced is exported to the European Union, so Welsh agriculture needs a trade deal with the EU more than anything else, and the Welsh Government should be part of that negotiation.

The changes envisaged in the Bill to direct payments in England are clearly not wholly appropriate to Wales. There are some welcome signs that the Bill recognises this fundamental difference, but there are equally some areas where the current level of independent action accorded to the Welsh Government is not clearly carried forward. Like the noble Duke, the Duke of Montrose, and my noble friend Lord Thomas, fundamentally I wait for a framework agreement between all parts of the United Kingdom that encompasses the wide areas of the Bill. For example, a framework agreement is needed to provide a replacement for the state aid regime. It is important that the Bill is able to accommodate any agreements reached in due course by the UK and the devolved Governments in respect of the common frameworks, which are to replace the areas where EU law intercepted with devolved matters. I would be grateful if the Minister could explain what progress has been made on the proposed framework agreement.

There remain outstanding matters of difference between the Welsh and UK Governments, which require resolution if the legislative consent Motion in the Welsh Assembly is to be passed. In particular, what is the UK Government’s view on the disagreement surrounding Clauses 40 to 42, on the World Trade Organization? I understand that some bilateral agreements have been made regarding those clauses. Will the Minister provide me with a copy of that bilateral agreement and place a copy in the Library? I am concerned that written intergovernmental agreements sitting behind powers in the Bill will undermine the ability to change in the future. Governments change, and written agreements, which are not recognised in the Bill, cannot provide the certainty that the legislation requires.

Concerns also arise on powers between the UK and Welsh Governments in the areas of the identification and traceability of animals, agricultural tenancies and the regulation of organic products. Will the Minister, in his response or in writing, outline what progress has been made in each of these areas?

Most powers over agriculture are currently devolved, and I hope that the Bill will respect that level of devolution in this important agricultural field.

5.27 pm

Lord Vaux of Harrowden (CB) [V]: My Lords, I declare my interest in beef and sheep farming in Scotland.

This is a framework Bill, enabling the principles but not providing the detail. It still leaves farmers facing a high degree of uncertainty. I want briefly to set out what I see as the key needs of livestock farmers following Brexit. First, they need a market for their products. More than one-third of British lamb is exported to the EU. Without a free trade agreement, there is a very real risk that that market will effectively be lost. It is frankly not credible to suggest that it can be replaced by other markets on any realistic timescale. The loss of this market is an existential threat to upland sheep farmers. Will the Minister tell us how the Government propose to help livestock farmers in the event of no deal?

Secondly, farmers need fair competition. We are, rightly, subject to a wide range of environmental, welfare and other regulations. Other countries do not all face the same rules. This issue is often confused, sometimes deliberately, with food safety standards, and the Government have committed to not reducing them. However, it is not just about food safety standards. UK farmers are not frightened by fair competition, but it would be unfair to expect them to compete against imports from countries that have lower environmental, welfare and other standards, and therefore lower costs, even if our food safety standards are met, so I greatly regret that the Government rejected the amendment in the other place that would have put their manifesto commitments into law.

Thirdly, farmers need predictability. Farmers have faced uncertainty for some years now and, even with the Bill, we do not know how the various financing arrangements will work. Farming is a long-term business. If farmers are to invest, they need to be able to see how things will work into at least the medium term, and preferably longer. If the financing arrangements set out in the Bill turn out to be a series of short-term or one-off projects, rather than multi-year financing schemes, investment for the future will not be possible.

Fourthly, there is simplicity. We have heard about the shortcomings of the CAP, and I do not disagree, but it does have the merit of being relatively simple. In this Bill, we have a list of nine different purposes of financial assistance, many of which themselves have further subdivisions. It is easy to see how this could become extremely complicated, with an even heavier administrative and compliance burden on farmers than the CAP if it is not carefully planned and executed.

Finally, there is consistency. I started by declaring that I farm in Scotland. Agriculture is a devolved matter and we will have our own rules. But that introduces

another concern, which a number of noble Lords have raised. When the UK was a member of the EU, our internal market was kept consistent by the umbrella framework of EU regulations. With that gone, we face the risk of different parts of the UK producing under different rules and different financing arrangements, potentially leading to unfair competition even within the UK. So it must make sense that the Government and the devolved assemblies agree a UK-wide framework to ensure that our internal market continues to work fairly.

5.31 pm

Lord Wigley (PC) [V]: My Lords, I draw attention to my registered interests and to my membership of the Farmers' Union of Wales. I am delighted to follow the comments made by the previous speaker.

The House knows of my opposition to Brexit, but it is happening, and probably on a no-deal basis, so we must mitigate its negative impact on agriculture. Clearly, new legislation must establish a framework for British agriculture, so Plaid Cymru does not oppose a Second Reading of this Bill. I do welcome three features of the Bill: the linking of funding to sustainable farming, the repatriation of the red meat levy, and the framework enabling the Welsh Government to bring forward their own legislation.

Agriculture is devolved, reflecting Wales's special characteristics. It is essential that new arrangements facilitate Welsh farming's ongoing viability, particularly Wales's livestock and dairy sectors. But there are deeply worrying aspects of this Bill. Notwithstanding the Minister's assurances today, I am extremely concerned at the absence on the face of the Bill of the means to uphold Britain's food standards. It must be amended so that imported agricultural and food products fully conform to our existing animal health and welfare standards, and our plant health and environmental protection standards. The need for such safeguards has united agricultural unions, environmental campaigners and animal welfare lobbies.

The Conservative Party committed in its recent election manifesto that:

"In all of our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards."

