

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Food Security, HC 622

Tuesday 13 December 2022

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Members present: Sir Robert Goodwill (Chair); Ian Byrne; Rosie Duffield; Dr Neil Hudson; Julian Sturdy; Robbie Moore; Geraint Davies.

Questions 231 - 299

Witnesses

I: Dr Kelly Parsons, Post-doctoral Researcher, MRC Epidemiology Unit, University of Cambridge; Professor Tim Lang, Emeritus Professor of Food Policy, City, University of London.

II: Emily Hunter, Lead Policy Advocate on Land Use, Woodland Trust; Mark Tufnell, President, Country Land and Business Association (CLA); Professor Michael Winter OBE, Professor of Agricultural Change, Centre for Rural Policy Research, University of Exeter.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Dr Kelly Parsons, Post-doctoral Researcher, MRC Epidemiology Unit, University of Cambridge](#)
- [Woodland Trust](#)
- [Country Land and Business Association \(CLA\)](#)
- [Professor Michael Winter OBE, Professor of Agricultural Change, Centre for Rural Policy Research, University of Exeter](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Kelly Parsons and Professor Tim Lang.

Q231 **Chair:** Welcome to this session of the EFRA Committee, where we continue our inquiry on food security. I would like to ask our two witnesses, our distinguished academics, to introduce themselves.

Dr Parsons: I am Kelly Parsons. I am a research associate at the University of Cambridge in the MRC Epidemiology Unit. My research interests are food systems and the policies and governance structures related to them. I have a particular interest in the procedural aspects of policymaking and the tools that can be used to connect food policy, like national food strategies.

Chair: You are just the person we need to talk to.

Professor Lang: I am Tim Lang. I am Professor Emeritus—which means I am retired but booted upstairs—of food policy at the Centre for Food Policy at City, University of London.

Q232 **Chair:** The first question is like the exam question in your finals. Do you think the Government's food strategy will make a material difference to the UK's food security?

Dr Parsons: When analysing food policies, I find it important to compare them on two different aspects. One is the substantive policy measures that they have proposed, so the "what". What concrete actions will be taken to target health, environment, the economy and so on? That might be a regulation, a tax or an information campaign. The second is the "how". How will the policy happen? How will food policymaking be organised to deliver that strategy or policy? If you want the "what" to happen, you really need to think about the "how" as well.

On both those aspects, the Government's food strategy measures up quite poorly, particularly on the latter, and particularly if compared to the national food strategy independent review by Henry Dimbleby, which I will call the independent review for clarity. Because of those shortcomings, there is a risk that the food strategy is added to this list that we have of national-level food policies that have been developed with high-level ambitions but have been undermined by poor design and implementation.

I have included a comparison of the two strategies—the Henry Dimbleby independent review and the Government food strategy—in terms of their substantive and procedural aspects in my submission, but I just want to mention a couple of things. The independent review has a very clear set of recommendations for measures aimed at preventing harms the food system is doing to our bodies and the environment. Those are both innovative, new measures like the salt and sugar reformulation tax, but also ways to improve existing policies, like public procurement, which we



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know are not working as well as they could, learning from best practice around the world.

The Government's food strategy has some good measures in there, but because of the way it is written, it is not always clear whether it is referring to aspirations or concrete policy measures, or whether the actions it is talking about are existing policy measures or new things that it is going to do. We know for sure that concrete measures from the independent review like the sugar and salt reformulation tax and expanding free school meals are definitely not in there.

Some of the recommendations have been taken up but deferred, looking for more evidence or consultation. The problem with this type of deferment is it undermines the momentum and political support, which is the whole reason for doing these national food strategy exercises in the first place. It also fragments the action and makes it harder to track and drive progress.

Secondly, on the procedural side of things, the Government food strategy falls well short of what was in the independent review. The review lays out the systemic nature of the food system and the fragmented nature of food policymaking, and a really strong package of procedural measures to improve food policymaking. I will not list them all out, but they are all in there. The team did some dedicated work looking at options to address the current criticisms of food policymaking and to learn lessons from previous national food strategies.

Some of that team had been involved in previous national food strategy projects so they knew what to look out for. They tried to create some institutional arrangements that would embed a longer-term approach and avoid some of the problems that have happened in the past, where changes of Government have meant that strategies have just been shelved. There were lots of other very positive things that they did such as supporting local food policy and action and local food plans or addressing poor institutional memory.

I could go on, but in summary I would say that the Government food strategy is weak. It recognises that Defra is responsible for food policy, and it talks about the fact that there are levers across Government to influence the food system and it is going to join up, but it gives no details on how that is going to happen. The evidence suggests that it will be very challenging to make that happen without any other supports, institutional changes and so on.

Q233 Chair: If you were going to mark them out of 10, how many would you give them? Is that an unfair question?

Dr Parsons: It is probably a bit unfair. On the substantive side, I would say 5; maybe it could go up if some of the other measures are implemented later. On the procedural side, we are really at the low end, so a 2.



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Q234 **Chair:** Would you agree with that, Professor Lang?

Professor Lang: I will be blunter than Kelly Parsons.

Chair: She was quite blunt.

Professor Lang: She was, but she was doing it in a very erudite way. I will be shorter and say no, I do not think it will make much difference. If I was asked to give a score, I would be lower than Kelly. If I was generous, I would give it 4, but it is a waste of trees. It is a shame trees were cut down to deliver it, because it does not say much substantively.

I will add another criticism to those that Kelly just outlined. There is a general problem at the moment in the discourse about food security. It thinks that history began with Dimbleby. It did not. We have been here before. After the oil price crisis of 2007-08, a massive learning operation went on inside Whitehall and inside the Government, and it led to a very big, three-year process of discussion and development of strategy and research. I was involved in that with colleagues of Kelly's and mine.

It ended up with a formulated, indicator-rich strategy called Food 2030. It was agreed across the food industry and across the Government. Structures were created inside Whitehall. A Cabinet sub-committee on food was created. A civil service shadow was created. All of the structures were there, and it was abolished within two months of the coalition getting in.

It is really important to know that history, because the mess, the vagueness and the weakness that Kelly was referring to, which almost all of us outside think about the Government food strategy, is doubly a shame because we were in a better place 12 years ago. It could have been kept on. There was nothing ideologically that the coalition could not have kept running, but they did not. Ever since then, we have a drift. What is worse is that what was attempting to create an integrated food policy has become a fragmented food policy. I do not think Kelly was quite saying that, so I will add that as another criticism.

Q235 **Chair:** Would you say that it is heavy on agrifood?

Professor Lang: It is heavy on farming. The farming focus troubles me. I am a food policy and food systems man. Farming is very important, but it is not the most important thing in employment or value-adding or in terms of impact on public health, let alone the environment. We have to think more food systemically and not just about farming. There are great weaknesses in the ideological framework of the Government's food strategy that the Dimbleby report was trying to break away from. In the critique of the junk food cycle, it was thinking about post-farm interventions in raising the issues of ultra-processed foods. It was trying to think about consumption patterns. It was trying to look at inequalities in health, and not just a rather vague notion of levelling up. To what?



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The Government food strategy does not add any heft. It does not get any grip upon the reality that industry analysts, let alone academics like Kelly and me, think is needed. On international terms, it passes as very weak. We have left the European Union. Over 24 miles away, there is the farm to fork strategy, which is now an integrated food strategy. Britain led the criticisms of the old common agricultural policy, and we have gone backwards.

I would urge the Committee to think about the history. Excellent though some aspects of the Dimbleby report are, and there is much to salute it for, history did not begin with it.

Q236 **Chair:** Kelly, you talked about international comparators and best practice. If you were to point at another country or bloc around the world to say, "They are doing it right", is there anywhere we should look at as an example to follow?

Dr Parsons: We should definitely look to Scotland and what is happening there with the Good Food Nation Bill. That has been a long time coming, but there is a really promising approach there. Obviously, we do not have any evaluation of what the impact of that is going to be, but there are a lot of good measures being put in place that are potentially world leading.

In a different way, the Scandinavian countries have put a lot of resource and political leadership behind food policy and making changes to their food systems. There have been some really impressive transformations of their food supply and food culture because of the resources they have put in.

In Brazil, there were some really good examples of ways that you can set up governance mechanisms to include outside stakeholders and do cross-Government working, which are always held up as the example of how to really do it well. They were under the Administration before last and were disbanded under Bolsonaro, but there is a possibility that they may be reintroduced in some way. They have a very robust approach to making policy, including outsiders and addressing food insecurity in a way that targets health but also really supports farmers in the country.

Q237 **Chair:** Do you think policy in Scotland is being driven by the fact that they probably have one of the worst diets and health problems in the United Kingdom? Maybe that has concentrated their attention more, or is it a political incentive?

Dr Parsons: Yes, possibly. It has probably helped that Scotland is smaller. It is easier to work across Government and get a bit of momentum going around food. There has been a very active civil society effort there for many years, pushing for this sort of approach. It has built momentum over time. Initially, the Good Food Nation Bill was seen as good but there were flaws in it, whereas what we are seeing coming through now is potentially a much more robust approach.

Q238 **Chair:** Is the problem partly due to the compartmentalisation of



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Government Departments? You have health, agriculture and education, which is responsible for school meals. Do you think that is one of the problems? The Dimpleby report was meant to go across Government, but my impression is that it does not seem to be doing so.

Dr Parsons: In what sense did it not seem to be doing so?

Q239 **Chair:** I mean in terms of going to the Departments. It is, "That is an EFRA report that was commissioned by Michael Gove. That is their thing and somehow we are not fully involved". You are nodding, Professor Lang.

Professor Lang: I am. Of the two of us, Kelly is the expert on the modern analysis. We would both share a view that the British state is very good at fragmenting things, and food policy is an example of something that needs a lot of work to co-ordinate. Its default position is to be fragmented.

You asked about Scotland and the dynamics engendering the advances that most of us around the world think Scotland is making at the moment. I agree with Kelly that size is a very important thing. I chaired the Scottish Government inquiry into the limitations of the diet strategy over 10 years. Scotland has lived with an open discussion of the indignity of having such a bad record of inequalities in health and poor diet. It has been more openly discussed in Scotland than it is in England. In England, the problem is that we accept bad diet and do not think it is something for shame. It needs to be something for shame. We are a rich country. We are a declining power. We know that. We are entering a recession. There is a terrible cost of living crisis, but the normalisation of bad diet is something that Scotland decided it wanted to address.

For me, and I am sure for Kelly too, one of the regrets about the present UK Government's dismissal of the Dimpleby report is that here was a serious attempt to look at the junk food culture and the normalisation of ultra-processed food. When the Monteiro team tried to analyse it, they found that Britain eats the highest percentage of ultra-processed food of any European country. That is something that ought to be a matter of shame, but we have accepted what we would call, in normal circumstances, crap food.

