HOUSE OF LORDS

Environment and Climate Change Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Mobilising action on climate change and environment: behaviour change

Wednesday 23 March 2022

10 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Parminter (The Chair); Baroness Boycott; Lord Browne of Ladyton; Lord Colgrain; Lord Grantchester; Lord Lilley; Lord Lucas; Baroness Northover; The Lord Bishop of Oxford; The Duke of Wellington; Lord Whitty.

Evidence Session No. 11 Hybrid Proceeding Questions 98 - 107

Witnesses

I: Professor Tim Lang, Emeritus Professor and Founder of Centre for Food Policy, City University; James Hand, Co-founder of Giki; Henry Dimbleby, Lead non-executive board member, Defra, and co-founder of Leon restaurant chain.

Examination of witnesses

Professor Tim Lang, James Hand and Henry Dimbleby.

Q98 **The Chair**: Good morning and welcome to this evidence session of the House of Lords Select Committee on Environment and Climate Change. This morning's session is on food waste and food choices in relation to our inquiry into behaviour change on climate and the environment.

I am pleased to welcome three witnesses, two in the room and one down the line. Down the line, we have Henry Dimbleby, co-founder of the Leon restaurants and the lead of the national food strategy. In the room, we have Professor Tim Lang from the Centre for Food Policy at the City University, and James Hand, the co-founder of Giki. Welcome to all three of you. We look forward to hearing what you have to say.

A transcript will be circulated to the witnesses so that you can review it before it is published. This session is webcast live and is made available on the parliamentary website. I remind Members to declare any declarations of interest before their first question.

Finally, although we have two hours for this session, time disappears down a rabbit hole, so I invite witnesses to keep their responses as succinct as possible. If they want to add supplementary evidence, we will treat it as such, and it can be accommodated after the session.

I will kick off with the first question. As I said, the point of this session is to look at the food choices that people make, their behaviours over food waste and the factors shaping consumer choices. We have already heard evidence on accessibility, affordability, packaging and general social norms. Will each of you say a few words about factors that drive consumer choices in those two areas of food choice and food waste?

James Hand: A number of the key things that you have mentioned are the price, the ease and social norms, but there are also things such as the functionality of the product—does it do the job that somebody wants? We focus on individuals and the way they are changing towards more sustainable behaviours. Their personal values are also very important, as are the habits that people have. The myriad factors that work for consumer choice are different for different people—the persona is very important—and they do not all pull in the same direction at any point in time. They are all working against a counterforce of anchoring. People are very reluctant to change their minds, especially because there is always a risk in change.

We see the key things that you mention—price, ease, social norms, functionality, and values—across not just across food choices but clothing choices, transport choices and financial choices. They are definitely very common.

Henry Dimbleby: I would like to say two things on this. First, it is fantastic that this committee is dealing with food. At COP 26, which was meant to be about climate change and biodiversity, food was hardly mentioned—it was in the sidelines—yet the food system is by far the

largest cause of damage to nature. It is the biggest cause of biodiversity collapse, freshwater pollution, freshwater scarcity, deforestation, and clearing out of the oceans. It is, alongside energy, one of the two big causes of climate change globally. It is fantastic that you are bringing that to front and centre. If you could encourage the powers that be for the next COP to do the same, that would be terrific.

On factors shaping consumers' food choice, I will not go into what you already have. I am sure that you are getting David Halpern to come and talk about this. He is the expert in the individual drivers, social drivers and material drivers.

What is more important than that, if we are thinking about what you need to do—presumably, what you are thinking about is to get people eating more healthily in a way that is less environmentally damaging—is realising that the fundamental overriding cause of people eating unhealthy food, or our becoming a nation being killed by the food we eat, is the interaction between the commercial incentives of food companies and our evolved appetite. I call that the junk food cycle. No amount of nudging, of trying to persuade people, of changing culture will stop the disaster that is awaiting the NHS and many of our lives, unless the Government intervene directly in that commercial incentive.

On the environmental side, as Partha Dasgupta set out brilliantly in his *Economics of Biodiversity*, there is what I call, and he calls, the invisibility of nature—the fact that in all the ways in which we measure success in the food system, whether that is in the balance sheets of companies or GDP, nature is invisible, and until you make the cost of nature visible in the price of food you will not change the public's behaviour. Not enough people have the time, the money or the knowledge to create the huge shift in the purchasing of the more environmentally friendly food that we need if we are to avert climate and biodiversity collapse.

Professor Tim Lang: I am with what both my colleagues have said, but I would add that choice is complex. The difficulty with inquiries such as yours is that you want to try to get it down to some simplicities. That is a big danger. You must see that what shapes how a population eats cannot just be reduced to individual factors.

I am a total opponent of the nudge-type approach. I think it reduces everything to individual factors and puts around the individuals some shaping factors. We have to recognise—I echo Henry here—that it is population change or bust. Trying to appeal to individuals to do that, or to do a little tweak here or there, will not address the enormity, the scale of change that has to be done if we are to take public health seriously and environmental health seriously.

I do not like the model of individual, social and material. It is far too focused on individual choice. It is an ideological position. It does not bear any resemblance to the cultural shifts that we need to do and, indeed, now understand better.

My point, to summarise that, is that you have to have theoretical clarity about what your framework of understanding is about change and behaviour change.

The second point is that within culture we have to see it as differentiations around class. In Britain, we do not talk about social class any more, and we should. Class is not just a fixed issue about whether you are a manual worker or intellectual worker, or something like that. The new approaches to class that social scientists have come up with absolutely get this cultural dimension. Aspirations, location in a social system, income, background, cultural norms, et cetera, all are part of what makes the weave and web of culture. If we want to change culture to address climate change, if we want to change food culture to address public health, we must address it at the cultural level. That is where the behaviour change models go silent, because their focus is on the individual.

I urge you to look only at population change. It is population change or bust. That is not just an accrual of many individual choice factors. It is the scale of it. I am sure that you will want us to get to this.

What I think might bind all three of us witnesses is that if we are as a country, as a culture, going to have the scale of change that is necessary to address climate change, to deal with this complete failure of COP 26 to address unsustainable consumption, particularly in the rich world, we have to realise that we will have to have multiple interventions, at a multiple level, with multiple actors, to address that big population scale. We will not get the requisite change that the data say we need unless we have that big picture first, which then shapes what we want to do.

If you just reduce it to the individual, it is hopeless. You are then in flotsam and jetsam. The advertising industry spends £1 billion on food advertising in Britain. Public health messages are tiddly and, one study showed, 33 times outspent by the advertising industry. Overwhelmingly, if you look at the top 100, as I did in my *Feeding Britain* book—it is all there—the top 100 advertisers in Britain completely outgun as regards messaging any little nudge twiddlings at the fringes. Boldness is what you need. If your report is not bold, it will be yet more trees cut down for a waste of time.

The Chair: Thank you for that challenge and for getting us off to a good start.

Q99 **Baroness Boycott:** Henry, I absolutely take your point that the COP completely failed where food is concerned, and I am very glad that we are doing it here in the committee. I have various interests to declare and they are in the register of interests.

What barriers do some consumers face in making food choices in line with climate and environmental goals? I am not sure whether that question is going to sound to you, Henry, as though we are almost

jumping the gun, because there is very little information about the impact that the food we eat has on the climate. How can barriers faced by consumers in making food choices, including action around food waste, be addressed and reduced? I will start with Henry on that and then the others, and I will come back and ask you all quickly about the impact of the situation in Ukraine on environmental choices.

Henry Dimbleby: Building on what Tim just said, I think that the premise of this question is, to some degree, flawed. If you talk to Justin King, for example, who was on my advisory panel, about how at a population level people make choices, he will say that pretty much the only thing in marketing terms that they go for is that they like a Union Jack on the front of a piece of food. In any kind of environmental labelling or health labelling you are dealing with very specific groups. You will not change the system through changing that point.

You need to change affordability and the material environment, and you need to do that through legislation. The problem, the big barrier, is that Tim was saying you have to be bold. When you intervene in a complex system—for example, I recommended a very pure intervention with a sugar and salt tax building on the sugary drinks levy—you do not know exactly what impact that is going to have. There will be a lot of lobbying to stop it getting put into place. When it happens, it might be more powerful in some areas than you think, and in other areas it might cause unintended consequences that you do not like, and then the lobbying will be, "We always told you it was a bad idea".

The biggest barrier is that structurally in a complex system you need to be bold, but you need to be bold in many different ways, and you need to be prepared to change. You need to accept that it is incredibly difficult to predict how your bold initiatives will land, and therefore change.

Within a parliamentary democracy, with a very powerful lobby lobbying against you, that is fundamentally the biggest barrier to change in the food system. How can you give government the space to be bold enough? How can you be humble enough to make bold policy and then be prepared to change it?