Therefore, this House has every right to insist on having such safeguards on the face of the Bill. To claim that it is inappropriate to incorporate these provisions is curious. It ignores the fact that Clause 36 of the Bill specifies such an approach for imported organic foods.

The EU has for many years tried to set high standards for food production. The EU's Food and Veterinary Office regularly inspects farms and processing plants in third countries. The EU has insisted on an equivalence on food entering the single market from countries with which it has struck a trade deal. It is totally unacceptable for us to facilitate a race to the bottom at a time when environmental, animal welfare and human health issues are at the top of the international agenda, reinforced by the coronavirus pandemic. What will the Government's response be if this Bill goes through without such safeguards, but if the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland Governments insist on such provision?

[LORD WIGLEY]

Will the Minister also confirm that nothing in this Bill relating to sustainable farming will be used to dissuade farmers from diversifying in order to maintain viable income levels, and that nothing in the Bill will be used to hinder farmers in supporting efforts to decarbonise our economy? Will the Minister also give an assurance that the creation of a British market will not be used to undermine initiatives taken by the Welsh Government to maximise local procurement and support local processing of food to gain maximum economic benefit locally from its production?

I shall raise issues at later stages concerning the mechanics of enabling Wales to control its own farming. For now, finally, will the Minister confirm that, under this Bill, the Governments of Wales and Scotland will be treated as equal partners with Westminster in all agricultural issues that have a UK or international dimension?

5.34 pm

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen (Con): My Lords, I welcome the Bill, but none of us can be expected to discuss it during a pandemic. Indeed, going forward, the background against which we find ourselves will change our views about what is important to us.

Never have we been so grateful to farmers for making sure that our food retailers are well stocked during this uncertain period. It has highlighted the importance of sustainable, accessible and safe local food. As we move forward, our farmers want and deserve certainty about their future to enable them to carry on producing the high-quality food that we have all come to expect. However, that future must include continuing high welfare, food and environmental standards. Indeed, the Conservative manifesto stated:

“In all of our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards.”

I welcome the letter that was sent this week by the Secretaries of State for Trade and Defra confirming that food standards will not be lowered during future trade deals. We need to hold them to this commitment.

Animal welfare is obviously a high priority going forward. The APGAW released a report yesterday emphasising the importance of local abattoirs, many of which have closed. They are central in supporting the rural economy, keeping our food local and upholding good animal welfare. As such, they should receive capital payments in our agricultural framework. Can the Minister reassure me on this point?

This is our chance to make sure that our voice is heard globally on welfare and food standards. With this Bill, we are looking at a new future. Farming can thrive and diversify, with strong market opportunities both at home and globally. Ahead of us can be an opening of new export markets for our farmers, and these trade deals can influence standards worldwide. To that end, I welcome Clause 17, which requires the Secretary of State to report every five years on food security and consumer confidence in food.

At long last, farmers in the UK are free from the constraints of the CAP. We can develop our own agricultural policy, leading to farmers producing more

food in this country, which in turn will make us self-sufficient going forward. The future is most certainly “public money for public good”. As is often said, farmers are the custodians of our countryside, and the Bill enables financial assistance for environmental farm practices, along with support for agritech that will enhance productivity in a sustainable way. The Bill allows us to level up the rural economy, providing grants to improve productivity in farm businesses so that they can become both resilient and successful.

In conclusion, I thank the Minister for keeping us informed and for answering our queries before reaching this stage today.

5.38 pm

Lord Berkeley (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. The nearest I can come to making a declaration of interest is that I live on the Isles of Scilly next to a farm which grows all kinds of vegetables and fruit, and which has pigs, cows and chickens. That farm is really suffering at the moment because of Brexit and transport costs, and the farmer has had to kill most of the pigs and chickens. That is just one example of the problems, mentioned by many noble Lords, of bringing forward this Bill at the same time as the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit. I support the key tests proposed by my noble friend Lord Grantchester regarding safe and traceable food, support for jobs, investment in research, and high standards. The Bill needs to deliver those.

On jobs, many noble Lords spoke about the need to improve skills for agricultural workers, but I believe that our immigration policy is putting the ongoing viability of many farmers at risk. Noble Lords will have read that several flights of workers from Bulgaria and Romania came in a month or so ago. None of them had social distancing on the plane. They were all exempt from the 14-day quarantine period, because there are no workers in this country. I enjoyed reading about the equivalent problem in Germany, where the chairman of their fruit and vegetable pickers association said that Germans are no longer the right shape to bend down and pick vegetables. I do not know what we will do, but the Government must set up some kind of long-term arrangement to ensure that there is a proper supply of seasonal workers in the sector and make them welcome.

On finance, I would welcome any scheme for agriculture that gives more support to local farmers and hill farmers, particularly those who have sheep. There is a double whammy here: I understand that in six months’ time, according to Professor Fiona Smith from the University of Warwick, if we do not get agreement on Brexit there will be a 51% duty on the export of sheepmeat to the European Union. How will farmers deal with this? It might be that the sheep can be exported elsewhere, but we ought to know a bit more about these things at this stage, with only six months before Brexit happens. The House needs a lot more time and much more detail.

My last point is that a lot of this traffic goes between the EU and the UK in trucks. There is still no border operating manual to tell operators and customers how they are supposed to move these goods, whether they are temperature-controlled fresh fruit and vegetables,

meat or animals. Many of these journeys need phytosanitary controls. It is no good trucks queuing up for several days at Calais or Dover, because most of the product will be inedible or dead, sadly, before they get to the other side.