It is something that we ought to be working very hard to reduce, not least because it pays in reducing healthcare bills. It improves people's quality of life and it improves the lived life experience. One of the main problems for public health today is not that you die from food quickly and suddenly; you have years and sometimes decades of bad health before you die. In the academic world, it is the difference between QALYs and DALYs—whether you are disabled or the quality of life. It is about those sorts of issues.

I will go back to the question you asked Kelly. Where is anyone doing anything better? We have different bits around the world where countries



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are beginning to take seriously aspects of this very complex challenge that food poses, but no one is really getting a grip of it. I would rather be honest about it.

My final point—again, Kelly is much more the expert than I am on this—is that we live in a multi-level food world. Britain cannot do things without addressing the global level. It cannot do things unless it addresses the European level, but it is making a ham-fisted attempt at sorting out the UK. We have different powers and different foci at different levels of the devolved Administrations, and there is no intervention at the English level. We can salute Scotland. There is a very interesting process beginning in Wales, which is not dissimilar. There is nothing in England. Dimbleby was trying to kickstart something in England. The Government food strategy knocks that back and it is a shame. It is a scandal, to be honest. It is shocking.

Q240 Geraint Davies: Following your comments, Professor Lang, to what extent are these endemic problems of bad health, obesity and all the rest of it linked to poverty itself? We are at a time now when the Government are saying they are going to put up universal credit by 10% next April, food inflation is 17% and the Food Foundation says one in four people are in food poverty. We can talk about the different sorts of food, but in terms of having enough money to feed the family nutritious food, as opposed to junk food, do you not think that should be an integral part of any food strategy?

Professor Lang: I do, and I am not alone in that. Almost all of us in public health think that is the case. Historically, after the Second World War, there was a very big effort across the world, particularly in the western world, to try to overcome the problems that were experienced in the 1920s and 1930s, which came to a head in the 1940s. The approach that was taken to that, Mr Davies, was to essentially produce more food to try to bring the price down so that people on low incomes could afford it and therefore eat more and have a healthier life.

It was the Beveridge approach. Sir William Beveridge was one of the architects of that way of thinking. He was the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Food in World War I and was brought back to review the food system and preparations for war in 1936. We know him for the 1942 report on health and national insurance, but he got that, and that generation of academics and thinkers and policy people got it.

You raised the issue of poverty. The problem is not poverty; the problem is inequality. Endless studies around the world have shown that, as the quality of eating and the quality of health improves, the gap between rich and poor becomes narrower. There has been a long experiment in Britain for the last 25 years of trying to level up. Under Labour it was something not dissimilar. It was better delivered, but the aspiration was not dissimilar.



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You referred to the Food Foundation. Lots of studies like that show that we have a massive rise in the percentage of the population that now struggles with the cost of food. Having cheaper food does not necessarily resolve the problem of the cost of living and inequalities of health, because food is a flexible item in household expenditure. There are all the fixed costs such as PCP for a car, transport, housing costs, gas, electricity or whatever. What is left over is spent on food. That is not an issue of poverty. It is an issue more about gross inequalities in society, so that is a very important distinction.

Going back to Henry Dimbleby, the independent review and the national food strategy document, he was being very diplomatic. I have great respect for him and what that exercise did. He was being very diplomatic. He was actually looking at food poverty, not at inequalities. We have to take lessons from the way the Government dismissed that in the Government food strategy. Just going for trying to level up a bit is not working and it has not worked. Until we get a really big focus on increasing the amount of flexible money that is left over at the end of the week to be spent on food, we will not resolve the problem of inequalities in health.

- Q241 **Geraint Davies:** In terms of the different Departments passing the ball about their responsibility, perhaps I can turn to Kelly Parsons for a moment. It has been mentioned already that, on the one hand, Defra is responsible for food. Then we have this problem that people simply do not have enough money to buy nutritious food because they do not have social security.

Professor Lang: It is more expensive to eat a healthier diet.

- Q242 **Geraint Davies:** It is linked to inequality and relative cost. Professor Lang mentioned Beveridge and the Ministry of Food. Do you feel that there should be a more centralised, holistic responsibility with real power to deliver outcomes for real people who are currently near starvation?

Dr Parsons: Absolutely I do, yes. A piece of research I did in 2019-20, building on previous work by Professor Lang, mapped out the Departments in England with a role in food policymaking. This identified at least 16 Departments who do something related to food systems or food policy. The idea of that mapping was not to say, "Isn't this terrible and fragmented? What can we do?" It was meant to be a practical tool to dig deeper and say, "What do we want to be more joined up? What do we want to be more connected?" given there have been calls for more joining up for 20 years and we have not got there.

We need to be really careful of making a blanket critique and saying that food policy is not joined up at all and it is just fragmented across. There is a lot of effective co-ordination that goes on between these Departments and other organisations. We saw this very clearly with the food policy response to Covid. There are other examples of really good, connected working on one health, animal and plant health, and at times



on developing cross-Government strategy on obesity. We need to be really clear on what needs to be joined up and what the problems are.

Nevertheless, we can definitely see that there are co-ordination failures. The national food strategy recognised several of those, around aligning trade and agriculture policy and ensuring policy interventions are coherent with the Government's dietary guidelines. This is a basic level of coherence that we should be thinking about when we are making new policies. What does this do for health? What does this do for the environment, our net zero ambitions and so on?

These examples that were raised in the national food strategy are echoing the sorts of examples that have been raised to me when I have done research. What do we need? What is connected? What is not connected? What are the issues and problems with this fragmentation across 16 Departments? If you do not mind, I have some concrete examples of where this is problematic, which might be helpful in thinking about where we might want to address and move forward.

Q243 Geraint Davies: Can you also suggest what we should do? I am not trying to stop you here, but we are aware that there is all this fragmentation. I am wondering what you feel should happen. For example, should we have a Ministry of Food with real power to demand that everybody has sufficient money, somehow or other, to buy enough nutritious food to avoid food poverty? What do you think?

Dr Parsons: There are a lot of different tools that we can use to connect food policy. You can think about them on a spectrum. At the bottom are the day-to-day connections that happen between different civil servants and Ministers working on food across Government. Then at the top end, we might have a Minister for Food, and up around that top end we would have legislative approaches as well, like some kind of food Bill.

What the national food strategy independent review did really well was it proposed a package of measures to try to drive forward progress and make food a more strategic priority. It is just like obesity policy. There is no silver bullet that is going to work. With governance, we need to be careful about thinking that there will be one silver bullet solution that will address it.

For example, we may have a bit of a change in ministerial portfolio, but if the Minister is not particularly engaged or does not think that food is an important political issue, that is not necessarily going to work very well. Legislation is one way of embedding a high-level, long-term approach to strategic priority. We need to potentially have a body looking at monitoring what is going on and monitoring progress, either inside or outside of Government. We need to have some kind of monitoring and tracking of progress and clear reporting. We need to get our evidence base better established. There are lots of things we should be doing.

Q244 Geraint Davies: That is helpful. Professor Lang, you will be familiar with



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Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen's work on poverty, where in essence he found that famine was not caused by a shortage of food but by a combination of high food prices alongside low wages. That would be in clusters that would then develop into starvation. Do you see those conditions now emerging in Britain? Certain communities are facing high prices and they do not have the money. More and more people—millions of people—are going to food banks. How should that be tackled?

Finally, on the issue of the departmental arrangements, do you believe that the Prime Minister should be the leader to say, "We should not have a society where millions of people are in food poverty, and we need to pull together to give them the food they deserve to live"?

Professor Lang: I agree with almost all that you have just said. Since you have asked me the question, I will turn back. Picking up on what Kelly was saying, we need a Cabinet sub-committee on food. You have to get it at that ministerial, co-ordination level. Across Kelly's 16 Departments, there is some ad hocery. Kelly's own research has shown that it is not that they do not talk to each other; there is talking, but it tends to be ad hoc. We need to make it more systematic.

Again, I would urge the Committee to think very seriously about taking it down a level, as Kelly was alluding to. The problem is always England. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are small in population terms and small in the overall picture in the UK food system, and so they have the potential to be much closer to their roots and the people and understanding the problems. England is too amorphous. That is something we have to address.

Are we going to take the eight NHS regions? We could start with that. The regional development agencies were abolished and replaced by the LEPs, the local enterprise partnerships. They have been weak. We really need something at that sub-national English level, which is parallel to Scotland and Wales, to start getting cross-fertilisation going on. We have the beginnings of that with the M10 group. I will not put you on the spot, but I wonder how many of you know the M10 group.

Chair: I do not know about the M10 group.

Professor Lang: There you go—none of you. The M10 group is the group of the 10 metropolitan mayors who are meeting and analysing and sharing across party politics. There is a very interesting cross-fertilisation going on there, but my argument would be that it needs to actually make food one of its themes.

To get to your Beveridge question, yes, we need to have that sort of commitment. This takes us into the issue of rights to food. The year I was born, 1948, the UN Declaration of Human Rights notionally gave all people in the world—for any country that signed on, as we did—a right to food. The European convention also does likewise. We have not



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translated that into something that is practical politics, with a big P and a small P. That is what you are getting at.

Kelly and I and many of our colleagues have discussions about this. Do we want to have something written into legislation that says, "Every British person has the right to a sustainable diet"? That means a diet that is not just adequate for health but also one that is not injurious to the environment or future generations. Wales has its future generations Act, as I am sure you know, which is extremely interesting.

I do not regret mentioning Beveridge, because he was at least thinking about these things, but the Beveridge generation did not get the environment. They did not get the productive capacity of 20th century capitalism to overproduce food. There is an overproduction problem of food, not an underproduction problem. Food is too cheap in some respects and too expensive in other respects. This is a very different situation we are in now, and that needs attention. It needs clever people to be brought in. I agree with Kelly that we need something like a Ministry of Food or a clear role within Defra.

I remind every Secretary of State I ever meet, "The F in your title does not stand for 'farming'; it stands for 'food'". That is what the Labour Government tried to get out of by getting rid of the old Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, because food came last and it was all about farming. Here we are in 2022, nearly 2023, and we are back to that focus of thinking farming is all that matters.

Q245 **Geraint Davies:** Just for clarity, so I can understand what you are saying, in a nutshell, you are saying that there should be a centralised vision with a Cabinet sub-committee to focus in on food—

Professor Lang: That is certainly one model.

Q246 **Geraint Davies:** You are also saying that, given what has happened in the devolved nations and with the mayors, there is a case for different regional groupings, doing localised strategy that is very close to the ground and the people who know their communities, as opposed to an approach of, "I know best", from the centre. That is what can actually deliver those things. You are saying both of those things. Is that right?

Professor Lang: You have it absolutely right. Multi-level governance is needed. Kelly and I would both agree that you are not going to get anywhere if it is all just centralised in some abstract way. The criticism from the likes of Kelly and me is that the attempt to have a central-state Government food strategy has been weak; it has been badly delivered. That means the sub-national level has no room for manoeuvre, no clear frameworks and no advice. Away from Westminster, everyone gets that, be they Tory, Lib Dem, Labour, SNP or Plaid.