Baroness Boycott: Can you give the committee an example of what being bold in your book would be? What would be the Government's action?

Henry Dimbleby: I argued for a very large sugar and salt reformulation tax. The modelling that we did suggested that it would significantly change the composition of foods, and it would make some very unhealthy foods more expensive compared with healthy foods. We did a lot of focus groups on it, and prior to partygate, and now the Ukraine war, there was a sense that the Government had the political capital to invest in that. A lot of people are fed up with the food system, and we thought it was possible to get it across. Now, because of both partygate and the food price inflation caused by oil price hikes and the Ukrainian war, I think the opportunity, sadly, has gone.

It is a very good example of where in politics you have to seize the opportunity to do things when you can. Any delay can result in something getting offloaded, not happening, or being delayed. Tim will probably have other ideas. That is just one.

Baroness Boycott: Tim, Henry came up with a big bold idea, but that was very much about health, and we are a climate committee. Can you try within your answer to give us your thoughts on how we could reform the climate impact and biodiversity impact of food?

Professor Tim Lang: I hope so. I will say two things. The first is that the public have very little knowledge about food and the environment. There are a lot of appeals. The NGO sector, civil society, the birds and bees, and the particular interests within conservation and environmental movements have done a good job in pushing the importance of understanding the impacts of, say, how agriculture works and has effects on loss of bird life and insects, soil structure, pollution, et cetera, but translating that into food choices is not what is done.

I detect across the civil society world quite a lot of frustration with that now. Within civil society across the world, not just in Britain, there is now a recognition that unless the food system changes, almost all of what it wants will not happen.

That is not translated for consumers, which is my second point. Consumers do not get that. When they are taken seriously, and I cannot remember whether your committee—I should know this—was one of the climate assembly, when six committees—

The Chair: We were not formulated then.

Professor Tim Lang: That is right. I was one of the 50 witnesses to that process, but the committee is aware of it.

The Chair: Indeed, and we have had witnesses.

Professor Tim Lang: Things such as the citizens juries—that was a very grand-scale one—all came up with, very simply, consumers saying, "Why weren't we told? Why didn't we know this?" Which?, formerly the Consumers' Association, is endlessly showing in studies—I was an adviser to one eight or nine years ago, and it comes up time and again—"Why didn't we know this?"

You then ask, "How are you going to make markets work?" Is it just putting it on a label? Is it advertising campaigns? There have to be two prongs. One is to turn off the tap of non-information. A bold measure would be to tax advertising. It is runaway: tax it—tax it heavily. If you look at what advertising does, it overwhelmingly supports unhealthy foods with almost no information about the environment.

Secondly, we have to be very wary. I spent two hours on a Defra closed meeting trying to consider eco-labelling. I think there are lots of problems. Do we go just for one sort of eco-labelling, or do we say we

would like to have what I call an omni label, which covers health, environment, social factors, economic information, social justice issues, and so on? When they get asked, the public get quite concerned about slave labour in food and things. The label starts to become very complicated. How can you address that?

The advantage, by the way, is not the label. The advantage is that it encourages companies to start inspecting their supply chains. Almost everyone one talks to inside the food industry states that when that happens it is not the label that is actually communicating the information. It is getting below the radar to change and the reformulation and so on, as Henry was saying.

Boldness gets you to think about systemic change in a different way than just saying, "Put the onus on individual consumer choice at the point of sale". That is the critical issue. I am in favour of arguing for labelling, but not if we think that is the mechanism for engaging with consumers. I am sure we will come on to it, but we have to be better—both more radical and more reasonable—in how we engage with consumers. They cannot be left in the dark, which is what they are, and then the food industry turns round and blames them and says, "We've got the wrong consumers. They don't do the right thing. They only want cheap food", this, that and the other. You get that sort of nonsense politics.

We have created a complex situation where, in Henry's terms—I agree with him, and again I spelt it out in my *Feeding Britain* book—there are lock-ins. We have to break out of the lock-ins, and we will not do that by a little tweak here or there. It has to be thought through very systemically. Information and knowledge are definitely key ingredients, but you have to say whose knowledge; who funds it; who frames it? How can we do that?

The big example, let me just say—and God spare us from this happening—is that in wars big changes in food culture happen. I dread this, but I have constantly said it, and I said it when I was policy lead on the Lancet Commission for three or four years. If you want big population changes, war is when they can come. Wars can be disastrous, but they can also be used very effectively, because suddenly all the conventions and norms are up in the air, the conventional lock-ins start loosening and the vested interests start getting frightened, and they are prepared to listen. We have to prepare for some fairly nasty times and use it wisely. I agree completely with Henry.

Baroness Boycott: James, will you pick up the point about consumers and waste, which is also part of this question? That would be wonderful.

James Hand: The first thing I would say is that the discussion about the role of policy, the role of individuals and the role of companies has been a long one in sustainability. We are now at a point where, to halve emissions this decade, it has to be all of them to get the sort of change that we need.

The barriers that people face are around key things such as awareness. Someone's personal carbon footprint in the UK is around 9 tonnes and food waste is around 2.5 tonnes of that—a really meaningful portion. That is often a huge surprise to people when we show it to them through the digital tool that we have, especially people who act sustainably. They feel empowered when they know that they can take a tonne or a tonne and a half off that by changing food waste and by changing the food that they eat.

The blockers are the behavioural ones, such as anchoring, the reluctance of people to change their mind, and very narrow framing. People will tend to look at individual choice, "I am buying a product without plastic", and assume that means they have made a shift to a sustainable diet, rather than looking at it holistically. Then there are the practical ones, whether that is prices in the supermarket or just the sheer complexity of knowing what a good diet looks like for an individual. It is not simple. All those things are working to block.

However, we have seen that there are ways to help the individual to counter those barriers, by thinking very specifically about some of the behavioural blockers and how you can remove them. One of those is by giving them pathways towards a more sustainable diet. It is about starting off with entry-level changes, but being very honest about the very small changes that they will make. Telling someone to try an oat milk or a plant-based sausage is a good way to get them thinking about it, but hopeless in terms of the overall environmental impact.

What we see time and again is that people who start on that journey with that awareness start to think about food waste, about changing to be vegetarian, about becoming mainly plant-based. What we absolutely do not see in the thousands of people whom we have interacted with in workshops on this is people going all the way from a typical diet to an exclusively or mainly plant-based diet in one go. It is very unusual. Giving them those pathways can be really helpful for them.

The other one is the role of communities. People are much more willing to change when those around them are changing. By "communities", we do not just mean your local community. We have seen very effective change in companies. They are very powerful communities with strong hierarchies to bring people together, to think about what they can do.

All that, though, is underpinned by the challenge that any action has to be relevant, actionable and personalised to somebody, and that is the difficulty. Telling somebody who is vegetarian not to eat red meat is confusing and upsetting. Telling them about a part of their diet that they can change is much more actionable and relevant. I think that we will come on to that when we talk about technology, but that is where technology can play a role because technology can scale across personal journeys— across many people at the same time.

Q100 **Baroness Boycott:** Henry, Tim made the point that wars have a dramatic effect on changing food. How do you see the food shortages in

Ukraine affecting it? Will we have much more industrial farming to try to make up for grain and sunflower seed shortages?

Henry Dimbleby: I am worried that the wrong narrative is being put over what is happening with the war in Ukraine. There are basically three things that are happening to our food system as a result of it. There is a real worry about seasonal labour this summer to pick crops. About 70% of the seasonal workers who come to this country traditionally in the summer to pick our crops are from Ukraine and another 8% are from Russia. Farms are scrambling to find labour from elsewhere.

The second thing is that there are specific shortages of particular foods. The most notable are sunflower oil and white fish. About 40% of the world's white fish is fished by Russia. You may see shortages of things such as fish fingers on the supermarket shelves.

The third thing is price inflation driven by the underlying fuel inflation and food shortages worldwide. This will not cause in this country a shortage of food. It will just make food more expensive. The NFU is arguing that we should go back to paying farmers to produce food. What that effectively does is subsidise international food prices. Most of these things are commodities, and it is a very bad way to spend government money.

You need to do two things. For the 10% of the population for whom food is over 15% of their household budget—sometimes up to 40% or 50%—they are going to struggle in poverty, so you need to think about how you alleviate poverty.

Secondly, the Foreign Office should be thinking about the fact that these prices will probably lead to civil unrest and social disturbances in north Africa and the Middle East.

Giving subsidies to farmers to grow food will not solve either of those things.

At the same time, the long-term issue is that we need to try to decouple our economy from its addiction—or at least minimise it—to red diesel, fuel for transporting food, and fertiliser, which is very high-energy production. Doing what the Government are doing in trying to move those subsidies to environmental subsidies to create a form of farming that is not addicted to those things is the required response.