I hope the Minister will tell us a lot more about the information that operators and customers will need. I hope that he actually cares. I think that he does, but an awful lot of other people in the Government do not seem to care at all as long as we can get Brexit done and all our exports to the EU converted to the United States.

5.42 pm

Lord Greaves (LD) [V]: This is a very important and huge Bill, with lots in it. I will concentrate on one tiny bit of it, Clause 1(1)(b), which provides that one of the purposes of financial assistance can be for

“supporting public access to and enjoyment of the countryside, farmland or woodland and better understanding of the environment”.

Those are two important things. As a former geography teacher I could wax lyrical about understanding the environment, but I will talk about access. I declare my interests as vice-president of the Open Spaces Society and a patron of the British Mountaineering Council. I compliment the noble Lord, Lord Rosser, on his sensible comments on this, and my noble friend Lord Addington, who I see is in his place, also made some extremely sensible and balanced comments.

The nation’s path network is a treasured asset that everyone should be able to enjoy. It is the primary way in which people access the outdoors and connect with nature. Going walking is the main physical activity that people do. It brings huge benefits to rural communities, local businesses and tourism, and it helps to improve our understanding of farming and the natural world. What happens as a result of the Bill will set the agenda for access to the countryside for years to come.

While the Bill says what may happen, it has no detail in it whatever—not even a broad framework—on how it will happen. If we assume that the ambition is to enable more people to access and enjoy the countryside, while at the same time rewarding land managers and farmers for undertaking the activities to achieve this, I think we really need more from the Government on how this will work, particularly how they will work with local access authorities to help achieve this. The local access authorities and highways authorities that look after public rights of way are responsible for producing public rights of way improvement plans—they are not flavour of the moment—and for dealing with problems when a footpath is blocked or falls into the beck and making sure that the infrastructure for things like stiles exists.

The common agricultural policy was not all bad. It included cross-compliance which, in respect of rights of way, was useful to local enforcement and access authorities—they could use it to persuade recalcitrant landowners to provide the minimum standards necessary. It is not clear how this will be replaced under the new system.

One major absence from the aims of this Bill is landscape. One of the main public by-products of goods from farming is our wonderful British landscape

in all parts of the UK. People think that they are wild landscapes, but they are not; they are the result of land management and farming. This needs attention in the Bill.

5.47 pm

The Earl of Erroll (CB) [V]: My Lords, I have an interest to declare as I am now running my late wife’s farm until we get probate, and maybe for a bit longer. I am very glad to see in this Bill that there will be continuing support for farmers, as many have a very low net income. People always point at the ones who are bigger and better off, but they are also probably very efficient.

Many noble Lords have spoken most eloquently about standards and their intentions are good, so I want to make some observations about the barriers that put many farmers off the environmental schemes. We have had environmental schemes here since the early pilot schemes and the stewardship schemes, so we have been doing it for a very long time. Environmental protection is important, but it must be balanced with food production. The Secretary-General of the United Nations said yesterday:

“Our food systems are failing, and the COVID-19 pandemic is making things worse.”

That is at the global scale, but it is something we need to remember. If we get this wrong, we will not be able to feed people.

The real trouble is that compliance with rules costs money. Our producers need protection from competition from countries where they cut corners and to which we have effectively exported our consciences, so that we do not see where they are broken. We think we can do this by having strict rules on imports, but people launder import papers—it is amazing how things can move around so that they appear to be okay. Most realistically, we must continue to support our home production and underpin it in some way, as we have been doing with the basic farm payment system.

If we want to see good environmental outcomes—we all do; I do very much—we must remember that rules do not often recognise weather. They are very inflexible about certain operations, because very often they just look at one single issue of what is being protected. They also do not take account of local variations in flora and fauna and the normal behaviour of these things. Blanket provision for the whole country, from the lowlands of the south of England to the northern Scottish highlands, are often too crude—seasons move and things ripen at different times.

Inspections should establish whether a land manager is trying to get it right overall or whether they are taking the mickey. Inspectors ought to look at the environmental objective, rather than focusing on minor issues where a mistake, usually accidentally, has been made. Some rules actually hinder achieving the intended objective and we need to work out how to get around that. Inspections should be interactive, and advisory where this would be helpful.

My general theme is to get a good take-up of ELMS. It is important for systems to verify compliance work simply, too. I have been filing our cropping electronically since 2004 or 2005, when it was IAX, so I have some

[THE EARL OF ERROLL]
 experience of this, and of running digital mapping. The online systems must work reliably and simply. Even now, the BPS is unreliable. It regularly loses one or two fields for us most years—I believe that they are called “parcels in the system”—and I cannot see why. The land use codes do not take proper account of the farming and environmental schemes that are overlapping one another, which can cause confusion. It is quite hard to get your EFA declarations right. Remapping is exhausting and disruptive, and causes problems between schemes, but thank goodness the helplines are very helpful.

I hope that in future the inspectors can also be helpful advisers.

5.51 pm

Baroness Rock (Con) [V]: My Lords, I declare my farming interests as set out in the register.

This Bill is the most critical piece of legislation for domestic agriculture for more than 50 years. I commend the Government on the significant improvements made in comparison with the Bill introduced to Parliament prior to the last general election. However, there are still some issues around food security, the importance of food production and supporting active farmers and tenant farmers that could be strengthened, alongside the important environmental priorities.

An issue of important debate relates to standards and trade. Although the other place voted to reject the amendment to the Bill, I know that my noble friend the Minister is sympathetic to the arguments that are being made. I am aware of ongoing discussions about establishing a trade and standards commission; this surely would provide a possible way forward.