Dr Parsons: To come back to the local level, it is really important that we should be supporting all of the excellent work. There is momentum at local level. Where we have lost it at the national level, we have it at local



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level, and there is incredible work going on, particularly around cost of living and food insecurity. We need to be supporting the creation of local food partnerships and putting a bit of money—not very much—into supporting the creation of local food partnerships and local food strategies. Scotland and Wales are making moves to embed that local food partnership as a requirement. Henry Dimbleby suggested that it should be made a requirement that we have local food plans. Wales is putting £3 million of funding into local food partnerships. That is a very easy win that we should be doing.

In terms of your point about political will, you are absolutely right. Leadership is key. We have seen that in numerous national food strategies in other countries. If they had prime ministerial support, they went forward; if they did not, they withered. That is what comes through when I talk to interviewees about what we need to join up and move forward. We need these different institutional architecture changes, but that is not going to go anywhere unless we have some kind of leadership. I do not see anybody who is taking that political leadership role and really driving food forward as an important issue at a senior level to the degree that we need to.

Professor Lang: I agree.

Q247 **Robbie Moore:** Following up on some of the points you have made there about devolution of policy, Scotland has its own strategy, Wales is developing its own and England has its own. Do you think that has weakened the ability to have an overall framework? You have the different countries dealing with their own rather than a collective UK approach.

Dr Parsons: Yes, it is another fragmentation in food policy and another drag on progress, in a way, in terms of using resources efficiently, learning lessons from each other and so on. On a practical level, it can make it difficult for companies and other organisations working across the UK if there are different approaches in different countries. Historically, the devolved regions were seen as poor relations to England and were not able to develop their own bespoke approaches that they wanted to. We are seeing the reverse happening now. England is becoming the poor relation as progress happens elsewhere.

There is one more thing I wanted to say. There is a real missed opportunity for lesson-sharing across those different regions. Compare that to the lesson-sharing that goes on at local level between these local food partnerships; they are talking all the time, sharing ideas and helping each other to improve their practices. As far as I can see, that is really missing at the national level. We should be using our resources efficiently on policymaking, not doing things independently and then someone else has to reinvent the wheel, do the same analysis and go through the same questions.

Q248 **Robbie Moore:** Should there be an overall UK strategy as opposed to



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better cross-sharing between England, Wales and Scotland? Should there be a policy that relates solely to the UK?

Dr Parsons: There are things that will need to be done in the regions, but there could definitely be an umbrella that brings all of those together, understanding that there are local contexts and so on. That is possible.

Professor Lang: I agree completely. Kelly has just put it brilliantly. We all think there should be a framework. There are things that can be done best at the regional or sub-national level. Some things can be best done at the very local, sub-city level. Unless you have that overall architecture and framework of shared understanding and shared goals, you are going to get nowhere.

The sceptic would say that it is going to be impossible and that it is always going to be broken up by the politics of Westminster and party-political infighting, et cetera. I do not know of anyone, except possibly the President of Russia, who thinks that food is not a pretty important thing for everyone to get in decent amounts, sufficient for good health and good for the environment.

Chair: He knows that very well indeed.

Professor Lang: He does, but he is at the other end of your inquiry about food security. We are having a 1939-40 illustration of the need for food defence, to be honest, because we are seeing how the food system can be weaponised, to use the American word. Again, that is why your question is spot on. We need a national framework within which the responsibilities and the potential of the sub-national, the regional, the mayors and the localities know what they are about, what they can do and where they have to turn to a bigger authority to get the wherewithal.

I sit on the London Food Board. London cannot do things. It has to be done nationally. Some things cannot be done nationally; they have to be done internationally. That, to be honest, is a big weakness of us at the moment. We are fed by Europe but not engaging with Europe now. That is one of the big post-Brexit legacies. Unless we get our own act together at the UK level with a framework, we are going to see what we are now already seeing, which is that the people at the bottom of the social pile are being treated worse.

Back to your question, Mr Davies, we know that the LSE study that has come out this month has shown that the bottom tenth of households by income have been hit hardest by the cost of living crisis and by the impact of Brexit. They have been hit disproportionately. Cities cannot sort that out. That can only be sorted out by the national Government, but there are things that national Government cannot do and cities can do. For goodness' sake, give us the framework to enable that to happen.

Q249 **Chair:** In the Second World War, people were famously healthier even though they had food rationing.



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Professor Lang: At the end of the Second World War they were healthier.

Q250 **Chair:** Are we likely to see reductions in obesity levels in the poorer sections of society if they cannot afford food?

Professor Lang: I am sure Kelly has thoughts on this as well, but unless we tackle the rise of cheap, ultra-processed foods, we will not tackle the issue of obesity and its ill health costs on the NHS, let alone quality of lives. I call it the “turn off the tap” principle. Going back to your point, Mr Moore, legislation must stipulate what we want from the food system. We do not just want full shelves in supermarkets. What are they full of? Is it food that is going to be a contribution to rising obesity, or is it going to be food that is better for health?

Q251 **Chair:** It is food that people choose to buy, surely. That is the problem we face. People choose to buy these foods.

Professor Lang: Of course, but what frames that? The cost frames it. The messages frame that. People like Kelly and I and our predecessors have talked for decades about the huge avalanche of foods high in salt, sugar and fat that get advertising compared to fruit and vegetables, which get almost no advertising. Comparing like for like in terms of marketing budgets, it is a totally unequal world out there in the food system.

Dr Parsons: That is the difference between the current situation and the post-war situation. There is this Venn diagram between people who are poor and people who are obese or have dietary ill health. Often the cheapest food is the unhealthiest food, so therefore we cannot assume that being food-insecure is actually going to make people less obese. In fact, it is quite the reverse in many cases. That is the paradox.

Professor Lang: Back to Mr Moore’s question, which we have not forgotten, that is where you need national legislation and a national framework to stipulate what you want people at the different levels of food governance to do.

Q252 **Geraint Davies:** On that, the situation in Wales is that we have had free school breakfasts and lunches rolled out. If we had the national governance you are talking about, we would not. Is it not the case that we need this plurality of provision to deliver best practice as examples of what can be done on a budget to alleviate food poverty and to help the health of future generations?

Professor Lang: Yes, I think so, but you have mentioned the golden words. I was in a meeting last week with the architect of that, Jane Davidson. The future generations Act was a brilliant piece of legislation. Why does London not have something like that? The answer is that London cannot make its own legislation or set its own framework. Why does the north-east of England not have that? It could really do with it.



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Q253 **Geraint Davies:** In other words, it is an argument for more devolution, rather than less, in terms of developing the architecture of food delivery, including free school meals, that could get us out of this if we do not have something from the centre that allows people to have nutritious food.

Professor Lang: I speak as someone with Welsh blood running through his veins. Roll on the day when Westminster passes legislation like the future generations Act.

Q254 **Chair:** It is interesting. I was at a school in my own patch and they have a very good breakfast club for kids. When I said, "Is it because the parents cannot afford to feed their children?" she said, "No, it is because the mothers cannot get out of bed in the morning to make them breakfast". That was a real shock for me. It was not about the cost of a bowl of cereal or a bowl of porridge. It was the fact that the parents were not making the kids eat breakfast. They were just sending them off to school, or in some cases not sending them off to school because they had not got them out of bed themselves. It is quite worrying.

Professor Lang: There are lots of different reasons. Ultimately, in public health there is a point where you have to say, "Forget what the reasons are for why you are where you are. What are you going to do about it?"

Chair: It was a great breakfast club.

Professor Lang: I am sure it was. There is a really good argument for having free school meals for all because you cut through the inequalities.

Q255 **Geraint Davies:** In Wales, it is conceivable that there will be people who have dysfunctional parents, but the bottom line is that background poverty is very high, and obviously the people who are not on universal credit are still using food banks. Kelly, would you be supportive of universal free school meals? If you ration according to some line, then inflation goes up and you have a middle group of children who are simply hungry and not performing at school.

Dr Parsons: This is not particularly my area of research expertise, but we have seen a very clear argument in favour, with the recent campaigns that have been run, pioneered by the Food Foundation but with many other partners involved. The arguments they have made about the reason behind the need to expand provision and the benefits that will come from that, not just for the children but for society as a whole, are quite clear. I do not think there is any real argument against that.

Q256 **Geraint Davies:** Even if children have dysfunctional richer parents who will not give them breakfast, that is not their fault. Presumably they have a right to food.

Dr Parsons: We need to be talking about what is good at the population level.

Chair: These were not richer parents. This was one of the toughest parts of my constituency.



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Q257 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you, Dr Parsons and Professor Lang for being before us today. Just talking about strategies and targets moving forward, the Government have said that they will seek to broadly maintain our current level of domestic food output. There has been some pushback about that. Do you think that is too broad a statement and that there should actually be some more clarity about what our domestic provision should be?

Dr Parsons: I am going to pass to Tim quite quickly, because it is not really my area. One thing I really wanted to say is that it is great to have targets, but we need to make sure that those targets are driven forward, monitored and enforced somehow. The other is that we need to be thinking about those targets in terms of the types of food that help us reach those targets and what impact that has on our health and on the environment.

Q258 **Dr Hudson:** Would you be in favour of specific targets, or do you think the broad-level statement that the Government have made is adequate?

Dr Parsons: I probably would not have a view on which of those would be the best approach. I will pass to Tim. I am sure he has views.

Professor Lang: I do have a view. The Government food strategy is very clear. It says we are going to aim to keep broadly the same level. I cannot remember the exact words, but that is what it says.

Dr Hudson: Yes, it says we will broadly maintain the current level.

Professor Lang: Yes, exactly. I will make an academic point first before addressing the substance of what you are asking about. I wish we could get a bit clearer about the measures by which we are measuring food supply.

Q259 **Dr Hudson:** That is my next question. Should there be metrics? If so, what should those metrics look like?

Professor Lang: There should be. In the three-year process that we went through from 2007 to 2010 to deliver the food security indicators that came together for Food 2030, we were looking at different metrics. Do you go by tonnage? Do you go by nutrients? Do you go by value added? Do you go by embedded water? We have to sort this out. In my *Feeding Britain* book, I argued that ought to be a priority. If there is one recommendation following this question you could put into your report, you could say, "Could we please have clarity from Defra?" It is not about only one indicator. Let us have multiple indicators, because on some issues we need to know the embedded water in the foods that we are importing.

Q260 **Dr Hudson:** Perhaps you could follow up to us as a Committee in writing with some suggestions of metrics that the Government could look at.

Professor Lang: I will do that happily if Tim Jarrett writes me a nice note and I am feeling very benign, because it is the sort of thing I can write about at great length. Yes, I will do it.