I worry that there will be a knee-jerk response: "Look at what we did during the Second World War". We did two things during the Second World War. We did rationing, which meant that people who were poor suddenly started getting meat and vegetables into their diet, and their health improved significantly, and we grubbed up a large part of our landscape to produce food, which led to the environmental collapse we have now. We got more food production, which was important, but I worry that we will look back at the war and say, "We need to pay farmers to produce food", and in the 2022 context that is economically completely illiterate.

Q101 **Lord Grantchester:** Thank you for your submissions and for coming before the committee today. Perhaps I will drill down a little bit as there are many destinations.

What initiatives—public, private and third-sector driven—have been most effective at influencing consumers' food behaviours in relation to climate and environmental goals? What are the most effective labelling practices for choosing and disposing of food products, and how successful have these been.

Secondly, how has technology been harnessed by businesses and organisations in the sector to enable behaviour change for climate and environmental goals?

Finally, what is the role for public procurement in shaping consumer food habits for climate and environmental goals?

In your answers will you say whether we have picked out the right three? Which of the three has been most productive to date, and will it change? What others are there—for example, celebrity endorsements and social media, chemical versus biological for health? How would you rank all these factors?

James Hand: I can speak to labelling and technology, as that is the experience we have had at Giki.

We previously had an app called Giki Badges, which rated supermarket products on whether they were sustainable and healthy. It looked across 13 different areas and was used by about 60,000 people.

The results that we saw were very clear. The first is people's need for simplicity. Even though we gave lots of additional information about what was behind the badges, often they just wanted a simple yes or no. Indeed, some of the most common feedback was, "We don't even want 12. We just want one". That really highlights the challenge of good labelling that Tim referred to earlier.

The second thing they want is consistency, and by consistency they mean that if they are looking, for example, at food, they want to see it across all foods, not selectively disclosed or selectively coloured.

People are also very used to digital products that are near perfect. Most of the apps on our phones are incredible. As soon as they see information, they also want to know what the alternative is, and where they can buy it. That one-click solution is what many people want, despite the challenges of doing it. It really highlighted that labelling is one part and that people really want the solution of how they turn that labelling into actual action.

In terms of how technology is being used, we work with companies that are helping their employees to live more sustainably, and their technology can be very useful to provide a platform for people quickly to get a sense of their own environmental footprint. We look at the different groups of people who are engaging on sustainability issues.

There is the group we call the super greens. They have not grown much over the last couple of years. They have always been there, and they have always done what they think is right for the environment because it is the right thing to do.

The next group is the aware greens, who are concerned about climate change. It is that group that is growing very quickly and is very digitally aware, wanting to see digital platforms that can give them some sort of personal journey.

However, we have also found that a digital platform by itself is insufficient. People will make changes when it is also personal, or it involves them discussing things with their local community; and their local community, of whatever form it has, can also bring local knowledge. A digital platform by itself—for example, there are some pledging platforms where you can pledge to take environmental action—looks incredibly appealing, but the actual conversion of pledges to action can be well under 10%. It is almost a form of personal green-washing.

Something that can take people all the way through, which thinks about their model of decision, is where technology can have a really good impact: not short-term technology—not dopamine hits—but putting together the information that they need at the right time so that they can go through that pathway of the changes that they need to make.

Professor Tim Lang: Building upon that, I think that James has put it well. There are a lot of experiments going on around the world, and indeed in Britain, and he has given a flavour of that.

To answer your question, Lord Grantchester, I do not think there has been any effective labelling; we do not have any. That is why it is critical that your committee comes up with a call for government to be coherent about it. It cannot just be devolved to companies. There is such a fear of the nanny state that we have allowed nanny corporations to shape behaviour. We have to grasp this nettle and say there has to be a national position. Those who voted for Brexit said, "Let us take back control". Actually, we have ceded control to corporations. We are weaker now. We have less leverage on it.

Here is a test for the Government. Are they going to engage with and, to use their favourite phrase, empower consumers at the collective level? That means that we do not want hundreds of different apps; we want one app. It needs to be one, QR-based system so that we can go into more information and get it. It needs to be properly audited. It needs to be there in a way that the public can have trust. The Nordic nations are edging toward something like that, but have not done it yet. They have had the experience of having and building a confident position from a government body away from commercial interests that the public then trust.

I am sure that James would agree, and I know that Henry agrees, that food is a trust relationship. You have to build on that trust and accelerate it, if you want to get population change.

On technology, I will leave that to what James has said and perhaps Henry will add more, other than repeating a point that I just made. The critical thing is not to have technology cacophony but to have technology coherence. I think that has to be a principle that your Lordships' committee's recommendations endorse.

Your third question, Lord Grantchester, was about the role of public procurement. Forgive me for being a bit scathing about this. I have had 45 years of working in food policy. I am fed up with people saying, "Let's just do a bit of public procurement". Public procurement is tiny in the food system—absolutely tiny. If we do not address the big commercial relationship of the consumer to supply chains, it is a waste of time.

Of course, public procurement is quite important. It is pretty good for anyone who has been into hospital or goes to school or whose kids go to school. You want to know that the food is fit to eat. It would be quite nice to have an audited scheme of proper, sustainable dietary guidelines applied to all foods, but it cannot just be in the public zone. Most food is eaten through private commercial relationships. I am part of a team that is calling for sustainable dietary guidelines to be applied everywhere. It is radical, it is bold thinking, but if we want to reduce food's climate change and biodiversity impact—and I agree with what Henry said earlier: it is not just climate change; it is a whole weave and web of damage that the food system currently does—we have to set clear goals and clear guidelines.

The Government have been in complete disarray by breaking up Public Health England. For better or worse, they have done so. We have to get a grip of the eatwell plate. It is nutrition, it is dietary guidelines; it is not sustainable dietary guidelines. I would make that one of the recommendations for your committee. The country needs sustainable dietary guidelines. We should have them straightaway. They would set the template against which the technical innovations of the like of James's could then experiment with and develop.

I understand why you asked about public procurement, but, please, let us grow up. That procurement is tiny.

Lord Grantchester: Public procurement is always highly political and of course does not allow for the incoherence between government departments in policy. Lord Whitty, do you want to come in on the back of that?

Lord Whitty: After Henry.

Henry Dimbleby: As Tim said, there is very little evidence of ways in which you can, at a population level, change the environmental impact of the food people buy. One of them is by just making what is available

more environmentally friendly. There is a series of legislative approaches, which I am sure we will talk about later, which would ensure that the environmental impact of food was built into the cost, and where, if it was regulated, we could have trade deals whereby environmental impact was reduced. That is a huge way in which government can help so that the consumer does not have to make the decision.

On labelling, again I agree with Tim. I think it is important, but it is not going to change consumer choice. It will change the behaviour of companies, particularly where they are marginally doing things that are destructive. A couple of my recommendations were on mandatory reporting and labelling.

The industry's common theme is, "We just follow the consumer". Actually, we know that that is not true. For example, with huge amounts of advertising and a persistent attempt to create novelty and new markets, it is possible to change what we eat. In marketing case studies, the avocado is always held up as something that was introduced to the western world which no consumer wanted, or knew about, and now is a staple part of our diet.

If you were to boil down the one thing that consumers could do to minimise the environmental impact of the food they eat, it would be to eat less meat. It just takes up so much of our land. It is not the methane emissions from ruminants. It takes up 75% of farmland globally and, obviously, that dominates the ecosystems within which it is produced. With the attempt to make people eat less meat, we can learn from the avocado campaign and from other campaigns and using celebrities. Quite a lot of work that is not public yet is going on behind the scenes to see whether we can create globally a similar advertising, marketing, positive framing for eating less meat. I think that could be quite interesting. If anyone were to ask, "How can I reduce my environmental impact?", you can just say, "Eat less meat". That is by far the greatest way in which they can improve their environmental footprint.

Lord Whitty: Everybody has hinted at this, but is not the elephant in the room the structure of the food sector and the domination of every stage by a very small number of companies, whether it is wholesalers, the big retailers, the food service companies, and, to some extent, the catering sector? They are all oligopolies. The disadvantage of the oligopoly is that no challenger can get in. The advantage is that, given proper pressures, they all change at once.

To take a wartime analogy, Churchill and Woolton were confronted with a much more diffuse food industry. All they needed to do in a wartime situation was to call in half a dozen to a dozen senior officials of major companies and bang their heads together to actually change the system. They were in charge of the message, in charge of the advertising expenditure, in charge of their technology and in charge of their product. Here, the Government have to act as well, through taxation and perhaps through public procurement to a limited degree. Essentially, it is getting all those companies to adopt broadly the same approach.