The coronavirus pandemic has underlined the need to consider issues of food security. The Government’s own food adviser, Henry Dimbleby, has said that this must be included in the new food strategy. This Bill should have food security and the health and well-being of citizens at its heart by listing this as an objective within Clause 1. There is merit in the report to Parliament occurring more often than just once every five years. Is there any scope for that part of the Bill to be looked at?

In the context of this legislation being an Agriculture Bill, there is concern that the Bill does not adequately target either agriculture or farmers in the provision of financial assistance. In order to support our incredibly important farming industry, it must be necessary to restrict the financial assistance powers, such as they are, in respect of individuals who are operating units which are predominantly agricultural. Without changes to the Bill to introduce clauses to both define and target active farmers, how will the Government ensure that financial support goes to those individuals who need it most?

The Bill sets out the intention of a seven-year transition to phase out current direct payments, and that this period can be modified by the Government by regulation. Within the context of an uncertain trading environment with the EU beyond the end of the year, the impact of the coronavirus crisis and the significant delays that there have been in the development of the new ELMS programme, we need more time to develop

the new agricultural policy framework, and we should be delaying the beginning of transition from 2021 until 2022.

On Schedule 3 on agricultural tenancies, as a tenant farmer myself, I am concerned that the provisions protecting tenants from landlords who refuse consent for them to enter a financial assistance scheme excludes tenants occupying under farm business tenancies. While I am aware that the government argument was that these tenancies tend to be shorter and more negotiable, I fear that this misses the point that they are often more restrictive than the tenancies let under the AHA 1986 and, as they now account for 50%—and growing—of all land let in England, these tenants need just as much protection. With these tenants facing some of the most restrictive clauses in their tenancy agreements, why have the Government chosen not to extend necessary protections allowing them to object to a landlord’s refusal to enter into a financial assistance scheme in the same way as their fellow tenants can under the Agricultural Holdings Act?

Our farmers and our agricultural industry are the lifeblood of our rural economy. We must support them.

5.56 pm

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD) [V]: My Lords, I too thank the Minister for his comprehensive introduction to the Bill and for his time, and that of his officials, in providing briefings in preparation for our debate today. I agree with noble Lords who have complained about the time limit and sympathise with those not able to speak. Had this been a Brexit debate, two days would have been allocated. I congratulate all who have managed to speak and made such vital contributions to the debate.

Like other noble Lords, I welcome the move away from payment for farmers based on the amount of land they are farming to a more equitable system of public money for public good. Under the previous CAP system, half of the payments in England went to only 10% of farms. Like the noble Lords, Lord Grantchester, Lord Teverson and Lord Carter of Coles, and other noble Lords, I look forward to hearing how the environmental land management pilots are progressing. Is the Minister able to give us an update?

To some extent, this public good is defined in the Bill, but there are gaps and the continued use of pesticides is one. A former friend who worked for Fisons many years ago warned that since man is much nearer to the physiology of insects than of plants, we would be wise to treat pesticides with more caution than we do weed-killers. The overuse of chemical-based fertilisers and pesticides does little to enhance the quality of the soil. I am sure we will return to that in Committee.

Like, I am sure, other noble Lords, I have received dozens of briefings in preparation for this debate, from large organisations and interest groups to individual members of the public. The vast majority welcome the Bill but are worried that an opportunity to make a real difference is being lost.

The Bill in its opening clause lists the Secretary of State’s powers on financial assistance. There is an extensive list of what this will include. But there is no

mention of food production—a concern raised by the noble Lord, Lord Grantchester. Only in Clause 4 is the Secretary of State required to have regard to “encourage” the production of food. As the noble Baroness, Lady Young of Old Scone, does, I find this alarming. Now is a golden opportunity for agricultural land to be farmed in a sustainable and ecological way to produce healthy food for the whole nation.

Food security is the subject of a requirement for the Secretary of State to report at least every five years. I welcome the Minister’s assurance that this review will take place sooner than five years’ time, and I agree with the noble Earl, Lord Lindsay. Food security is vital and can alter dramatically with climate change and international conditions. It should be monitored more frequently, perhaps yearly.

I welcome the addition of measures to improve forestry productivity—as raised by the noble Lord, Lord Colgrain—peat restoration and soil quality. These are key in carbon sequestration and tackling flood prevention, providing a holistic approach to how land is managed for the benefit of farming and the public.

Turning to the section on agricultural tenancies, this is to be welcomed as it enables tenant farmers to benefit from their hard work and to receive the payments themselves. Not all tenant farmers have received this in the past. To encourage new entrants into farming, it is essential that tenant farmers should get the rewards they deserve for farming the land. The noble Baronesses, Lady Bennett and Lady McIntosh, and the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, have raised concerns about tenant farmers, and I agree with the comments that the noble Baroness, Lady Rock, just made. Can the Minister say whether the measures in this Bill are consistent with the direction of travel in the renters’ reform Bill?

I turn briefly to Northern Ireland. In the Commons my Alliance Party colleague, Stephen Farry MP, introduced an amendment to provide for a sunset clause in regard to Clause 45 and Schedule 6, on some measures which relate to Northern Ireland. There is a sunset clause in the Bill for some measures applying to Wales, as my noble friend Lady Humphreys says, while Scotland has already indicated that it will bring forward its own policy. I am concerned that Northern Ireland will be out of step with the other devolved nations at a time when it needs to build a food and farming system that is resilient, healthy and regenerative. We will explore this further at later stages of the Bill.