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Q261 Dr Hudson: There is an imperative now on the Government from the Agriculture Act for the Secretary of State to produce a report or an assessment of the nation's food security at least every three years. I and many colleagues have been saying that actually needs to be more frequent now. If we think about our experiences of the pandemic and now the war in Ukraine, perhaps at least annually there should be an assessment of our food security and the inputs, the outputs and that side of things. Do you agree that we should have a more frequent assessment of food security?

Professor Lang: I do. I thought it was a good job by the House of Lords to get that into the Agriculture Act, but yes, that is the reason we need a food Act in which that could be revised. At the very least, I would think that should be revised in the Bill, but how you can do that as a Select Committee recommendation, I do not know. I will leave that to you or your clerk.

Back to your central point, we need to be producing more food, but the issue is what sorts of food. Do we want more high-fat, high-sugar food products? No. Do we want to be producing more fruit and vegetables? Yes. We produce 54% of our own vegetables. We should be doubling the consumption of those vegetables. Arguably, we are only about a quarter of our supply of what we should be eating.

On fruit, we are a catastrophe. We are entirely dependent. It is about 13% or 14% in the latest figures. As a nation, in terms of health, we are under-consuming fruit. For me, I frequently say that if I have one point to make to a Minister in three minutes, it is, "Let us have a bit more horticulture". I am sure you know these figures and speak them fluently. It is something like 18 million hectares in Britain, of which 6 million—about a third—are croppable, and of which horticulture is about 165,000 acres. It is, as we say, piddling and small. It is ludicrous. When you look at the specifics of that, you know why it is small. It is because the incentives for horticulture are not there. Horticulture is something that is seen as peripheral in the British agricultural strategy, and it should not be. It is the centre of health.

Q262 Dr Hudson: In terms of the Government keeping a watching brief on food security and looking at some of the inputs and challenges, in the last couple of years there have been significant challenges, again brought into sharp focus by the war in Ukraine and various other issues. In terms of fertiliser supply in this country and the fuel requirements for it, we now have two plants in the UK. One, the Ince plant, has been mothballed, and the other one in Billingham has now ceased ammonia production. That has knock-on effects in terms of the fertiliser supply for our food producers, but also an ancillary product of that is carbon dioxide, which is needed for poultry and pig slaughter processes, so that has animal health and welfare implications.

How do you think the Government can keep a watching brief on these critical inputs that we need for food security—fertiliser, fuel, CO₂ but also



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labour shortages? Again, we have seen that in the pig sector in the last year or so, with an insufficient supply of skilled butchers and not enough vets in the food processing sector. That causes animal health and welfare implications upstream. What can the Government do? The Government want to do this, and we as a Committee keep trying to put pressure on them to do that, but how can we get the Government to have clarity on keeping a watching brief on the critical inputs?

Professor Lang: I am sorry to interrupt you, but I do not think the Government want to do it, because the Government have been told for 12 years that something like this is needed. From the moment that Food 2030 was abolished, they were told, "Do not do this. There has to be a strategy that addresses national food security interests". They have systematically not done that. You can tell from my tone of voice that I am extremely angry about it.

Q263 **Dr Hudson:** Gently pushing back, this Committee pushes for this sort of thing and we have had the Defra Ministers before us on this. Some of the comments that have come from earlier are that we need cross-Government working; we need Defra to be working with the Home Office and with the Cabinet Office.

Professor Lang: Yes, but Kelly said it. You have to have Government leadership. I heard Thérèse Coffey, both in the Lords and in front of you. I was not impressed. She is a very impressive person and I am not being at all personal, but it was blather. There was no commitment at all to anything that anyone outside thinks is necessary.

Q264 **Dr Hudson:** Dr Parsons, if there was more clarity about set targets for levels of food production but also critical inputs like fertiliser and labour, would having those benchmarks sharpen the focus of the Government?

Dr Parsons: It definitely would not hurt. We are really interested in taking a systems approach to food. That means you cannot just look at the level of target for production. You need to think about what is going into that, the impacts of it and what kind of food that is. We should be looking at what the state of the food system is every year and monitoring and reporting on that. That should help us to direct action towards the areas where it is needed. Some of these other mechanisms that we talked about would probably be needed in order to drive that forward as well. As I said before, we cannot rely on setting targets alone and hoping that will do the job. We need some of this other supportive architecture to make progress going forward.

Q265 **Dr Hudson:** I am aware we have to make progress today as well, but that would be a useful take-home message for our Committee. Calling for an annual statement of the status of food security in this country would be a starting point that the Government can get behind.

Dr Parsons: Just to clarify, we should take a broad definition of food security. We should be looking at the food system as a whole, because food security, in a broad sense, and food systems and food policy are



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pretty much overlapping. We should not just be looking at production levels. There are many other parts of the system that we should be keeping our eyes on, such as labour, inputs and diet.

Professor Lang: I have to be true to myself and say that there is a real danger of thinking that we must protect the fertiliser supplies. A food-secure country would not be dependent upon Russian-gas-developed fertilisers. If we need carbon dioxide for the butchery industry, we have to think about other ways of doing it. We can talk about that at great length. It should not be off the back of Russian gas through to Norwegian fertiliser manufacturers and therefore saying, "That is the source of our food security".

It is perfectly possible to grow food without those artificial fertilisers, and that is what we should be doing on sustainability grounds. Here is yet another example. If you want good land use management and good environmental stewardship, you have to be thinking about how your food is grown, not just whether you grow it.

Chair: That would be quite a contentious issue.

Professor Lang: I know it is.

Q266 **Chair:** They tried it in Sri Lanka recently, and it did not work out too well for them.

Dr Parsons: There are some important local reasons in Sri Lanka as to why it did not work out, so we should not take that as an example of why that should not ever be tried.

Q267 **Ian Byrne:** I want to clarify a couple of points that have been raised. It has been a fascinating and really good evidence session so far. With 10 million people in poverty at the moment, do we need a right to food? What would it look like? I have huge respect for Henry. I was hugely disappointed that his report has been kicked into the long grass. There are lots of elements of it that we should have had in there that we did not get. Henry said that, with a developed welfare system, it is difficult to define what a right to food would look like. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food disagreed. He said that you have mechanisms; you start from zero. Do we need a right to food and what would it look like?

Dr Parsons: The different opinions there are very interesting. It would be great to be able to see a dialogue between them. It would also be great to understand a bit more about why Henry Dimbleby did not feel that he wanted to support a right to food in the food strategy. That is possibly because it seemed too difficult to land politically, because a lot of the proposals in that strategy and in that review were crafted in a way that would give them the best potential to be taken up in the current context.



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The right to food is not really my area, but I would say that my understanding of the argument in Scotland is that, by putting the right to food in Scots law, there is more pressure on the Government to take action and it is easier to hold the Government to account. To me, as somebody who sees drift and a lack of leadership and progress, that seems important.

My only caveat to that is that, with my policy coherence hat on, we have other legislation around food, and so we just need to be very clear about how it all fits together and what we want to achieve from those different bits of legislation, because we could end up creating even more fragmentation.

Q268 **Ian Byrne:** It comes back to leadership and a clarity of vision as well, does it not?

Dr Parsons: It does, and potentially what the role of a food Bill is and whether there is some kind of umbrella across all those other bits of legislation and how they all fit together. Better legal minds than me need to be thinking about that in terms of the big legislative picture across those different areas of the food system.

Professor Lang: Kelly knows I have a long, troubled relationship with the right to food. It is a great idea. We have it in theory already with the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and we have it with the economic, social and cultural rights that the Government signed on to as well. The problem is how you make it specific. How do you deliver it? Kelly is right. If we have it in legislation and we are specific, we can then hold Government, authorities, families or parents to account and so on.

For me, the issue would be not the right to food but the right to sustainable diets, and that is different. We do not need to have it as an abstract right. A good food nation would be feeding its population equitably and reasonably. In other words, there would be a great range from the wealthy to the not so wealthy, but not so unequal that the rich trip over the poor on the way in and out of the opera. It is a question of degree of wealth disparity. There has to be now, in the 21st century, a low-carbon, pro-diversity element to the diet, because food is the biggest driver of ecosystem destruction. In Britain, we have a catastrophic drop of wildlife. The Committee has looked at that, rightly. Unless we sort out the food system, we are not going to address that.

If you are asking me, "Would I like the Committee to come out with a recommendation for the right to food?" I would say no, but I would be very happy if you came out with a right to a sustainable diet, as long as it was then given proper indicators.

Q269 **Ian Byrne:** In my city, one in three are in food poverty at the moment. We have 4 million kids who are going hungry. Geraint touched on universal free school meals. Surely that has to form a part of a right to food and that universality.



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Professor Lang: Yes, but, going back to the school meals issue, we do not just want to feed the kids—

Ian Byrne: We do not want to go back to turkey twizzlers, no.

Professor Lang: That is right. We do not just want a right to food abstractly. It has to be to a decent diet. Let us nail down what we mean by that decent diet.

Q270 **Ian Byrne:** Kelly touched on local food networks. We can talk about community kitchens. There is so much investment you could bring back into areas through this. It is a huge potential game-changer for local economies.

Professor Lang: Am I in favour of that? Yes, categorically, but I am saying that we should not just repeat 1948. It has not been working. We have the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To my knowledge, the present Government have not said they want to get rid of that. They have said they want to get rid of lots of other things but not that. In theory, that should be delivering this. That was the goal of the Roosevelts. That was the goal of the Hot Springs conference in 1943, which Britain was a major player in.

Q271 **Ian Byrne:** Is it the form of wording? You would not sign up for a right to food but you would sign up for a right to a sustainable diet.

Professor Lang: I would, and the difference is huge here; it is absolutely huge, because you then start saying, "What is a sustainable diet?" You have to have the indicators for it. You do not just want to provide turkey twizzlers for the school lunch. It has to be a decent, low-carbon, low-embedded-water, pro-diversity diet. We know how to calculate that. We know how to deliver it, so deliver it. That is what the 2050s need.

Q272 **Ian Byrne:** As a follow-up, what have Scotland done that we can learn from in Westminster? Are there any lessons we can learn from the Good Food Nation Act?

Dr Parsons: There are loads of lessons we can learn. I would really encourage the Committee to speak to the people who have been at the heart of that process, such as Professor Mary Brennan and Pete Ritchie from Nourish Scotland, which is the civil society organisation that has been driving forward this good food nation process, about the challenges and opportunities that it has presented.

What have they done? They have managed to get a really good coalition across different interests together, across health, environment, community, food security and so on. That has helped. They had a body, the Scottish Food Commission, in place for a short amount of time to help advise the Government on food. They have managed to get food in front of lots of different Departments. That is easier, in a way, because it is



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smaller and there are fewer people; people in different divisions in Scottish Government can work together and know each other a bit better.

What else have they done? They have managed to make the case for legislation in a way that Henry Dimbleby did in his review but was not picked up.

Professor Lang: He was ignored.

Dr Parsons: The case for legislation, given all these other issues that we have and the lack of political leadership, is pretty good.