Professor Tim Lang: I take the argument absolutely, except we have just come out of a two-and-a-half-year experiment over Covid in which the Government did not take their chance to persuade that oligopolistic power to change the food system. Defra just said to the nine retailers, "Get on with it". The result was, at one level, effective, but in changing the outputs of the food supply chain and public consumption, the Government missed an opportunity. What your inquiry is doing, as I understand it, is saying: how can we get from where we are now to a situation where the impact on the environment and climate change is far less? That requires government to set very clear guidelines about what it wants. It cannot just say, "Get on with it", to nine retailers, because they will do a little bit of tweaking here and there, and reduce a bit of plastic and displace it on to there, all of which sounds very good and is very honourable, and I respect some of the things that have been done by industry, but it is not radical enough. There is no sense of direction.

It has taken us 70 or 80 years to get into this mess and, on UN and IPCC terms, we now have eight years to sort it out. It has to be pretty radical and pretty fast. That will not happen through conventional market measures. It will happen through reframing the market, and being very clear about the direction of travel that we want from market dynamics, and that is what is not happening.

Henry is the person partly in the hot seat on that in terms of whether the English Government rather than the UK Government are actually going to get a grip and deal with some of the challenges that the *National Food Strategy: Part 2* report laid out last July. We are still waiting, and I am not holding my breath, to be absolutely honest.

The case for doing that has to have clarity from government to get that oligopoly power to work. It is very different in that respect from 1939-40. Let us not forget it. Lord Woolton basically saved the country by—completely illegally—buying the entire Canadian wheat crop. This horrified Churchill and he then had to paper over it with retrospective legislation. I wish Mr Eustice would do something radical. There is no sign at all of that at the moment.

Lord Lucas: I find it really hard to get hold of reliable data, whether it be on simple things such as comparing the environmental impact of rail travel, or what level of food waste is actually occurring and what the underlying data is there, or why oat milk costs so much more than cow's milk. If we want to change that, who should be at the centre of it? What institution is capable of putting together data that we would all believe and is not already committed to one viewpoint or the other so that it will immediately attract the sceptics?

Professor Tim Lang: I can answer that very quickly. First, I no longer call Defra Defra, it is Dera; it does not do anything about food. The acronym has rather poor connotations in a cost of living crisis.

It ought to be Defra that co-ordinates it. Britain has incredibly good science and scientists and has the capacity to pull together solid,

trustworthy information and data on sustainable diets and everything that goes into them. One of Henry's recommendations in the *National Food Strategy: Part 2* was to get that data out into the open and liberate it from companies much more. I am sure he will want to speak about that. I think that the capacity of Britain to have a unified science base that is publicly available is very great.

What we have, however, and I am sure James will comment on it, is a lot of corporate data that is commercially confidential. The huge investigations that industry does—the Nielsens and the Kantar Worldpanels, and so on—monitor tens of thousands of British families every day, every week: what they eat, what they buy and why, et cetera. We have data that is there but not being used for the national interest.

Again, this is part of my, if I am allowed to, recommendation: that your committee make a clarification of sustainable dietary guidelines—not throw away the eatwell guide but turn it into sustainable dietary guidelines; and, secondly, to have an evidence base that is constantly updated. In my book, I made a recommendation for a new national food security and sustainability institute to co-ordinate all this data in one trustworthy source. At the moment the Government just keep on pushing and pulling the agencies that have the potential to do that. Defra ought to be doing that and ought to be co-ordinating it, but it is not.

James Hand: I agree that there is a huge role for some open central repository of data in relation to carbon. Carbon accounting is pretty simple. It is the emissions factor of something and the quantity of that thing that you are consuming, and that is it.

The complexity comes in because your life is complex and you are doing that across transport, and your home, and the food that you eat and the things that you buy and sell. When we have built our own models, we have more than 10,000 variables that feed into that to help an individual work out what their footprint is. They do not want to know that.

It would be far better if they were standardised so that lots of different initiatives could use it. What is happening at the moment in the private sector is that that is being done by innovative companies or innovative charities.

The conversion factors that Defra already provides are world leading. They are some of the strongest that you see around the world, but they are also very narrow compared to the scope of somebody's lifestyle.

I would concur that there is a huge role to do that, because the quicker it is standardised the more people can innovate and come up with some good solutions to help people cut their footprints.

Henry Dimbleby: May I say a quick word on that? This is an area now, in terms of public availability of data, where there is in some parts of government—our Chief Scientific Officer and in the ONS—an

understanding that across the board, in all sorts of fields, setting the data free in an easily consumable way would be enormously powerful.

There are a number of steps that you need to go across. First, you need to create a map where you make all data that government has available. I have spoken to farmers who have been in Defra and looked at the data Defra has on their farms, and it has completely changed the way they think about farming them. Defra holds data about their soil, about water, which is not easy to get, and it has changed the way they want to farm. The first thing is to get that data available.

The second thing is to work out how to get hold of other data that are available but locked up in companies, or elsewhere, so to think about what full set of data would be useful and work to get that on to the map.

The third step is to create what are called semantic maps, so that the data is not only available but is marked in ways that enable people to use it in their models. For example, a kilogram is formulated in a certain way. You need to create a dictionary of how you can use the data.

The final step is to make it live. You would have to have different levels of access, but an example that the former CTO of Ocado always used to use is that he has empty refrigerated vans going around the country that could be used for all sorts of other purposes, such as delivering blood or transferring blood between NHS hospitals, which the NHS finds difficult. That is the way things need to go.

Who does it? I think the ONS in government is the body that understands this best, but it then needs to work with the different government departments to produce the relevant maps in their areas. Defra definitely should be leading on rural land use.

In the end, you want all these maps layered on top of each other so that there is one set of data that is live and available to the country. The power of that will be completely transformational. What is extraordinary is that every business has this for its own business. Every business understands the importance of data, but they are only just beginning to get it across to government how just having data available changes systems and decisions. I think we are 15 years off getting to where we need to be, and that is probably 15 years behind where we need to be in this area.

The Chair: That is really interesting.

Lord Grantchester: May I quickly nip in with a comment? I know we are short of time.

I am a dairy farmer. The supply chain looks over every facet of what we do. Each year we go through an environmental climate change/carbon footprint analysis. They come and ask questions of the business. I tend to think, without going deeply into it, that the answer comes out: where is it in the huge margin of trying to work out the footprint of, for example, straw use in bedding a cow down? And so on. I wonder whether that

scope of error, when magnified with everybody else's farm, means that it gets wider, or do we somehow narrow all the answers into some kernel of truth and we get told the environmental footprint? Does Henry have any reflections on that farmer's view, whether it is correct or not, and how it then translates into Defra policy?

Henry Dimbleby: When you are dealing with data in any organisation, how clean and good that data is is always an issue. You will be aware within your organisation of the level of confidence you can have in different pieces of data. In the decisions you make, you will always think about the impact of getting this wrong and how good is the data, and you will try not to make big decisions on data that you think is not as reliable. That will be a problem.

When you do this, and try to get data, people will say, "This is rubbish and that's not right", and they will try to take it apart from a number of different angles. The fact that the data will not be perfect originally is not a reason not to do it. You need to start doing it and as you expose data to light, to academics, to businesses, and to people who are using it, they will begin to clean it up and point out what is good and what needs improving.

It is definitely an issue at the moment. The data is lousy, it is in the dark, and therefore it is miles off where we need it to be. No one can honestly say they have a really good way of measuring how much carbon is stored in a field's soil in a way for which you could give carbon credits. At the moment, that is not possible, but if we begin to bring that data out and say that is an intention, we will get better at those kinds of things.

Q102 **Lord Colgrain:** I would like to ask Tim one question specifically and Henry one question, coming back on something that each of you said.

Tim, you talk about public procurement being very tiny, and that is slightly news to me, because I was thinking about schools, hospitals and prisons, and I thought that would be quite a body, but you say it is not. Would you be kind enough to give us the actual data?

Secondly, you said we need to do something radical. Could this committee propose to the Government that they take a real stand on public procurement?

Professor Tim Lang: I do not have the data with me on public procurement in relation to the total population's diet, but as regards money—I think I put it in my book, and I can dig it out—Britain spends, at the last year's estimate, £223 billion, so that is a quarter of a trillion pounds on food and soft drinks in total. That is the total expenditure. I would be surprised if public procurement was anywhere near even 10% of that. I will get you the figures and send them to you.

Henry Dimbleby: I think it is 5% of total calories consumed.

Professor Tim Lang: There you go. I think you had it in your report, did you not? It is small. Please do not let me give the impression that I think

it is unimportant. That is not what I was saying. I was saying that it is small and that committees such as this, with great respect to your Lordships, always say we must do something about public procurement. It is private procurement that is much more important. Public procurement, as anyone who knows about this—I am sure Lord Lilley knows about it as he has a track record on this—has had 40 years of being told it has to ape private procurement, and cut costs and privatise and outsource, et cetera.