The Bill cannot be seen in isolation; at least two other Bills are inextricably linked to it. The first is the Trade Bill, which allows for trade with countries outside the EU. It has the possibility of allowing food and animal products into the UK which are not produced to our own high standards of animal welfare. There is grave concern among organisations supporting agriculture and farmers that their produce will be undercut by these inferior imports. It is vital that all goods are clearly labelled with the country of origin and other details which will assist the purchaser to make informed choices, as raised by the noble Duke, the Duke of Somerset, and the noble Baroness, Lady Redfern.

The majority of people buying food, whether for the domestic table or for the hotel, catering and restaurant trade, will wish to support food grown and produced

within our shores, not imported from thousands of miles away. I am grateful to the Minister for circulating the letter from the Secretaries of State for Defra and for International Trade but, as my noble friend Lord Burnett said, Ministers come and go. Since the Government feel it is important to state their intention on food security and animal welfare, does the Minister agree that reassurance can be provided by an amendment to the Bill? Thirty-eight of your Lordships speaking today have supported this and only four do not.

The second Bill with links is the immigration Bill. We have heard much about the dearth of workers to harvest our vegetables and crops, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and seen adverts on our television screens for workers to come forward to help. At first there was a good response but as British workers found the work was back-breaking—for 10 hours a day—the accommodation appalling and that they got very little pay in return, their numbers dropped off. There is an issue here about how we treat our agricultural workers. It is estimated that some 17,000 migrant workers are needed every year to fulfil the needs of growers. The immigration Bill allows for only 3,500 to come in per year. This is hopelessly inadequate. Are the Government going to allow fruit and vegetables to be left rotting in the fields, when people are crying out for fresh produce? Does the Minister agree that this is a scandal which the Government can easily avoid? Some effort must be made to see these three important Bills as a holistic package and not separate, if we are to protect agriculture and farming effectively.

The Bill has much to commend it but there is no mechanism for enforcement, as highlighted by my noble friend Lady Parminter, the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, and others. Can the Minister address this vital issue?

At a time when large numbers of people are dependent on food banks, it is a scandal that food is wasted from farms. My noble friend Lady Parminter and I will address this issue in Committee. I could say more but will save it for Committee, and I look forward to the Minister’s response to this important debate.

6.03 pm

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for his introduction to the Bill and for the very helpful briefings that he organised for Peers beforehand. I also thank all noble Lords who have spoken on such a wide-ranging and challenging set of issues in their very short speaking times. I should, at the outset, declare an interest as the chair of Rothamsted Enterprises. Like others, I regret that so many noble Lords were unable to participate in the debate today. We very much miss them. I hope that the Minister is able to confirm that future stages of the Bill will not be curtailed, and that we will have the opportunity to have a full debate in Committee and on Report.

When the civil servants were originally drafting the Bill, they could not have imagined that we would be debating it in such momentous times. The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the strains that imperil our food and farming systems. Businesses are failing, including many rural businesses, and the risk of a recession is obvious for all to see.

[BARONESS JONES OF WHITCHURCH]

Life for the farming community now is tough. Farmers are subject to price volatility and market pressures that continue to put their livelihoods at risk; the added uncertainty of future trade deals with the EU puts their future export markets at risk; and the decline in UK food sustainability to some 53% of food and drink consumed means an unhealthy reliance on imported food from the EU and beyond. All this gives farmers cause for concern.

At the same time, we are in a climate emergency. The Government's net-zero target of 2050 has been criticised by the Committee on Climate Change for lacking ambition or urgent measures necessary to meet the targets. Biodiversity, which lies at the very heart of a farming renaissance, is in steep decline and the UK is on course to meet only five of its 20 biodiversity targets. In this context, our challenge is to balance the interests of farmers and the environment so that both can thrive and play their part in the new, post-Covid world.

There is much in the Bill that we support. For example, public money for public goods is an important principle that we welcome. It is right that we should incentivise those who work on our land to restore and improve the natural environment. Of course, noble Lords are right that these policies need to be properly measured and monitored before any payment is made, but it is also important that in doing so we do not lose the core intention of the CAP: to deliver stability of food and security for farmers.

We also have some serious concerns about the Bill. First, many noble Lords have quite rightly raised concerns about the danger of domestic producers being undercut in post-Brexit deals by countries with lower animal welfare and environmental standards. Contrary to what some noble Lords have said today, evidence shows that the level of bacterial food poisoning in the USA is much higher than in the UK and the EU. As we know, the trade deals also threaten the very livelihoods of UK farmers.

This is an issue that our colleagues in the Commons pursued doggedly to the end. Our amendments would have enshrined in law a guarantee that our high standards would not be undercut. Of course, we have read the letter from the two Secretaries of State about there not being a compromise on this, but if that is the case it is a great shame that the Government felt unable to support these amendments. I give notice now that, when the time comes, we will work with colleagues across the Chamber to pursue similar amendments. We will also want to explore the wider animal welfare implications raised by the Bill and the potential of such trade deals.

Secondly, while we welcome the inclusion in Clause 17 of a duty to report on food security, along with a number of other noble Lords we do not feel that this provision goes far enough. For a Bill about food production, it remains remarkably silent on action to reduce food poverty, promote healthy food and reverse the decline in UK food sustainability.

Protecting the UK from cheap, low-quality imported food is important, but we also need positive measures to deliver top-quality food standards, incentivise local

and regional specialisms, address poor nutrition and obesity and build our national reputation as a world leader in food excellence. We need robust measures to protect public health from pesticides and the overuse of antibiotics in the food chain.

We urgently need a national food plan, and we look forward to the Dimbleby report due later this year. But we need the key elements of a food plan enshrined in the Bill, rather than waiting for the Dimbleby report or the Government's five-year report, and we will take steps to amend the Bill to this effect.