Q273 **Ian Byrne:** Just to finish, we asked the Government to consider, with great urgency, the right to food in the last Covid-19 food security report that we did from here. The Government then produced a White Paper, the food strategy was published, and there was no consideration or discussion. There was nothing with regard to a right to food or whatever that could look like. That is something I feel we should revisit as a Committee.

Dr Parsons: It is much broader than that. It is really important that we understand the relationship between the independent review that the Government commissioned and the Government food strategy they put out. This was commissioned by the same Department that created the strategy, and yet there is not really any connection being made between those two things.

It is really important that we understand whether the Government food strategy accepts the analysis that was laid out in the independent review. This is a very rigorous analysis, which will stand the test of time and be a contribution in its own right. There was, apparently, a line in a previous version of the Government food strategy that said they accept that analysis. That is no longer in there, so what analysis is that Government food strategy based on? There are no citations, no references and no way that we can see why it is making the arguments that it is.

Why were those recommendations not taken up? A few of them were, but many of them were not. What we should have, when we have a consultation or some kind of independent review like this, is a response, like the Government's response to the EFRA Committee reports, that goes through the recommendations and says why they were or were not considered acceptable. We do not know why those measures were not picked up. Was it because they were not deemed political acceptable? Did they do an evidence review and decide they would not be effective or would cost too much money? Did they not really look at them at all? This is pretty basic stuff.

We can look to really good examples. The Food Standards Agency does really nice consultation responses. Where it does a consultation on something, it goes back to all the consultees and responds to the suggestions they have made and says why it did or did not pick that up.



It tries to do that in an evidence-based way. We should have exactly some kind of breakdown like that with the food strategy, saying why these things were not picked up.

Q274 Rosie Duffield: The national food strategy found that healthier food tends to be much more expensive per calorie than junk food. We have covered that quite a bit. There is a phrase that features the word “Sherlock” that I could use there. Does the Government food strategy set out a clear roadmap to increase healthy eating, especially for those on low incomes? What would that look like?

Dr Parsons: Again, this is not my direct focus, but I work in the MRC Epidemiology Unit, with a lot of very significant public health experts. From their view, the food strategy is a very disappointing strategy, in terms of it being, from a public health perspective, a missed opportunity, particularly the failure to pick up on the recommendation for a sugar and salt reformulation tax, which builds on the soft drinks industry levy. Emerging evidence is showing that to be an effective lever that we should be using.

There is a real sense of kicking the can down the road. There is lots of ambition and discussion of health and health inequalities and diets in the food strategy, but there are not really any measures in there. It is passed on to the health disparities White Paper to deal with, but even that is not forthcoming. Therefore, we lose momentum there and we are not quite sure what is going on. We have seen delays to existing Government-created proposals around junk food advertising, which are now being put back.

We have a childhood obesity strategy, which has been developed with a lot of effort and lots of expertise. We have a list of good policy measures that could be implemented there. In terms of what something good would look like, a good place to start would be implementing the strategy that the Government themselves have designed.

Professor Lang: I will be very frank. The reason I deferred to Kelly on this is because, although the question you ask is spot on, if I am really honest, I am in my mid-70s and I am bored stiff of having questions like the one that you just asked us. It is a very good question. I am bored stiff of us giving answers, giving data, giving evidence, writing strategies, and then nothing happening.

I was on the chief scientist’s obesity taskforce back in the 2000s. We went through this in minute detail and we gave very articulate, very clear pathways, roadmaps, processes and suggestions of what could be done, big-level stuff and small-level stuff, and nothing happened.

Back to the theme that Kelly and I have been trying to present the Committee, unless there is clear leadership and something in legislation with a bit of grip and a bit of heft, if we are northern about this, we will not get anywhere on this and you will be asking people like Kelly and me



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in 20 years' time, "What are we going to do about the 75% obesity levels and the 75% penetration of ultra-processed foods?"

We have some examples of where we can make interventions. In fact, I am on one of the committees of Kelly's boss, Professor Martin White, looking at the soft drinks levy. We have monitored how effective that was. When you have hard interventions, they work. If you just do vague, aspirational suggestions of, "Parents should be good to their children", we do not get the grip on the pricing structures, the marketing structures and the availability of the food ingredients that are less than desirable for health.

I am sorry to be very hard about it. The question you ask is spot on. Kelly gave you a very diplomatic answer. I would just like you to be a bit tough and say, "When will Government actually do something on this?" because they should do something on it.

Q275 Rosie Duffield: Yes, I agree. As someone who was there when Sure Start was set up in my community, as a single mother who was facilitating a group of single parents, we needed money for the kinds of clubs and the kind of food where we all got together and all made meals. The assumption that single parents, in particular, or people in poverty or inequality are stupid and do not understand and do not have the motivation is really pretty patronising from these Government studies. Everyone I knew wanted to do that.

Also, we do not have the time. There is this idea that people are lying around in bed. I did a couple of jobs and also ran the Labour Party branch and had two growing boys. We need money, time, help and the motivation to go and do all this stuff. I could not have stood around in a frilly apron chopping vegetables. It is also about consulting those people who are living that life, rather than top-down, patronising study after study after study, so thank you for saying that.

Professor Lang: I agree. You have put it better than me. Forgive me. I feel better about my moment of anger.

Dr Parsons: There is one thing I wanted to add on that. You may know, but one of the really good bits of evidence we have around obesity policy is the study by Theis and White, which shows the number of food strategies that we have had over the last 30 years, the number of policies and the failure to make progress on those. Part of that is about the way those policies are designed.

This is an issue that is relevant to the Government food strategy as well. There needs to be some kind of clear implementation plan. It needs to be evidenced-based. There need to be actions assigned to particular organisations or Departments, and there needs to be a budget attached to doing it. Those are also things that we should be looking at improving.

Professor Lang: To try to be practical, going back to your question, unless what you put more eloquently than I did is in legislation, Ministers



can wriggle and avoid and step sideways from it. To be honest, that is what has happened. We do not have any legally bound targets.

Back to answering Ian Byrne earlier about the right to food, I can see there is a very important philosophical debate about that. One of the reasons my generation is not obsessed but fixated on the need to nail down sustainable diets is because you then have your indicators. You can then cost them. You can say that universal credit must afford the delivery and the consumption everywhere in this rich country of ours, so that is purchasable, accessible, affordable and available. You then have some metrics that you can deliver and you can hold the Minister, the mayor or the regional authority, down the multi-level food governance, accountable for that. Until we do that, we are not going to be able to do that.

Q276 **Ian Byrne:** It is a right to food.

Professor Lang: It is a right to a sustainable diet, Ian. I am going to keep on arguing.

Ian Byrne: It is about the accountability.

Professor Lang: Call it whatever you like. Call it a good diet, which is what the Scots did.

Chair: Thank you very much. Certainly, from what I have heard, I look forward to rates of obesity in Scotland dramatically falling and heart disease improving, if what they have put on the statute book is actually going to work. It will be interesting if that actually happens. It is one thing pulling the levers in central Government; it is another thing the guy in the supermarket in Glasgow deciding to go for the cabbage rather than the Pot Noodle. Incidentally I checked this: a Pot Noodle costs twice as much as a cabbage, so it is not always the price of food.

Thank you very much indeed for your evidence. It has been much appreciated.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Emily Hunter, Mark Tufnell and Professor Michael Winter.

Q277 **Chair:** Welcome. We have our three witnesses. Could I ask you to introduce yourselves to the Committee? Explain who you are and why you are here.

Emily Hunter: I am Emily Hunter. I am a policy advocate on land use for the Woodland Trust. I mostly lead our advocacy on the environmental land management scheme and other areas of agricultural policy. I did our submission of evidence for this Committee on the food security inquiry, so that is why I am here. We are very pleased to be invited to give evidence today.

Q278 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Emily. I had a wonderful morning with the



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Woodland Trust in Raincliffe Woods in my own constituency, learning a little about your work.

I should put on record that I am a member of the Country Land and Business Association; it is in my register of interests. Mark, welcome.

Mark Tufnell: Thank you very much indeed. I am Mark Tufnell. I am president of the Country Land and Business Association. I am also a farmer and landowner in the Cotswolds. Our association has a strong interest in looking at food production and land use. We also made a submission to this inquiry.

Professor Winter: Good afternoon. I am Michael Winter, a professor in the Centre for Rural Policy Research at the University of Exeter. I have about 40 years' experience of researching farming and land use. I also sit on the Natural England board and the Rothamsted Research board, but I am appearing in a personal capacity today.

Q279 **Chair:** The first question to you, Professor Winter, would be whether England actually needs a land use framework, which we are expecting next year?

Professor Winter: Yes, it does. I was heartened to see the House of Lords Land Use in England Committee today coming out very much in favour of a land use framework. It is seeking a rather broader framework than the one that is currently being prepared by Defra. That is where a lot of the debate could take place now, as to exactly what the coverage of that land use framework should be. Would you like me to go on and say a little bit about that?

Q280 **Chair:** I will ask some more questions and see if we can develop some of those. I will ask Mark to respond to the basic essay question: do we need a land use framework in the country?

Mark Tufnell: I am going to come out with a "maybe" and a "probably not" reply, which is contrary to Professor Winter, for the simple reason we think that there are many constraints within the land use framework as we stand. We have a planning set-up. We have areas of natural constraints. We have local nature recovery strategies coming in. We think it would be a distraction to go to the full extent of what is being argued by the House of Lords report that came out, which suggests there should be a commission. We do not need to go that far.

It does not help, in any case, with food security. That is all to do with other issues that we can come on with, such as fairness in the supply chain, for example. Overall, we do not feel we need one.

Q281 **Chair:** Emily, forestry and woodland is something we do not have as much of in this country as other countries, around Europe at least. What is your view?

Emily Hunter: Much like Professor Winter, we would say a more enthusiastic "yes". We need a land use framework for England, simply



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because there are many competing pressures on our land at the moment. We need land for food production but we also have targets for increasing woodland cover, which we would certainly support having. We need land for house-building. We need land for recreation. The Government have a target to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030. We have all these competing pressures and we need a way of planning for that.

Again, we would certainly, like Professor Winter, support what the House of Lords has said about it needing to be much more cross-Government, not just a Defra initiative. One of the previous Secretaries of State, George Eustice, talked about very much linking it with the local nature recovery strategies, which I thought was a bit surprising. What is the difference between the land use framework and the local nature recovery strategies? They are really just about nature recovery, and this needs to be much more about balancing all those competing land uses across England so that we are thinking and planning ahead.

Thinking about the woodland creation angle, anecdotally we hear stories about good-quality agricultural land being taken out of agriculture to be used for woodland planting for carbon credits. Something like a land use framework could guide where that woodland goes, so that you avoid that situation, you avoid having good-quality agricultural land used for other purposes but you identify where the best place is for that new woodland to go.