My point is that we need to have a common, coherent set of guidelines about what we want from all procurement. My central point is that that is the role of having food-based sustainable dietary guidelines. That is what the eatwell plate ought to become. At the moment it is toothless. It is just vague advice. It is not translated into how a restaurant views what its output is.

Following up that radical and bold theme, I am part of a group internationally that is trying to explore how we get sustainable dietary change through the eating-out restaurant sector. Henry Dimbleby is one of the great founders of the Sustainable Restaurant Association in Britain, which has been fantastic at pioneering the thinking and voluntary education of the restaurant and eating-out market, but the scale that that is operating at is too small.

What could we have? You will remember that, after the 1980s' and early 1990s' food safety crises, a system of scores on doors was borrowed from the Nordics. We have hygiene monitoring being done by environmental health departments of local authorities.

We ought to have sustainable dietary scores on the doors. Is this restaurant broadly reducing its carbon footprint? Is this restaurant taking waste so seriously that it minimises waste and, if there is any waste, it goes to compost rather than landfill? There are certain directions of what good practice would be that the industry is beginning to come up with.

Lots of private consultancies are exploring these things. But it needs to be done now at scale. We need a national scheme that says, "Dear Britain, the eating-out market is 30% to 35% of total food consumption in Britain and, getting back to something like that again post Covid, or in the new phase of Covid, we now need to address that".

That would have much more of a knock-on on to how people eat in their private homes, because it shapes culture. Britain has become a much better and nicer, more flexible, more imaginative eating culture in the last 50 or 60 years, partly because we have got wealthy and partly because of Europeanisation and holidays, and people beginning to relax. When I was a child, British food was brown and dreadful—famously dreadful. Go and read all the critiques of the Derek Coopers and the great *Good Food Guides* of the 1950s. That change needs to be done at an institutional level, not at the individual level.

Lord Colgrain: I am conscious of the time.

I come back to something that you, Henry, said right at the beginning about the buyer's recognition of something that has a Union Jack on it. The British farming industry has been trying quite hard to get the red tractor logo recognised. Do you feel it has been successful in that regard?

Henry Dimbleby: The red tractor is interesting. Obviously, it represents pretty much minimum legal requirement standards. It is very little above that. Our legal standards are pretty good, although not perfect compared with those of other countries. I think it has recognition and people like it. It is going through a very difficult phase at the moment, as you probably know, because it is beginning to apply red tractors to things that are not necessarily reared in this country, et cetera.

The first thing the Government need to do on labelling and regulation is to own the measurements, and to say, "Here are the things we care about", and, as Tim said, that should be broader than carbon and biodiversity. It should cover labour relations, modern-day slavery, et cetera. The Government should own how those are measured, so when you get a label you know that it is measured in a way that the Government have put their seal to.

As for creating a government scheme above that, I worry about the government gold standard; in the nature of it, it would never keep up. I think that the Government should be responsible for saying, "What you're saying is true", and they should, certainly for their own products, mandate that procurement is assured by schemes that they recognise, but I am not sure that the Government should run the scheme.

Q103 **Lord Lilley:** When Professor Lang advocates a national set of sustainable dietary guidelines, will he illustrate what that means? I have no idea.

Secondly, Mr Dimbleby, you said that paying farmers to produce more food is an economically illiterate response to a food shortage. As the landowners on this committee know, I am no enthusiast for subsidising farmers, but I was taught economics at Cambridge by a range of economists, from communists, socialists, dirigistes, and even a few closet market economists. All of them would have thought that a natural and economically literate response to a food shortage would be to produce more food. Please comment.

Henry Dimbleby: Do you want Tim to comment on his thing first, or me to comment on that thing?

Professor Tim Lang: I will go first and then you can have the fun of answering that.

We have a set of national dietary guidelines at the moment called the eatwell plate. It was originally set up under the Department of Health and then devolved to the Food Standards Agency. Then it went to Public Health England, and I think it is now about to go back to either—Henry, you probably know more than I do—the Food Standards Agency or to—

Lord Lilley: What does it say?

Professor Tim Lang: It makes recommendations. It has a notional plate: how much meat, how much fruit, how much vegetables, how much grain, how much fish, et cetera. It makes recommendations and in the bottom left is the interesting bit. After Public Health England did some work with the Carbon Trust, which obviously made the point that Henry put earlier, on the critical role that meat and dairy have as regards the carbon footprint of your diet, at the bottom left in little writing, it says, "Please cut down your red meat and only consume fish from sustainable sources, if you can".

People such as me say that the whole of the environment is in that minute bit of writing that no one can read on the plate, whereas, in fact, the whole of the plate needs to be thought through in terms of environmental impact. You are showing the plate, thank you. When I was recommending that the eatwell plate become sustainable dietary guidelines, I was wanting to have a rethink of that.

Lord Lilley: Someone such as me is ignorant of this, and perhaps I am particularly ignorant, but do you think it would have an effect if it was reclassified a bit?

Professor Tim Lang: Yes, it would, because it is the only notional advice on which government is unified. Whether you eat in a prison or eat at a restaurant, or cook and eat your own food at home, in theory, this is what we as a nation are aspiring to eat. If you did not know that, you now do.

Lord Lilley: Does Lady Lilley?

Professor Tim Lang: I will leave that to your domestic relationship.

Baroness Northover: You mean in what she is asking you to cook for her.

Professor Tim Lang: I think that James would probably add that we ought to be having the carbon footprint of that. He was rightly saying that life-cycle assessment and analysis is pretty easy now. We have developed the methodologies. They are accurate, they are agreed, and there are PAS schemes that ratify what they are and should be, and how they should be done.

We need to do that for food's impact on biodiversity and on soil and embedded water. People such as me are arguing that we should have embedded water as a factor in what a choice of diet is. Water and biodiversity both end up, as the carbon analysis does, by saying the quickest improvement one can make, both as an individual and as a population, is to cut down on meat and dairy.

The Chair: Shall we get Henry in to answer on the economics?

Henry Dimbleby: Just a quick footnote on that answer first. SACN is a group of scientists who work to direct government—I think it stands for the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. It recommends the

specific diet in words and numbers. That was taken by Public Health England and turned into a communication device, which was the eatwell plate. The Government need to add to that group, to create a new committee—very wonkish—on nutrition and sustainability of food that comes up with the numbers.

As for who then turns that into communication, it will probably be, just because someone has to do it, Chris Whitty's new group, which has taken a lot of Public Health England in, OHID, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. There will need to be some government working. That is what needs to happen there.

Going back to farming and subsidies, as you all know, before the Second World War we grew about 30% of our own food. There was a great risk if that were to be cut off. By the end of the Second World War—thanks to payments to farmers to grow up hedges and to grow more food, and directives to grow less meat; the Government said we needed to grow much more wheat and vegetables because meat is incredibly inefficient—we ended up growing about 75% of our food.

With the expansion of the European market, those subsidies continued to grow in two ways—direct subsidies for growing food and at the same time subsidies in the form of trade barriers. For example, Italy argued for huge tariffs on rice to protect the northern Italian rice market. It is just one example of a trade barrier. Those of us who are old enough to be alive then—probably all of us—remember that that led to overproduction, butter mountains and wine lakes, and so on and so forth.

Basic payments in the UK were effectively putting up land prices and rents for tenant farmers. The economics of it all went straight through the system and made land more valuable. Clearly, that is not a good use of taxpayer money.

The intention now is to move those payments, rather than just increase the price of land, to create environmental goods—to sequester carbon, to restore biodiversity, and to maintain cultural assets, in some cases. I do not think anyone is suggesting, for example, that the Dales should be turned into woodland. Those walls and pastures are very important culturally. What will happen to the level of food is that, largely speaking, the upland farms, the livestock farms, which are the most worried about it, can be more productive. They will have fewer ruminants, but they will still have ruminants doing sustainable grazing, and they will have more wildlife. Most of the farmers who have made the transition have more people working on the farm and are putting more back into the economy.

By continuing the basic payment, you are either putting up the price of land or, if you are subsidising wheat or the big calorie producers, you are subsidising things in a global market.

You need to keep an eye on food security, as has happened. I agree with Tim. Defra produced a very good food security report in December, which I strongly recommend everyone read if you have not read it. We need to

keep an eye on it, but I do not think that stopping payments for the environment to sequester carbon to change the climate—to stop biodiversity collapse—is the right answer to the food crisis we have at the moment.

That may change. If it becomes the case that our trading links with the rest of the world are severed, if we have the equivalent of U-boats stopping food coming from the continent to us, it would be a different situation, and it would require a different response. If you keep an eye on the overall level of food that we produce, and keep it over 60%, you have time, as the Second World War showed, to make that transition.

Lord Lilley: That does not answer the question, but—

Henry Dimbleby: Ask it again and I will definitely answer it more directly.