Of course, the future funding for farming lies at the very heart of this Bill. Our concerns, like those of many other noble Lords, lie with the practicalities of the transition from direct payments to ELMS. Whatever the failings of the CAP regime, it at least provided some certainty for the farming community. The delays in spelling out the new funding regime, the uncertainty over Brexit and the impact of the coronavirus lockdown have created a perfect storm in which many farmers are contemplating whether they have a future in the sector.

Despite the Government's reassurance that the total pot of money will be protected during the transition, many farmers fear that their existing direct payments will be phased out before the new ELMS system is fully functioning. The impact of the devolved nations having different payments systems for farmers adds to that uncertainty. We will therefore want to explore in Committee whether the proposed timetables are realistic and what reassurances about future income during the transition can be given to farmers. We will want to ensure that a disproportionate share of the money is not siphoned off for consultants and advisers. We will also want to ensure proper support for smaller farmers, tenant farmers and new entrants to the land. Ultimately, we will look to government to provide more details about how the new scheme will work and to enthuse sceptical farmers that it will work both for them and for the national interest.

We welcome the measures to introduce greater transparency and fairness in supply chains and to recognise producer organisations. These are long overdue, but, as the recent crisis in the dairy sector has shown, the supply chain disproportionality squeezes the farming community at the base, when it is doing all the work for very little reward. We will want to explore in Committee whether more could be done to redress the balance and give farmers greater control over their contracts and markets. We will also want to explore whether the Groceries Code Adjudicator, or similar body, could be given greater powers to intervene to ensure fair practice throughout the supply chain.

Several noble Lords raised the issue of the status and pay of agricultural workers, and we share that concern. Some 474,000 people work in agriculture on a permanent or casual basis. Many of those jobs are physically hard, low paid and precarious, with a poor safety record and few of the employment benefits that other workers take for granted. The impact of the lockdown and the Government's failing immigration policies show how reliant we are on overseas workers to harvest our crops. It will be interesting to see how many of the UK volunteers for the Pick for Britain

scheme stay the course, given the arduous nature of the work involved. We will want to explore in Committee what more can be done to address rising poverty and inequalities in rural communities, and whether the reintroduction of something akin to the Agricultural Wages Board could play a role in improving pay and making UK agricultural work more attractive. In this mix, a drive to improve skills and training will of course be key.

Finally, we remain concerned that the Bill does not address the number one challenge of the climate emergency and the role that agriculture needs to play in delivering net zero emissions. Agriculture currently accounts for nearly 10% of greenhouse gas emissions. We would expect to see in the Bill a plan of action, and targets, to tackle these emissions across the farming community. They should lie at the heart of the future funding framework. Without action on this scale, we have no chance of reaching even the Government's unambitious 2050 deadline, so we will pursue amendments to make sure that agriculture steps up to the mark.

I have been able to touch on only a small number of the many important issues raised in the debate today, but I look forward to working with noble Lords across the Chamber in the weeks to come to make sure that this Bill really is fit to deliver a vibrant food and farming programme for the 21st century.

6.14 pm

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: My Lords, what an exceptional debate. It will be impossible for me to answer all the questions that have been posed but I will say what I always say: I will seek to follow up in writing those questions either that I have not covered or which require further embellishment.

I was struck by some noble Lords' words because there are some elements of this debate that I think have been unduly negative, but I agree with the noble Lords, Lord Grantchester and Lord McConnell, that there are great opportunities for what we are going to be considering in the coming weeks. The noble Baroness, Lady Parminter, referred to a welcome approach and the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch, referred to a balance between the environment and food production. The noble Baronesses, Lady Mallalieu and Lady Quin, emphasised that we have to work with farmers. None of this is going to work unless it becomes the farmers' enterprise as well. That is what I will explain in further detail.

There were three Vs: "vision", from the noble Earl, Lord Devon, and the noble Lord, Lord Curry; "viticulture", from my noble friend Lord Naseby; and "the veterinary profession", from my noble friend Lady McIntosh. All this shows the interconnection, the jigsaw puzzle that is the countryside, which so many of your Lordships know about.

My noble friend Lord Dobbs referred to innovation. I think we are on the cusp of a further agricultural revolution. Of course we need to use that knowledge wisely. I am conscious of the institutions that we have in this country that we need to prosper.

I want to clarify a point made by the noble Lord, Lord Grantchester, and perhaps my noble friend Lady Rock, in referring to food. Of course food is essential. It is essential for everyone in the world.

However, in our view food is a private good; it is bought and sold. This is the key distinction of the philosophy of the legislation, because its value is rewarded in the market. These new financial assistance powers are intended to reward farmers and land managers for those outcomes that the market does not currently recognise. Coming from traditional farming stock, I can say that the reason why we see beautiful countryside is that many landowners and farmers actually want to embellish their landscapes.

I turn to trade standards. So many noble Lords have referred to this that I am not going to mention everyone by name. However, I want to refer to what my noble friends Lady Browning and Lady Chisholm had to say: in the negativity that I came across, let us not forget the British leadership that there has been on many of the activities raising trading standards across the world. That has been our influence. I know that our ambassadors raise standards across the piece and across the world. We should be proud of that.

My noble friend Lord Ridley referred to exports. I think it is the UK's reputation for high-quality products that drives the demand for UK goods. Our success in the global marketplace depends on us continuing to maintain this reputation. I have said this many times, and I am starting to believe that certain noble Lords are determined not to believe me when I say it, but all EU food safety, animal welfare and environmental standards will be retained and form part of our domestic law. I emphasise that that includes all existing import requirements. Any changes to existing legislative standards would require new legislation to be brought before Parliament.