Professor Winter: I am interested in the way Mark conceptualises it as an additional constraint, because I would tend to see it the other way around. It is that plea we often hear from business for certainty. A land use framework, if it is constructed correctly, can give more certainty to landowners, land managers and land businesses about what the appropriate thing to do is, where the incentives are going to apply, et cetera.

I see it as a positive thing. I would absolutely not want it to be too prescriptive. I certainly would not want it to cut across the individual business, entrepreneurial decisions that are taken, but we need the framework precisely for the reason that Emily articulates. We actually have an over-promise of our land from this Government. If you add up the different policies and commitments the Government have made for land use, it is an over-promising. We have to find a way of dealing with that problem.

On the question of local nature recovery strategies, the way the Government at the moment are considering the land use framework is very much in terms of a general, overarching, national set of priorities, with local nature recovery strategies and ELM being the key deliverers on the ground. I am quite comfortable with that. It needs to go a bit further in terms of other types of land use that will not be covered by those, particularly around energy, transport and housing. It needs to be broader.



Unlike Mark, again, I think the idea of a land use commission is a really good one. It does not need to have a high regulatory function, but it would allow that overview to be developed, and particularly the data. We end up arguing, quite often: "Could we do this on land? What does multifunctionality mean?" A land use commission can do some of the thinking on all those kind of issues that, at the moment, is rather fragmented across different Departments and different bits of Government.

Q282 Chair: Going back to Mark, the way that we deliver on many of these ELMS objectives, and certainly the local nature recovery strategies, will be down to individual landowners and farmers deciding whether or not the incentives that are there, the cash that is on the table and the other ways that they can work, maybe in collaboration with other landowners, will actually make it worth their while. Do you feel that the current thinking in terms of delivery across the board on ELMS will be sufficient to deliver on the objectives the Government have set out?

Mark Tufnell: I have to go back to first principle, which is that I represent a group of people who own their own land and have a wish to protect their personal property rights and a wish to do whatever they want to do on their land, provided they do it legally and in line with Government policy. We would like to see incentives, in that way that you quite rightly set out, through environmental land management. Should Government wish to see a change in the type of land use within the environmental and agricultural sector, you change the incentive that you give for that particular purpose.

If there is a certain area, for example, in the edge or corner of your field where it is not as productive to grow wheat, and there is a better payment for either wild flower mix or a wild bird cover, the farmer would take the view that the incentive is there and he would choose to do that. It would benefit his overall farm and increase and improve the level of biodiversity.

Having a very top-down land use framework would not necessarily help with that, because we like to think that our members know what is best for their own farm and their own land. They have the constraint of the geology and the soil type on which they farm, they are in an area which is constrained by use of the local planning authority in the locality, and there are so many other constraints that we do not need to add another one, another layer, to say, "Yes, this is what you should do in this particular area".

Q283 Chair: Going back to Emily, some of these changes in terms of incentivising carbon capture through forestation are going to have impacts on the landscape. They are going to have impacts on the employment structure and the structure of farms in the area. To what extent are you aware that there may be concerns that, if we do go for tree-planting on a very large scale, it will change many of those other things and possibly even discredit the whole tree-planting strategy?



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There have been some concerns in parts of western Scotland, where lots of trees are being planted and the nature of the countryside has changed, and certainly the employment structure has changed as well.

Emily Hunter: We are certainly aware of those concerns. It is very simplistic but we always talk about the need to have the right tree in the right place. Historically, there has been a post-war drive to increase forestry in this country. We certainly planted the wrong trees in the wrong place. Trees on peatland, for example, is now probably recognised as not a good thing to do. We definitely recognise some of those concerns.

From the Woodland Trust perspective, we obviously want to see an increase in tree cover; we support increasing woodland in the right place. It does not just need to be about woodland creation. There are trees outside woods. We recently published a report on agroforestry and the benefits that can bring. You mentioned concerns about the landscape. That is certainly something you have to bear in mind. It is another thing that a land use framework can help to identify: where is there that landscape character that cannot have trees in it? It is worth bearing in mind that questions of aesthetics and landscape character are, to a certain point, very subjective. What some people would see as not fitting into the landscape, others would welcome.

If I could just say a bit on what Mark mentioned there, some of those concerns depend on how you conceptualise a land use framework, in terms of whether it is this top-down, very prescriptive, "This is what you must do on this land", or more guidelines for how you identify what might be the best use for the land. Certainly, we have not argued for that for the local nature recovery strategies, and we would say the same for the land use framework. You need to have engagement with the people who actually manage the land right from the start, so that they are involved in designing that framework and designing those strategies, so that they feel that they have a buy-in to that.

There needs to be a link with the environmental land management schemes. Mark mentioned targeting, so that you get a higher payment rate if you do something that is a priority in that area.

Q284 **Dr Hudson:** I have a follow-up on a very similar theme in terms of the concerns about land use and unintended consequences of these new policies. It has been raised with me and this Committee that some tenant farmers feel that some landowners are not renewing their contracts and renewing their leases because they are then going to allocate their land over to tree-planting or other forms. We are, potentially, losing really good, viable tenant farms moving forward.

Are you aware of those concerns and, more specifically, evidence to back that up? We questioned the Minister about that and he was aware of these concerns. If there is evidence out there, what can we as a Committee do to ask Government to really keep a watching brief on that,



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so that that unintended consequence does not come to fruition?

Emily Hunter: We are certainly aware of those concerns. Much like you, we do not have clear facts and figures to say to what extent it is a problem, but we have definitely heard of those concerns. I know that the problem of tenants being pushed off the land so that the land can be used for tree-planting has been raised in Wales. Broadly speaking, the Woodland Trust offers a number of schemes where we provide trees.

For example, for the last eight years we have been running a Trees for your Farm scheme, where we help interested farmers to set up agroforestry. Our experience of that, from 190 schemes that we have helped to set up, is that only approximately 5% of them were on solely tenanted land. Tenants are less likely to go for those schemes. There are things the Government could do to support that. One thing is encouraging land managers to work more closely with their tenants, to think about the long-term sustainability of the land, because having trees on your farm can improve the resilience of that farm, for example improving the soil health.

Q285 **Dr Hudson:** We are going to get on to a later question about the details of tenant farms, it was more just whether you have any evidence of concerns. We will get onto the details of tenancies later. Mark, do you have a quick point to make?

Mark Tufnell: Yes. My quick point is that we have not really seen a significant number of concerns about it. Because, in essence, planting of trees in the long run is not seen to be a hugely profitable exercise in any case, there has not been a great drive to take land back that has been in agricultural production to plant trees on it.

The concerns have been raised more in Wales, where the sustainable farming scheme is more designed about having a 10% tree cover before you can even claim the payment. There you have difficulty where, on a holding that is owned by a landowner, the tenant may not have the area that includes the trees, because the landowner has withheld that for sporting purposes. We have done some very good work with Lesley Griffiths and also with the Tenant Farmers Association to work out ways to get around this, because we do not want to have that holding back what should be a proper farming scheme.

Chair: Lesley Griffiths is the Agriculture Minister in the Welsh Administration, if anyone watching was not aware of that.

Q286 **Robbie Moore:** My question is now going to focus on the three-compartment model that was put forward as part of the national food strategy. Good afternoon, everyone. Professor Winter, I think that is a Nuffield tie that you are wearing; it is always good to speak to a fellow Nuffield scholar.

The national food strategy proposed a three-compartment model approach to land use. In your view, what are the advantages and



disadvantages of such an approach in terms of food security?

Professor Winter: I am supportive of it as a guiding principle but, again, it should not be too prescriptive. It certainly should not divert attention from the need to improve performance, both agricultural and environmental performance in all farming systems. I am not as wildly enthusiastic about the three-compartment model as I perhaps am about the land use framework, but it has a role to play.

We certainly need to recognise that land type and land grade might be good guides, but there are much wider socioeconomic forces at play. In the part of the world where I live, in west Devon, it is grade 3 and grade 4. It would definitely fit into the middle compartment of low-yield farmland, probably lending itself to more tree-planting and lower-intensity methods of farming. That would probably be quite sensible for some of the beef and sheep farmers around, but within that landscape, on exactly the same kind of land, are fairly intensive dairy farmers. They have built up levels of investment in machinery, buildings, drainage, dairy animals, et cetera, that cannot change overnight.

The three-compartment model has some use. Where it is particularly helpful is encouraging people not to think that agriculture should be the same everywhere. In particular, we need sustainable intensification on some of the better land. If we are going to lose from farming a lot of land, for very good purposes in terms of nature recovery and woodland planting, we have to maintain production on the rest of the land. That is where I like the model, just in terms of focusing attention on the fact that there is agriculture as well as nature recovery and carbon to consider in all this.

Q287 **Robbie Moore:** Just as a follow-up to that, do you think there is a risk, when we create a prescriptive approach such as this type of model, that it may stifle innovation within the food and farming sector?

Professor Winter: It definitely could if it were to be too prescriptive, without a doubt. It comes back to some of the points that Mark was making. It really is important that the people who own and manage the land make a lot of these choices themselves. We disagree on the land use framework, but I see the land use framework as helping to facilitate those decisions. I certainly would not want to see innovation stifled. I do not know if we will come back to that later, but there is masses and masses that can be done to improve innovation and enhance investment in agriculture. That ranges from new machinery right across to genetic improvement, and to upskilling the industry as a whole.

Q288 **Robbie Moore:** Mark, could I ask the same question to you, about the advantages and disadvantages of the three-compartment model that has been proposed?

Mark Tufnell: We are actually quite in favour of the three-compartment model because we like the flexibility. It allows, as Professor Winter has been saying, this variation of farming and allows for the entrepreneurship



that you see across farms. It recognises that land is multifunctional. It can do different things in different places and it is not an either/or. We are not into land-sharing or land-sparing. We are into a multifunctionality situation, and that is essentially why we as an association would support it.

Q289 Robbie Moore: Just as a quick follow-up on that, what are the key factors that the land use framework needs to address to be able to support the three-compartment model?

Mark Tufnell: We do not think we need a land use framework.

Robbie Moore: The answer is nothing, in your view.

Mark Tufnell: What we are saying is that there are different ways of farming, which is essentially what Henry Dimbleby's report is picking up on. You have got semi-natural land, high-yield farmland and low-yield farmland, and it depends which piece that you have and how you want to farm it. You should have the flexibility to farm it as you see fit. You do not have to farm it in a prescribed way. That is, in essence, what we are saying. You could look at the agro-ecological model, the sustainable high output model or a solely environmental model, and you could manage that accordingly within the holdings that you have.

Q290 Robbie Moore: Emily, any other additional points you would like to add to the first question or the two supplementaries I asked?

Emily Hunter: It was interesting that Mark said that they would see the three-compartment model as allowing more flexibility. My instinct is, cautiously, that it feels quite rigid, in that there are three compartments. It was interesting to note that the House of Lords report that came out this morning mentioned Henry Dimbleby saying that he felt that it had been slightly misunderstood and he viewed it more as a continuum. That idea that there is a continuum, recognising the flexibility for different approaches to land in different parts of the country, is important.