Lord Lilley: I agree with you. I wondered why you thought it was economically illiterate to encourage more food production.

Henry Dimbleby: Because it does not make you have more food available in this country. Basic payments do not do that. That is why, for the reason I gave.

Lord Lilley: I entirely agree with you that if we pay £5 billion to farmers it goes through to landowners eventually, but if we pay it in proportion to the food they produce, they will produce more food; if we pay it in proportion to the number of cowslips they grow, they will grow more cowslips. It will end up in the hands of landowners—you are quite right.

Henry Dimbleby: If you pay people to produce more wheat, on a global market, that will end up as a subsidy. The total will be spread out. You might grow a bit more in this country, but it is not a good use of money when the problem that you have is poor people not being able to afford wheat. The problem is not that we do not grow enough wheat in this country. The problem is that over the next three years people will go hungry because they cannot afford the food. If you are making a decision between paying farmers to grow wheat and paying for the least affluent in society to be able to afford food, the problem you are trying to solve is the latter, not the former.

Lord Lilley: I agree with you. That was the correct answer to the question, and you have pointed out the error in my question.

The Chair: On that note of agreement, I would make a point about the food security report that Henry referred to. It is a very good read but was produced the day after the House went up, which ensured that there was insufficient parliamentary scrutiny, suggesting that there are plenty of interesting nuggets for us to pull out that the Government did not wish us to look at.

Q104 **The Duke of Wellington:** I declare my agriculture interests as detailed on the register.

May I address my question to Henry Dimbleby? I think you said, and I hope I wrote this down correctly, that 75% of agricultural land is used in some way for meat production. I hope I understood that correctly. I think by that you mean that a lot of agricultural land is dedicated to the growing of crops that are fed to animals. I think that is what you were saying. Of course, we have to recognise that in this country we have a lot of permanent pasture, or uplands or lowlands in pasture. I think that livestock grazed on this ground is actually environmentally quite efficient and quite benign, because what else do you do with permanent pasture other than plant trees, which does not help food production? There is a huge distinction between meat that is pasture grazed and meat that is fed in a feedlot in South America, North America, the Far East or Australia, where the environmental impact is considerable. I suggest that when you consider these matters you ought to make a huge distinction about where the meat comes from rather than simply saying that we have to reduce the consumption of all meat.

Henry Dimbleby: I think that you are right in what you say, but I would add on to that. Some 75% of the land globally used to produce meat, as you say, covers both the land that grows soy or beet, or whatever it is that is used to feed the animals, and the pasture. In fact, so much of the meat that we eat in the UK is fed from soy grown abroad, so 85% of our total food footprint is used for pasture and food grown here and abroad to feed to animals.

I think it is too simple to say that we are just going to reduce the consumption of grain-fed meat. The reason for that is twofold. First, if you are looking at just a carbon footprint, grazed meat in a horrific feedlot system is lower carbon than meat grown on pasture, so it is complicated.

The second reason is that a lot of the pasture in this country is grazed pretty intensively using quite a lot of nitrogen. What we need to do with that pasture is to get a bit of that land back. At the moment, we farm about 70% of our countryside. In our report we say that we think you need to take about 5% to 8% of that, which will be very low producing—20% of our land produces about 3% of our calories on the least productive land. You need to take 5% to 8% of that, and pretty much take it out of production and use it for trees, restoring bogs, restoring nature. Even on that land there might be a little conservation grazing by native ruminants.

For some of the other pasture, you need to incentivise farmers to graze it in a less environmentally harmful way. It needs to be more attractive for farmers to reduce sheep numbers per hectare and to introduce more trees and more environmental benefits on those pastures.

Finally, if we manage to do that in this country, we have to be much harder at the border, because it is not sensible to create that change in this country and just let in cheap Australian beef grown on land that has recently been deforested to undercut our farmers.

In summary, saying, "Grain bad, pasture good. We are a land but not a pasture", is a little too simple and might lead to the prevention of environmental measures that need to come into place in this country.

The Duke of Wellington: I completely understand that it is a much more nuanced and complex issue, but I was trying to simplify it because somebody said, quite rightly, that we need to give simple messages to the consumer.

Professor Tim Lang: There could be a different grading system for meat and dairy. Henry is quite right, and the data is very clear, both nationally and internationally, that meat and dairy reduction has a very big beneficial environmental impact, particularly in relation to carbon, but how the meat is grown is a critical issue. We probably need to have a more consumer-appropriate and consumer-intelligible grading system of non-grain-fed meat, a bit like we have done over the last 30 years with poultry. The public gets free range, barn-reared, et cetera—the different categories. We need to have new categories for different types of meat: how that meat has been grown, what its inputs are, not just carbon but land use.

The Chair: Moving on within that theme to Lord Colgrain.

Q105 **Lord Colgrain:** My question follows on very directly from that. I must declare my interests in the register as a beef farmer, and that is even more relevant to the question.

What are your views on proposals to tax meat products due to the greenhouse gas emissions associated with their production?

James Hand: In a situation where we have unfettered free markets, the price mechanism has to be a key allocation of resources, especially, as we have discussed, where there is some degree of regulatory capture as well.

The practical side of it is really important. If we are thinking about a tax, it must be a tax on carbon, not necessarily a tax on a category. Beef will almost always have a higher carbon footprint than potatoes. That does not mean that there is not a big spread between the different methods of production that we have just spoken about, in the same way as cheese has quite a high carbon footprint because it needs a lot of milk, or prawns farmed unsustainably on old mangrove forest can have an even higher carbon footprint.

It is really important to remember that it is about linking it to the right carbon outcomes, which will require a huge amount more information. We must also reflect on the fact that someone's personal carbon footprint from food is one part of it. If we are going to have a carbon tax that is trying to shift behaviour, we also need to consider other areas such as flights, cars and the items we purchase—electrical items and those sorts of things—all of which can have a much higher carbon footprint than red meat in somebody's diet.

Using a price of around £75 per tonne for carbon, which is what the head of the OECD suggests, is 15p extra per person per day for the average red meat consumer. It is material but a lot less than, for example, a flight to Spain, which can emit hundreds of kilos of carbon in just a few hours, or the £9 to fill up a big SUV.

The key thing is that it really gets to the heart of the overall carbon and that it is progressive. Carbon footprints in this country and around the world are deeply unequal. The top 1% of people have carbon footprints of 50 tonnes and above. That compares to a global average of just 5 tonnes, or in the UK 9 tonnes, so the right people have to be paying the right price for the carbon they are emitting. Rather than picking a specific category, I think it needs to go across all those areas.

Professor Tim Lang: I declare an interest. I am one of the advisers on the advisory group Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health. I have been in favour of having taxation of that. I am also on the advisory group of the Cambridge monitoring study of the impact of the soft drinks levy.

Taxation works. A famous Nuffield Council on Bioethics report chaired by Lord John Krebs produced a ladder of interventions. At the bottom, you are on ground level and you are doing nothing. You say, "I see no problems", and you do nothing. You gradually climb up the ladder and start with labelling and information, et cetera, and end up with tough fiscal measures such as taxation and laws—bans, ultimately, or prescription of one form or t'other.

Taxing seems to be very draconian and somehow un-British, but it is effective. There are good grounds for taxing meat, but it goes back to the previous discussions answering the Duke of Wellington: what sort of meat, how has it been produced, what is its footprint, its carbon footprint, its land volume and its embedded water? There are different metrics one would need.

If, ultimately, there is to be meat taxation, careful thought needs to be given to what its impacts are, what it is trying to improve, and what it is trying to prevent. I am in favour of push and pull strategies. Taxation is good. If it is linked to public goods, public benefit, public health gains, it is a good thing. We are seeing that in salt and sugar taxation. It works. It works internationally.

The arguments against it are that it hits the poor, who can ill afford it. At a time of cost of living difficulties, that is not necessarily good thinking. It is partly why, we presumed, the Prime Minister dismissed Henry's proposal for taxation extension, but I think it has to be kept on the boil. It would be a stupid Government or a stupid country that said it will not think about taxing. However, it must be located among other hard as opposed to soft interventions. There are many forms of hard intervention. I am not agin meat taxation, but how and what sort of meat need to be thought through. Just meat per se is not good enough.

It should be taken seriously. The arguments about taxing salt and sugar went through similar horror and, "We can't do that", and, lo and behold, we can, and we have, and it works. It may come, but I think big events are more likely to change meat production than that. I am with Henry. The critical issue is to turn off the tap of grain being fed in meat production. That is the key thing. If anything, I would want to tax grain being grown for animal food. We have to put animals back into their Darwinian niche. They have been taken out of their ecological niche. Historically, it is thousands of years, but the meat transition of the last 70 years globally is staggering. It is the runaway planetary change.

Lord Colgrain: Henry, do you want to put animals back in their Darwinian niche?