I should also say that in the UK food safety is regulated by the Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland. Decisions to allow new regulated food products or processes—for example, food of animal origin treated with certain substances—into the UK market will be taken by Ministers in the UK Government and the devolved Administrations, informed by the independent advice of the FSA and FSS. This is a point that I would make particularly to the noble Lord, Lord McCrea, and the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, and I emphasise it because I fear that we are getting into a determined position that everything is negative. That is why I refer again to my honourable friend the Minister for Farming, who stated in the other place that

"there can be no question of sacrificing the UK livestock or other farming industries for the US trade deal."—[*Official Report*, Commons, 13/5/20; col. 335.]

On labelling, raised by the noble Duke, the Duke of Somerset, and my noble friend Lord Dobbs, I highlight the Government's commitment to a serious and rapid examination of what can be done through labelling to provide reassurance that we intend to promote high standards and high welfare across the UK market. The Minister for Farming said that

"we will consult on this at the end of the transition period."—[*Official Report*, Commons, 13/5/20; col. 335.]

Obviously, the Government have ongoing trade negotiations with the EU, an issue which was raised, and we have committed to a free trade agreement, to ensure that there are no tariffs, fees or quotas across all sectors.

[LORD GARDINER OF KIMBLE]

My noble friend Lord Naseby referred to horticulture. Clause 1(2) allows us to introduce support for anyone starting or improving the productivity of a horticultural activity. I should also say to the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, that, when discussing productivity—I was struck by this—it is in the context of sustainability. It is not about allowing something that potentially improves productivity but then does environmental damage. That is not what is intended at all; this is about sustainable productivity.

The noble Lord, Lord Krebs, referred to the delivery of public goods and the measurement of such. The Baroness, Lady Bakewell, was right in what she said. The interconnected Environment Bill provides the office for environmental protection with the functions to scrutinise the Government's environmental commitments, including those under Clause 1 of this Bill.

On the reference to our manifesto commitment, the UK Government's election manifesto guaranteed the current annual budget in every year of the new Parliament, giving significant certainty on funding for the coming years.

I say to the noble Earl, Lord Devon, and the noble Baroness, Lady Mallalieu, that the first period of the multiannual financial assistance plan—in Clause 4—will cover a period of seven years, starting from 2021. It will set out the Government's strategic priorities for agriculture policy during that period and describe which financial assistance schemes are expected to come into operation during that period.

My noble friends Lord Lindsay and Lord Duncan, and others, referred to future funding allocations for the devolved Administrations. In response to the Bew review, the Government committed to engage with the devolved Administrations to develop a fair approach to future funding allocations, and to consider the needs of farmers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, recognising that agriculture policy is, and will remain, devolved. This work is ongoing.

On arrangements for Northern Ireland, I say to the noble Lord, Lord Kilclooney, that the deal with the EU makes it clear that Northern Ireland is, and will remain, part of the UK customs territory. This allows the UK to ensure unfettered market access for goods moving from Northern Ireland to GB. The arrangements we introduce will reflect this. The Prime Minister has been clear that, beyond the limited changes introduced by the protocol, there will be no changes to GB-NI trade. Northern Ireland remains part of the UK's customs territory.

Under the protocol—I say this wearing my biosecurity hat—agri-food checks and assurances will be required for the movement of goods from GB to Northern Ireland. This is to protect supply chains and the biosecurity of the island of Ireland, as a single epidemiological unit. The protocol establishes that Northern Ireland will align with EU sanitary and phytosanitary rules, including in relation to the movement of animals and products of animal origin.

I should say also to the noble Lord, Lord Kilclooney, that we will want to bring down the level of checks to a pragmatic, proportionate level that recognises the high standards across the United Kingdom, in line with the protocol provision that both parties must use "their best endeavours to facilitate ... trade",

and avoid controls at Northern Ireland ports as far as is possible. We will actively seek to simplify and minimise electronic documentary requirements for this trade.

As for the wider state aid framework after the transition period, this is a matter on which the Government will set out their position in due course. The Government will continue to ensure that agriculture support schemes, now and in the future, are compliant with the UK's domestic legal framework. If necessary, the Government will work on any domestic legislation required, once they have set out their position on subsidy controls.

I turn now to Wales and the devolved Administrations. I emphasise that the reason I am so pleased to bring forward provisions for Wales and Northern Ireland is that they are at those Administrations' request. The devolved Administrations have asked us to do this, so I can confirm to the noble and learned Lord, Lord Morris of Aberavon, the noble Baronesses, Lady Finlay and Lady Humphreys, and the noble Lord, Lord German, that Defra and the Welsh Government reached agreement on the WTO agreement on agriculture. The bilateral agreement was published on GOV.UK and the Welsh Government website in March 2019. My officials continue to work closely with the Welsh Government, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland and officials from the Scottish Government to agree and implement an administrative UK agriculture support framework. The aim of the framework is to ensure effective co-ordination and dialogue between the Administrations on agriculture subsidy, marketing standards, crisis measures, cross-border holdings and data collection and sharing. My experience is that, beyond the hyperbole, the arrangements and conduct of business with officials and Ministers between the devolved Administrations and the UK Government are very positive, and on these matters we are working very much to a common objective.

I say to the noble Baroness, Lady Finlay, that it has been agreed that a joint approach on organics is beneficial to the sector and we consider a UK-wide power the best way to achieve this. I also say to the noble Baroness and the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, that we want to see consistent protection against unfair trading practices for farmers, wherever they are in the United Kingdom. We continue to consult widely and meaningfully with everyone who will be affected by our new codes of conduct, including the devolved Administrations and producers in those territories. Their views will be listened to and respected.