We would err more on that side of what the House of Lords report recommended, which is about recognising the multifunctionality of land, recognising that you need to make the best use of land for an area and that requires that local context. That is where the involvement of local land managers in designing the framework and designing the land use strategy is important.

Finally, just to add on that, I was told there are over 47,000 individual farms in England. Although they are individual farms, none of them exists in isolation. You need to take a landscape view of that and encourage support and co-operation, through ELM, the local nature recovery strategies or CS or whatever you want to call it, to look at how they can work together. That idea that you have three rigid compartments is quite problematic.



On intensification, there is a question about what that means. If it is very much intensification, there is a risk that bits of the land where you are intensifying are detrimental to those bits that you are not. There is a similar concern when we talk about the 30 by 30, and then we have to say, "What about the remaining 70% of land? That is important too". It is about connecting up the land and making sure that we take a landscape approach. My concern with the three-compartment model is that you see everything as very separate. You do not support that connection of the land.

Chair: The NFU said that we needed a 47,500 compartment model, because that is how many individual farmer members they have and each one would have a different view as to how they should run their own farm. I thought that was an interesting point.

Q291 **Rosie Duffield:** We have skirted around this a bit but, specifically, can increased environmental considerations be achieved at the same time as increasing food production for a growing population? Is it a straight choice between food security and environmental considerations when it comes to land use? That is a big question. I do not know who wants to tackle it first.

Professor Winter: I am happy to have a go. There has been a huge amount of progress in recent years in terms of both research and changing farming practices, in terms of getting this compatibility and this balance between food production and environmental considerations. We need to recognise the era of cheap fertilisers and pesticides is long gone. There is greater synergy now between what nature needs and what farmers need to reduce their inputs. There has been quite a lot of progress in understanding the positives for nature and agriculture of cover crops, winter stubbles, uncropped margins, min-till, use of legumes, et cetera, but there is still a long way to go. We still have to improve management.

There are two aspects to where we need to go. One is we need that application of science that will allow sustainable intensification on some of the land. In other words, we can produce good amounts of food with high yields, by use of genetic improvement, by use of better technology, et cetera, but we do not damage the environment at the same time. "Precision farming" is a term that is often used, where you absolutely make sure that, if you are applying additional nutrients, they are for the plant; they are not to go into the water. There is a lot of work that can still be done to improve that.

The second thing is that there is a mindset in agriculture that still needs to change. Some farmers have significantly changed their attitude to environmental issues and others less so. I will give you an example of that, because I happen to own two little bits of land—five acres in one place two miles away and about eight acres where I live. I happen to adjoin two different dairy farmers. One of those dairy farmers takes the view that every autumn, he will completely cut the hedges right back and



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all the berries for the winter feeding for the birds disappear in September or October. He does it year after year after year, in spite of the fact that dear old FWAG and other advisory organisations have been advising farmers for decades that trimming edges every two to three years is a much better way of managing these things.

My other dairy farmer takes the opposite view. I happened to bump into him the other day and he said the adjoining hedge was growing up well. I will lay it properly in a few years for him, and he says, "There is no point in deploying the extra inputs, the cost of diesel for the tractors, to cut those hedges frequently". He has a much more benign attitude. That is two dairy farmers, who are both pretty full-on dairy farmers, adopting different views.

There is a mindset that needs to change. There are some low-hanging fruit, in terms of environmental management. Hedgerows is one. Management of margins is another. We can get a balance, but we should not delude ourselves that it is easy. Certainly, some of the data around agro-ecological farming show that yields do reduce; they are cut back. Some of the best agro-ecological farmers have managed to find ways though that. It has to be smart. It has to have a lot of knowledge applied. It has to be good.

Whether farmers are conventional or organic or whatever, the difference in economic performance between the top-performing group and the bottom-performing group is really large. We want farmers to be high-performing. That applies to environmental outcomes as well as food production and economic returns.

What I am really saying, to sum up, and this is a long answer to your question, is, yes, we can balance farming with environmental considerations, but it requires a lot of effort, a lot of knowledge—I would say this, wouldn't I?—a lot of research and a lot of working with farming communities to develop the skills that are needed.

Emily Hunter: First of all, it is fundamentally wrong to accept food security and environmental concerns as opposed to each other. Essentially, there is no food security if you destroy the environment that you are using to grow that food. That is a very key point to make. As Professor Winter said there, it takes a lot of effort to bring in those environmental considerations, but it is very much worth making that effort.

There are so many pressures on farmers. It is very understandable that they can only think short term a lot of the time, because they are thinking short term about making their businesses viable. The Government should be thinking long-term. The Government's own food security report identified climate change as probably the biggest threat to food security in this country. The Government need to be thinking long term about how you address that threat. That is where their schemes to support farmers need to come in. They need to be supporting farmers,



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yes, to address those short-term pressures, but also to address the long-term pressures and to become more resilient.

In the previous session, Professor Tim Lang talked about how it is not just where we produce the food but how we produce it. Supporting farmers, in those ways that Professor Winter just described, to be less dependent on inputs like fertilisers will not only be beneficial to the environment but will be beneficial to the farm business, if they are less dependent on something where the price is going to fluctuate based on things completely out of their control.

Sorry to give a very long answer, but I will briefly talk about agroforestry again. We recognise that agroforestry can deliver environmental multiple benefits. Planting trees on a farm will sequester carbon. It can help improve the quality of soil. It can provide shelter and shade. It is also good for the farm business. For example, in a silvoarable system, if you plant fruit or nut trees in alleys and among crops, you are giving the farmer an additional crop, which is good for their farm business. There is evidence that it can help improve yields, it helps improve farm wildlife and it is good for the environment.

Our report found that just converting 10% of arable land to silvoarable agroforestry and 30% of pastoral land to silvopasture would bring our agriculture to net zero by 2050. There are environmental benefits, but there are also benefits for the farm business.

Mark Tufnell: Just to go back to your question, food production can be achieved alongside good environmental management. Good environmental management is being pushed forward by the environmental land management scheme and also countryside stewardship, and there are a lot of good elements of that that farmers can take up to improve all of their environmental credentials.

I want to make an important distinction between food security and food production, because one is an economic problem and one is a feature of agriculture. Food security comes down to, effectively, an input cost crisis, as we heard earlier, and the rapidly increasing prices of nitrogen, for example, and diesel. On the other side of the equation, you have a rapid rise in the cost of the end product, which goes on to the consumer and that feeds into a cost of living crisis. What happens in the middle, where the processor gets involved, becomes another arc, which is outside the hands of the farmer.

Too often food security gets muddled up with actual food production and what happens on the land. Environmental management can easily run hand in glove with food production.

Rosie Duffield: Thank you for that. That is a really important point. When we are doing our inquiries, that is something we need to keep in mind.



Q292 Geraint Davies: I wanted to get the feedback on the emerging evidence that, in producing food on farms, if you do not use any artificial chemicals and fertilisers or pesticides, in fact you can generate more naturally resistant and nutritious vegetables and food generally. I was wondering what the panel thought about the prospects of moving forward on a much less chemically and fertiliser-intensive strategy for producing food.

Emily Hunter: Certainly from an environmental point of view, we would definitely support a move toward a less chemically intensive approach to farming. That is one of the things that the environmental land management scheme should do—and, hopefully, will be doing—in terms of supporting farmers to adopt systems.

For example, in the sustainable farming incentive, Defra was developing a nutrient management standard and an integrated pest management standard, both of which were designed to help farmers rely less on those inputs. There have been some questions raised recently about whether they are going to go ahead with those standards, which we were quite disappointed to hear.

The Woodland Trust does not work very closely on those areas, although there are areas where trees can be helpful, but I know colleagues in other NGOs that have felt that those standards were looking quite good. We would certainly support a move to a less input-intensive approach to farming, if for no other reason than the fact that, for example, nitrogen pollution from farms has a serious impact on ancient woodland and its quality.

Q293 Geraint Davies: Michael Winter, there is a huge lobby from the chemical manufacturers of fertiliser and pesticides against this idea, but what do you understand the evidence to be? I thought that the emerging evidence is that, if we get rid of it, we end up in a better place in terms of both productivity and nutrition.

Professor Winter: I confess that I do not know enough about the nutrition side. I remember some research some years ago on the nutritional standards of organic products that said they were not hugely different to conventional ones, but I would have to look into that. My gut instinct is that it is probably better. I certainly would not want to be eating food with pesticide residues. I am not quite so sure about whether I really care where the nitrogen comes from in products that I eat, to be quite honest. Whether it comes out of the end of an animal or out of a bag, the plant processes it in the same way.

There are strong reasons, as Emily just indicated, for reducing our dependency on bagged fertiliser, especially when that ends up in the wrong place, and farmers are incentivised to reduce that just by the balance sheet as well.

The real nitty-gritty of your question is whether we can maintain yields going forward. If we suddenly switch from a high dependence on NPK—artificial fertiliser—applications to none, we are going to see yields dip



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very rapidly. We have to change our farming systems to adapt to different ways of getting nutrients in. That is probably more rotation farming and maybe more use of animal manures—and maybe use of human manures, to be quite honest—and green manures, et cetera, and to shift towards a much more sensitive way of farming, using intercropping and cover crops, et cetera. You can then gradually move towards maintaining yields on a much lower input system.

The evidence is very patchy. I referred to that in my written evidence. There is certainly some evidence that you are talking about 20% to 30% lower yields. You might have higher profitability for other reasons, but there are other farmers—I spoke to one only the other day—who say, “I have gone through the transition and I am doing okay in terms of yields”. There is a lot of work still to be done in this area in considering what the techniques are that will get us there.

The plain truth is that we cannot just remain dependent on bagged fertiliser. Phosphates are in short supply across the globe anyway. Getting nitrogen into a bag is a highly carbon polluting industrial process, so we really have to move away from that. If you look back historically, it came in really in the 1930s and 1940s. We had a period of 20 or 30 years when we were very dependent on that. Since then, we have slowly, as an industry, been finding ways to do things differently.

Something that I should mention, of course, for nitrogen is legumes.

Mark Tufnell: I speak more as a farmer now than as president of the association. It comes back to science. There is the pesticide safety directorate that assesses all the chemicals that are applied to crops to make sure that there are no residues in the products that are then sold. Certainly from an arable perspective, the application of those is all done on the advice of trained agronomists. There is a significant amount of science involved in all this, and the net result is that the production that we see in this country is significantly higher than it has been if you suddenly took all of those inputs away.