Henry Dimbleby: I do not know.

Professor Tim Lang: The answer is yes.

Henry Dimbleby: Tax works. I do not think it is the right time to do it now. I think it will probably happen.

There are two reasons why I do not think it is the right time to do it now. The first is, as the others have said, that it is incredibly complicated. It is very difficult to tax for a number of different things. If you assume the tax is a carbon tax, there is simply no way you can tell reliably from a dead carcass, or a carcass ready for sale, or even if you are able to visit the farm, what the carbon footprint of that meat is. It varies wildly depending on the production method. What we know about taxes is that people try to avoid them, and if you cannot absolutely guarantee measurement, it will become a complete mess. A further reason why it is complicated, as Tim alluded to, is that not only is it expensive but if it is a carbon tax the proportional tax on mince, say—a cheap cut, but there is pretty much as much carbon in mince as there is in fillet steak—will be much higher than on a fillet steak, which is incredibly regressive.

That feeds into the second reason why I do not think you can tax now. I think it is simply politically impossible. I said in the report, and I go into this in great detail, that if you put a tax on meat at the level of what the OECD currently reckons the cost of carbon is—£75 a tonne—you would get people out on the street. I think you would genuinely get civil disorder.

Unless for some reason the commercial campaigns work and we start reducing our meat intake individually, the easiest route to it happening is the introduction of carbon border taxes in high-carbon areas, so specifically steel, and then meat. You will need to be able to measure it better by production system, but because the meat produced here is generally lower carbon than, say, Brazilian or Australian meat, not American meat, you can imagine it being set at a threshold where it does not hit British farmers, again making it politically possible, but excludes meat grown to the worst possible standards, and then bringing it down

over time as the effects of climate change become more and more apparent and the Government get more and more space to act.

It is a bit like smoking. If your first act in smoking had been to ban smoking in pubs and restaurants overnight, rather than that being on the back of a 20-year campaign, you would have had civil unrest. Much as we would like it, it is very difficult for Governments to do anything that would lead to them being overthrown.

Q106 **Baroness Northover:** In this question you have already addressed a lot of the issues, so perhaps you might want to look at this as "any other points", as it were, and how we create change.

What recommendations would you make to the Government regarding how they approach behaviour change in relation to food?

James Hand: It reiterates some of the things we have talked about so far: the need for urgency and the need for not avoiding detail about the scale of the changes that people need to make in their lives this decade if we are going limit global warming to 1.5 degrees. They are enormous. Any recommendation has to include consideration of that. We do not have time for the small steps.

The other one we mentioned is around open data. The more datasets there are around—carbon, land or water—the more innovation there will be to bring those datasets to life, in a way that can help people to understand their role in fighting climate change. There are hundreds of thousands of people every day across this country thinking and worrying about this issue. They are ready for the urgency, and they are ready for the inevitable solutions. Datasets that provide structure and then provide commonality would be an incredibly powerful tool for the many organisations that are already attempting that, to bring solutions to individuals that they can use.

Henry Dimbleby: I am assuming the question is: what recommendations should you make to government in the report that comes out of this, rather than what recommendations would I make to government—because I have obviously spent two years and done a report on it? I think this is a really interesting question.

Baroness Northover: Perhaps both—what we might say and what you might wish to say.

Henry Dimbleby: I will come to the first point about what you might say. You will clearly be thinking about your power in this debate—where do you have the ability to push something forward that needs tipping over the line? To do that you will need to do something that is picked up not just in Parliament but more broadly.

Therefore, there will be a tension because, as Tim said, to do that you will want to be bold to get news. I think there is a danger in recommending a whole bunch of new stuff. We have all said the same things. There is some quite basic stuff that just needs to get pushed over

the line. The things from my recommendations that I think will be most important for you to bang home are guaranteeing the budget for agricultural payments and ensuring that that farming transition continues, creating the rural land use framework, and getting trade right.

We are at a tipping point on trade. We might be seeing the Government move in a different direction, but it is still up for grabs.

We need the national food system data programme and, finally, a legislative response that sets targets, and a body that reviews the Government against how they are doing on sustainability. I will write this in an email to you, if that is helpful.

It is about how you do not create a whole bunch of new stuff, but you reinforce and push on what is in the system, while creating enough of a splash to get the work you are doing out there. I think that will be the tension that you face in the recommendations that you put in your report.

Baroness Northover: May I follow up on that briefly? You made reference to changes that have, in effect, been brought into the health Bill, the push for addressing inequalities. When you were talking about that, were you making reference to the changes that have just been agreed, and seeking to ensure they are not just, as it were, addressing health and social inequalities but climate change as well?

Henry Dimbleby: You mean the Government's regulatory targets.

Baroness Northover: Changes that have just been agreed to the health Bill trying to address inequalities, building on Marmot, et cetera, over many years, and led cross-party by a number of people including Professor Kakkar. That is what I thought you were referring to, but perhaps not. If you have any thoughts on that perhaps send us a note later.

Henry Dimbleby: When they broke up Public Health England, the original organisation that Chris Whitty was going to run was to be called the office for health protection, and it changed its name to OHID—the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. That is a fantastically powerful change, because one of the big problems, broadly speaking, with health in this country is that half the politicians have traditionally seen prevention/protection of public health as a nannying thing, and changing that narrative into a levelling-up narrative could be absolutely transformational in the way we think about preventing bad health. If that is your question, I am all for it.

The Climate Change Committee reports annually on climate change. If I was to do anything to stop some other poor sod having to do again what I have done in five years' time and keep momentum—which is what happened; Tim did this eight years before me and before him someone else did it—I would say that the FSA should do it, but you could get, for example, a joint report from Chris Whitty, Susan Jebb at the FSA, and Glenys Stacey at the Office for Environmental Protection, and

government mandates that some group of organisations holds them to account on their ambitions in the food system and suggests ways they can improve what they are doing.

The Climate Change Committee has been incredibly freeing for government in creating the space it can move into. They need to not see that as irritating and outside interference but embrace the fact that having that kind of reporting across Parliament on government action on massive structural problems can really move the political space in which the Government can move.

Professor Tim Lang: I would like to echo exactly where Henry ended up. In my *Feeding Britain* book I recommended that your Lordships create a new food policy committee, to hold the Government to account, to integrate the different bits of the food system. My colleague and ex-PhD student Dr Kelly Parsons produced a brilliant report last year, and another one this year, showing how the bits of food thinking spread across government. We have to integrate that. I think you have a very important role in that. One of the recommendations I made was that we have a food policy committee in the Lords and ideally in the Commons, but certainly we could have a food security and sustainability committee, which is basically an expansion of your role.

The most important of the other things I would like to see, and I think all the three of us have been saying this implicitly, is that there has to be a political will from government. We are not getting that. We are not getting a clear direction. I am highly critical of how the food system was addressed in the Covid crisis. I understand why it was done in that way, just handing the responsibility to nine retailers. It was not a political mechanism for addressing climate change, or the biodiversity crisis, or the transition of diets that we now know has to happen and in little ways is beginning to happen at the edges of British society. Political will is critical.

Thirdly, I would like to see a recommendation from you and from government for the new committee, possibly in the way of the tripartite coalition that Henry was just pointing to—and I have a lot of time for that thinking, by the way—to replace the eatwell dietary guidelines with workable, sustainable dietary guidelines. Many reports have called for that. It is implicit in what the Climate Change Committee has stated. Make that one of your clear recommendations. It is doable. The three bodies could come together and produce a new set of sustainable dietary guidelines that got a grip of diet's impact on climate change, and other environmental impacts.

The fourth point that I think is critical for you to recommend is to start treating the public as adults, as grown-ups, to stop this under-information, this allowing market choice to be a fantasy for carrying on with self-harm. We do not salute and support self-harm on alcohol or tobacco, yet we are doing it in food. As a nation we are allowing ourselves to undermine the future and future generations. The Welsh Government have a future generations Act, which was trying to get that

sort of long-term thinking. The English Government have to get a grip now in a post-Brexit world, and they are not doing so. They are treating consumers as idiots and keeping them in the dark, systematically. That has to stop.

The final point I would make is that, even though the time that we have to have an impact to reduce diet's terrible toll on rising global heating is short, there has to be some mapping. I do not know whether James or Henry would agree. There has to be some phasing in of this change. We know where we ought to be in eight years or 20 years' time. We need to come back from that and set ourselves goals as a country for reducing the carbon footprint of the food system, and do it systematically, and engage people in that. That is what the climate assembly came up with. That is what all the citizens juries end up asking: "Why weren't we told?", and, "Let's get on with it". That needs to be done at a national level. I do not see anyone but government who can do that. It cannot be offshored. It cannot be handed over to the food industry to do it. The industry has to be part of that transition, but it too is constantly looking over its shoulder: "If I do something radical in my company, I'll make my product more expensive". It is too product focused, not food-system focused. I see that as action that we need to do if we are going to be bold.