The noble Baroness, Lady Humphreys, asked about the Livestock Information Service. This is a very important part of the programme. We shall work with the devolved Administrations to ensure that we share data to allow seamless traceability across the UK. Each territory's tracing system will be able to communicate with each other to support day-to-day business operations such as cross-border movements.

I turn to the issue of new entrants. As I made clear in my opening remarks, it is very important that we ensure that there are new entrants and that they remain for the long term. The industry relies on attracting new talent and we will offer funding to councils with

county farms estates, landowners and other organisations that want to invest in creating opportunities for new entrant farmers.

On financial assistance for active farmers, a point raised by my noble friend Lady Rock, we anticipate that farmers will receive a large proportion of the financial assistance provided for in the Clause 1 schemes.

I turn now to the focus of the Bill. I emphasise what many noble Lords have said: a strong environment is the way in which you can farm well. If your soils are not in good heart, you will not produce the food we need for both domestic and export production. That is why it is important that we work together on ensuring that farmers will, as we hope and believe, help the nation in achieving our environmental goals and in producing food for people both at home and abroad.

A number of noble Lords raised the issue of agricultural transition. The noble Lord, Lord Teverson, said that the period was too long, while other noble Lords said that it was not long enough. We think that the seven-year period gives sufficient time for the sector to adapt to a new model. Delaying the start of the agricultural transition would just delay the many benefits of moving away from direct payments, which we believe are poorly targeted. The phasing out of direct payments will free up money so that we can start to introduce new schemes, which will be a more effective way of rewarding farmers for the work that they do and help to prepare them for the future. For most farmers—around 80% of them—our maximum reduction in direct payments for 2021 will be no more than 5%. I should also say that this is well within the usual payment fluctuations caused by exchange rate changes that farmers faced under the CAP. In this context, I have also referred to the manifesto pledge about funding.

However, I am very struck by what a number of noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord Carrington, the noble Duke, the Duke of Wellington, and the noble Earl, Lord Devon, said about what has been described as the gap. I want to concentrate on this and will express my understanding of the points that have been made. We will offer a simplified countryside stewardship scheme for 2021-24 alongside productivity grants. Countryside stewardship will provide an additional long-term income stream whether it is for, for example, new hedges, wildlife offers, managing ponds or, particularly, livestock yards and manure storage to reduce pollution and improve water quality. The noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch, referred to that point and to how we work with farmers to achieve the climate change goals we set ourselves. Productivity grants will be available to invest in equipment, technology and infrastructure, such as efficient irrigation systems and precision slurry application equipment. The Government will ensure a smooth transition into the ELM scheme and no one with an environmental stewardship or countryside stewardship agreement will be unfairly disadvantaged when we transition to the new arrangements.

I say to the noble Baroness, Lady Mallalieu, and particularly to the noble Baronesses on the Front Benches, that work on the collaborative design of the ELM scheme is well under way. There are 53 tests and

trials up and running, and funding of more than £6.6 million has already been given. The ELM national pilot will commence in late 2021 and will run until 2024, when we intend to launch the full ELM scheme. A number of noble Lords raised upland and hill farmers and also lowland farmers. There are many environmental benefits, such as clean air and water, which will help, and benefits to landscape, to which the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, referred.

A number of points were made on results. We will be working on that because we want to ensure that the approach achieves the results we need. On access, of course, all farmers and land managers will continue to comply with the regulatory standards, including those on public rights of way. We think the ELM can fund the creation of new paths and the maintenance of footpaths and bridleways, which will be very beneficial.

The noble Baroness, Lady Ludford, mentioned GIs. The Government are setting up new domestic schemes which will provide protection for GIs after the transition period.

On the impact assessments, we will be providing analysis and will publish further evidence in the form of impact assessments at the point of secondary legislation or when we consult on new schemes under Clause 1: that is how we are undertaking that.

The noble Baroness, Lady Worthington, asked about cross-compliance. Again, we wish to retain standards. On forestry, again there are many points to be made. My noble friend Lord Shrewsbury and the noble Lord, Lord Trees, asked about animal welfare schemes. We will be working on that and considering different forms of animal welfare schemes. On the issue of food security, I am very happy to discuss this, but I will highlight that the report will draw on a range of regularly reported and publicly available statistics and data. The majority of data covered will be available between the reports—but I understand the points that have been made.

Data on food waste is one of many aspects that will be considered when assessing the global availability of food. Skills are very important. In the wider educational area, there are currently 28 high-quality apprenticeship standards available in the agriculture, environment and animal care sector, and I will write further on that.

On gene editing, again the Government agree that the EU approach is unscientific. We are committed to adopting a more scientific approach to regulation in the future. I have to say that the Government will not adopt a new approach without proper consultation, which I hope will provide assurances. On tenants and their eligibility, of course tenants will be eligible and will be part of the ELM pilots.

Change can be testing, so the Government will work closely with farmers to ensure that schemes work for the farmer and the country. Farming is the backbone of the countryside; farming communities are at the heart of the wider community. The food and drinks industry is vital to this country; so is a resilient and healthy environment. They must go hand in hand. I look forward to further stages of the Bill; I have a fair idea of the collision points that may transpire;

[LORD GARDINER OF KIMBLE]
and I hope we will do it in a spirit of friendship and,
indeed, as an endeavour to do the right thing. However,
I commend the Bill and I beg to move.

*Bill read a second time and committed to a Committee
of the Whole House.*

House adjourned at 6.36 pm.

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