As Professor Winter quite rightly says, whether you get the nitrogen from a prill out of a bag, whether you get it from a legume or whether you get it from farmyard manure, it is still, from a plant’s perspective, nitrogen. You have to decide as a nation as to what level of production of a crop you wish. If you look at the figures, you see that we are 90% self-sufficient in wheat. We are more than 100% self-sufficient in oats and barley. If you end up with a 30% reduction in yield by going down that route, which is a route, interestingly enough, that has been adopted in Europe, which is an encouraging switch over to reduction in inputs, it will have an impact on production. You have to decide where you want to buy your product from. Do you want to import it from overseas or do you want to grow it in this country? That is a question for you.

Chair: The Brazilians will probably be keen to fill that gap. They have been very aggressively increasing their arable acreages to fill those big gaps.



Q294 **Julian Sturdy:** The national food strategy called for some food production to be reduced on the least productive 20% of farmland. That would be predominantly upland areas. That is based on trying to invest more environmental gain. Do you agree with this?

Emily Hunter: There is certainly an argument for saying that you could convert the less productive land to other uses and make better use of that land, but you also have to be aware, as we have already talked about, that it is up to the individual land managers or landowners in terms of what they want to use their land for.

I often hear this argument that the uplands could be taken out of food production and used for better purposes. In some places, that might be the best use and it might be what the land manager or the landowner wants to do, but you can also improve the environmental performance of those areas without necessarily completely stopping food production.

For example, the Woodland Trust works quite closely with farmers in Cumbria, especially on the commons, to develop wood pasture schemes. They do not stop producing food, but maybe they reduce stocking levels or switch from sheep farming to cattle farming. At the same time, we have created a lot of predominantly wood pasture in that area, which has improved the tree cover, so the carbon sequestration is held and water levels are maintained in that area. There is research looking into what impact that might have on flood levels.

It is about restoring the whole ecological functioning of that landscape. The commoners are still producing food on that land, perhaps just not as much. To do that, it is about making it profitable. Again, it comes back to what the environmental land management scheme will look like, because, if the incentives are right to switch from high-intensity sheep farming to lower-intensity and creating that wood pasture, the farmers will do it, because it is not very profitable to be farming in the uplands, to be honest, and they are quite dependent at the moment on that basic payment.

There is a balance. Some farmers may say, "I have this area of a field that is unproductive, so I will plant trees or wildflowers there". Similarly, some farmers in the uplands may decide that they would rather just take the payments from the land management scheme, if they are right, and stop farming. If they want to carry on farming in other ways, there are ways that they can do that and support the environment at the same time.

Professor Winter: I totally agree with Emily. She has got that entirely right. We definitely have to do things differently in the uplands, with rewetting of peat and more trees, et cetera, but we have to work with communities. They are isolated communities and are much closer to the land than others. It is a huge sociocultural issue as well as an economic and ecological one. These are cultural landscapes, so we have to do this very sensitively.



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Although, in calorific terms, not very important agriculturally, we should not forget that, in terms of breeding stock, they are important, certainly for providing ewes for lowland sheep flocks, so they have their role to play. They are also, of course, vital for access and recreation. Basically, upland farmers facilitate a lot of that tourism industry. We want to make sure that, whatever changes there are—and I love the idea of silvopastoral systems, et cetera—there is good access.

There are areas now where there has been too much abandonment of grazing. Certainly in Dartmoor, it is overgrazed on the edge, but it is now really hard to walk across the centre of Dartmoor, because there are not enough sheep, and molinia and gorse, et cetera, have grown out. This is, again, a very delicate balancing act. We certainly need to change what we do in our uplands, but we need to support those communities, because they are really important communities in terms of our history and heritage.

Mark Tufnell: The sheep stratification system is vital to this country and provides north country mules that will come down to your constituents in Yorkshire to then be bred and sold on to the consumer markets. Without that, the system at the moment would fail. There are some very high-quality sheep and land produced in the uplands, and there are many of our members who are up there with a living provided from the uplands. We must not forget them, and that is why we have been working with Defra to come up with some extra elements within ELM to be able to support them.

There are, of course, areas, as Emily says, that suit themselves to tree-planting, and other areas where members of ours have gone into peat restoration projects. In the long run, there will be some additional private finance for that. It is a vital part of the overall jigsaw that we must not forget.

Q295 **Julian Sturdy:** Are the uplands properly reflected within Defra policies going forward?

Mark Tufnell: They are not at the moment, but I know that there will soon be an announcement with further detail; we are told January, I think. I know, from talking to the officials and also to the Ministers, that our concerns about the uplands have been relayed on, and they are fully aware of it.

Q296 **Dr Hudson:** Can I just thank you all, and my colleague, Julian, as well, for speaking up for the upland communities and the commoners, and the importance of those stakeholders in looking after the environment and producing food in really difficult environments? They are part of the culture, the history, the biodiversity and the tourism economy, and it is so important that they are looked out for in Government policy, so thank you for speaking up for those sectors, which, as you say, are an important part of the part of Cumbria that I represent.

Is the current mix of crops grown in the UK suitable for achieving food



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security and also securing good environmental outcomes? Do we have the right balance at the moment?

Professor Winter: That is probably the most difficult question so far today.

Dr Hudson: We are leaving the good ones to the end.

Professor Winter: The balance of crops that we grow is driven by markets as much as anything else. It is a sense of, "Right for whom?" in a way. Going back to the earlier session, when I listened in to Tim Lang and his colleague, and what they were saying about the need for a much more sustainable diet, we certainly need to reduce meat consumption in this country. We need not eliminate but certainly reduce, and we certainly need a more varied and more plant-based diet, and to look after our horticulture industry in particular.

We have a significant trade deficit in horticulture and, therefore, there is potential for a modest adjustment in land use to address that, and positive measures to be taken to help consumers improve their intake of fruit and veg by helping farms to produce. That, I know from a PhD student of mine who is looking at this in Devon, is a pretty difficult ask, because there are some formidable obstacles. It is not about land availability; it is the challenges around the required levels of investment in specialist machinery and packhouses, et cetera. It is about know-how and skills, and, of course, it is about labour, and it is about confidence in the markets.

If I could just wave a magic wand, I would have a lot more horticulture production in this country. I would also have a lot more production of interesting novel cereals. I am a great fan of some of the oats and barley alongside wheat for human consumption, and some of the more traditional varieties of cereals. I would also, I am sure, please Emily by saying that I would like to see more nuts grown in this country as part of our diet within agroforestry systems as well.

There is plenty of room for change, but it has to be driven by the market. Farmers and growers have to be confident, if they are going to change, that there will be a market for their products. That is the big challenge.

Q297 **Dr Hudson:** Emily and Mark, do you have anything to add to that? Would you differ from that?

Mark Tufnell: We have a food deficit of, I understand, £27 billion a year, and most of that is fruit and veg. You can grow a lot of fruit in a polytunnel. You can do quite a lot with vertical farming. People could be encouraged to grow more vegetables, if they got paid more by the consumer and, therefore, by the supermarket, but we now have a cost of living crisis and there is a supermarket battle.

We have members who grow a lot of vegetables and, every year, the price that they are paid goes down, so there comes a point, particularly



with potato farmers, when they decide that they are going to grow maize for an AD plant, because they can make more money out of it. Of course, it does not help those of us who want to eat potatoes.

Emily Hunter: Just referencing what Professor Winter said about growing more nuts in this country and the need for markets, a very important thing when it comes to the Government developing schemes to support agroforestry is that farmers will need advice and guidance on how to do that, but also on how to access those markets. Those markets will need to be developed if we want more farmers to be growing those additional crops such as nuts.

I do not feel qualified to comment on the diversity of crops grown in this country, but it is worth noting that, according to a recent WWF report, 40% of arable land in this country is used to grow feed for animals. From an efficiency point of view, you could get more calories by feeding that directly to people than feeding livestock, which then goes on to feed people. Looking at how we feed livestock and whether some of that land could be used to grow food directly to feed people would have an impact on how much food we are able to produce in this country without necessarily taking or adding land into production.

Q298 **Dr Hudson:** That leads me on to the next part of my question. You talked about calorific production, as does the national food strategy. There has been a lot of controversy about that. I have to say that I have some reservations about some of the findings within that, because, if we think about the use of land, there are lots of different things that that land is being used for. The farmers are producing food but they are looking after the environment. There is flood mitigation and biodiversity. Coming down to a metric about calories produced can be too constraining. Do you share some of my reservations about that calorific production, or are you an advocate of looking at calorific production as a metric?

Emily Hunter: Very simply, I would share those reservations. It is important to think about what else you are delivering with that land at the same time. It is not just about the calorific production. There is also then that question of efficiency in terms of whether the calories are being used to feed livestock or going directly to people.

Mark Tufnell: I agree with you, but the main use for those cereals goes into white meat—into pig and poultry. Of course, Henry Dimbleby decided he was not going to go anywhere near the area of the virtues or otherwise of whether you eat white or red meat and which is “better”. Most of the grain is going into the white meats, whereas you could take beef and sheep and graze them on low-intensity grassland.

Q299 **Dr Hudson:** Michael, do you have any thoughts on that? Perhaps you could also answer the final part of my question within that. Should the land use framework set targets for the amount of crops that are being grown according to end use? We have talked just now about human



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consumption, animal feed or biofuel. Should there be prescriptive targets within that or should there be a bit more letting it be in terms of what is the best use for the land in individual areas?

Professor Winter: It would be incredibly difficult to have targets within the land use framework for that, because it really is market-driven. I want to see change, but that change has to be reflected in the market as people change their diets or their demand patterns. I totally agree with Mark's point and the supermarkets behaving responsibly to growers and farmers as well. I do not think that it comes from the land use framework.

This is complicated. I say that to every question, but it is. A lot of farmers will be aiming to grow cereals that will end up in the human food market, because it tends to be higher-value, or malting barley that ends up in something that we drink rather than eat. That is the high end of the market. It is the lower-quality stuff that tends to end up for animals, and it is difficult to see what would happen if we did not have that.

If diets change, it will shift, but it will not necessarily be directly proportionate to the amount of cereals grown, because there are quality issues. Yes, there are variety issues as well and, as things shift, farmers will grow different varieties, but this is a complex issue.

Chair: That last comment would probably sum up today's evidence session. It is complicated, because we are being told, on the one hand, that we need to try to have better food security here in the UK but, on the other hand, many of the other land uses, whether rewilding, planting trees or farming more sustainably, will reduce the amount of food we can produce.

Similarly, we have heard evidence that we do not need to rely so much on pesticides and fertiliser if we farm more traditionally. That means having more livestock, but we are also being told that we should not be eating red and white meat, but should be eating the grain itself.

That will probably sum up most of what we have heard, and Ministers will need to be very careful that they can navigate a route through these particular issues. I hope that, when we hear from the Secretary of State again in January, maybe at the Oxford Farming Conference, it will be a nice early January opportunity to set a few people's minds at rest.

Could I thank our witnesses very much indeed for coming along? There is certainly a long way to go before we really can be clear as to how we can navigate this difficult course between the sustainability of the industry, delivering on these environmental objectives and, at the same time, of course, producing more food from our own resources. Thank you very much indeed.