It is either that or we carry on walking into climate disaster. That is what we are doing at the moment. Britain is still the chair of COP 26. It will be a scandal—a hypocrisy of Britain—if it does not use these remaining few months to hand over to a developing country, Egypt, for COP 27 some better thinking than we had exhibited at Glasgow last year. It was pathetic, frankly. It was shameful. The only good thing that came out of it is the shockwaves among very big organisations and indeed companies, which said, "We can't have silence about food any more." There is a bit of feeling—I do not know whether Henry would agree—of what happened in the run-up to Paris in the climate change agreement of 2015. The shock of the failure of Copenhagen to address climate change led to very powerful unholy alliances getting together and saying, "Governments have actually got to be made to do this." I think we have that over sustainable diets. There is really big agreement that this cannot go on. We are sleepwalking in self-harm into really serious climate heating.

Henry Dimbleby: I wanted to pick up on one point about what happened during Covid. First, I am not sure the story has ever really been told, and I think it offers a way in which government could work more closely with the food industry in future.

Tim said they handed off food supply to the nine supermarkets. What actually happened was that in February some of us in Defra were asking ourselves the question: are we actually going to be able to get enough food to bellies? Is there going to be food in the right places for people to eat, and are we sure we can guarantee that will be the case? We realised that the food security assessments that had been done were not built for the context of Covid and the pandemic. We could not guarantee at that

stage; we could not absolutely hand on heart say that was going to happen.

Just before 23 March, when government went into lockdown, we set up the snappily named Food Resilience Industry Forum—FRIF—chaired by a fantastic man called Chris Tyas. The Government suspended competition law and every morning we had not just the big supermarkets but people representing the corner shops, et cetera, on a forum saying, "What are the big problems you are having? How are we going to tackle them?"

There were basically three issues that we faced. The first was, as I said, whether the food was going to get to the right places. The two biggest problems turned out to be not harvests abroad but, first, how we managed communication to prevent panic buying because of the way in which the food system was set up, with not a lot of warehouses across country. The other problem was that the 25% of our calories eaten out of home were shut off overnight. Suddenly, businesses that were supplying 75% of our food were having to supply 100% of our food.

Secondly, everyone stayed at home, so all the food buying went from the supermarkets to the local corner stores. There was a huge shift away from supermarkets in terms of where the food was bought.

We then had detailed conversations about how you change the logistics to get the food out to corner shops where people were now living—how you repackage, change labelling regulations so you can repackage things that were destined for the retail sector to go to homes, and so on and so forth.

Then we moved on to the packages for people who just could not go to shops because they were vulnerable, and, finally, how you get food to people in food poverty.

That was a massive state intervention in the food system. It was possible because over 100,000 people were going to die that year as a result of Covid—but that number of people die every year as a result of their general diet. What you see from what happened during Covid is that if the threat is big enough there is room for quite massive government intervention, and that it is about people understanding how big the boiling of the frog is—the threat that has built up with us over a long period—and, therefore, the requirement to have much larger government intervention in peace time, outside the pandemic, to solve those problems.

I have a slightly different take. What happened in Covid, rather than being an example of government leaving it to supermarkets, is an example of how government can work in a much more interventionist way when it needs to, which it does when it comes to the ongoing food system.

Baroness Northover: You made a very interesting point about how companies responded to people's response to labelling. It was not that it

is influencing individuals, but it was influencing companies. One thing that has not come through from these conclusions, but perhaps a little more is there, is what you can do to use that lever on companies so they see it as in their interest to change the way this is organised. I think some of that has come through in what has just been said, and what government can do to make that change.

Professor Tim Lang: I bow to Henry's account, which was really very good, and very interesting. One of the points we are all making is that there are many reports—I have the behavioural insights report here from two years ago. There are 12 very strong recommendations. They all need doing. Unless we have political will to do that in the vein that Henry has just been talking about, nothing will happen. It will all be what I have called in other writings the wrong consumer syndrome. If nothing good is happening, it must be because consumers are self-defeating. We have to break out of this lock-in that we have at the moment. That requires government to take a lead. It is the only legitimate co-ordination function it has. That does not mean to say it needs to be dirigiste; it can be facilitated, in the way Henry described.

At what point are we going to do it? That is the question for your Lordships. At what point of difficulty over climate change will the Government say, "Actually, we have got to get a grip on this"? I can tell you that among scientists the feeling is very sober indeed. Out of official forums, everyone says we are just heading for the iceberg and that the confidence and arrogance are misplaced.

Q107 **Baroness Boycott:** I just want to say that this committee reached out to the supermarkets. We had interesting replies that you may or may not have read. Sainsbury's said that it could not send a rep because the main person was on leave. Tesco said that it was in a closed period while it scaled back activity, commercial confidentiality—blah, blah—and, "We do not have defined views in a number of the areas".

It is brilliant having you. Most of us around the table agree with a lot of what you say, but what do we do as a committee when the supermarkets will not come, they send pathetic excuses and not even any answers to the questions? Henry, you gave a good example of stuff working around Covid. I know how much you have worked with the supermarkets on the food strategy. What do you say we should do about the fact that they will not step forward?

Henry Dimbleby: I think it is incredibly difficult. Funnily enough, I was having this discussion this morning with a former CEO of a supermarket about how you get better interaction between government and food. At the moment, you have the public face of food, the Food and Drink Federation, which is a complete lobbying body trying to stop any change. Privately, you have a bunch of CEOs. The supermarkets are much less threatened by all this than the fast-moving consumer goods companies because they can change what they buy, whereas the fast-moving consumer goods companies have factories.

When Lord Krebs at the FSA told them that salt was going to become their smoking, they all thought it was ridiculous and were outraged. They now broadly accept that this is a real problem for us as a society, and they want to cause problems. The food sector is quite irritated generally by the crossness they saw from the public health bodies, who were so cross about things that they demonised the food sector.

I am trying to work out how you create an intelligent conversation on, for example, not just tax but other measures of restriction where you could say, "If we wanted to reduce the number of sweets a supermarket sold, doing it this way would be stupid. You could do it this way. It would be more effective. This way would have fewer unintended consequences". We had that for the first time in hospitality during the pandemic. We had it on food supply. I think that kind of conversation based on a national goal, a national priority, is what needs to happen. It will involve characters, politicians and supermarket CEOs. To begin with it will involve a small number of people, and that will grow, but I think it is very difficult.

Professor Tim Lang: I agree that it is very difficult. Henry said it all. That said, I am a food policy analyst and I have read across many countries' and indeed our own country's history, and big changes can happen, against all the odds. I am further back than Henry is in terms of where we are. I am meeting people around the world, and indeed in Britain, arguing, "Look, if ever government wants to know what the science says, we need to spell it out for them, yet again". There are very clear things, and I think the three of us as witnesses have been saying the sorts of practical things that if the Government wished they would be able to do them. They are all there. Their own advice tells them the things to do, but they are not doing it.

We are sleepwalking into crisis, and I think crisis will mean the changes will happen and it will be ugly and nasty. There are people inside the food industries who see the writing on the wall. They know that big changes are necessary. They are held back by the fear of competition. They are held back by trading relationships and by fear of breaking ranks. They remember Iceland—the company, not the country—going organic and then nearly collapsing when it did not work out quite that way. They are very nervous about big change.

There has to be a building of trust and at a global level there is a lot of that going on. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the big health and environmental foundations are all getting together with the welfare organisations and consumer bodies. There is a gathering of the clans going on to put pressure on Governments internationally. Britain, which is the sixth richest economy in the world, should be taking a lead on it. We have been chair of COP 26. We fluffed it when it came to food and diet.

It is about political will, and political pressure is the only thing that will make a difference—that, or crisis will.

James Hand: We do not have the influence to affect what the supermarkets are doing, but we can equip people with the information when they are in the supermarket. It is perfectly possible to leave a supermarket with a very sustainable, healthy basket of food. That is the approach we have taken. We cannot change the availability and the position on the shelf. We can help them see what good looks like. That is the only approach we have found at the moment that can actually—

Baroness Boycott: It puts all the responsibility back on the consumer.

James Hand: It puts a lot, and, as I was saying earlier, we need to address this at every single level for the speed that we need. We are focusing on helping the individual, but it is even better if that comes at the same time by companies taking responsibility, as well as really strong, clear policy guidelines.

The Chair: On that note, I thank all three witnesses for a fascinating session. You have given us some bold recommendations. I think you all used that phrase. We know there is a crisis that needs sorting, and it has been good to hear some evidence today. We have sat on previous committees where, sadly, some of the witnesses have not been prepared to be quite as bold as you have. Thank you very much. You have given us a lot to think about.