



HOUSE OF COMMONS

# Environmental Audit Committee

## Oral evidence: Environmental change and food security, HC 880

Wednesday 19 April 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 19 April 2023.

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Members present: Philip Dunne (Chair); Duncan Baker; James Gray; Ian Levy; Clive Lewis; Caroline Lucas; Cherilyn Mackrory; Anna McMorrin; John Mc Nally; Dr Matthew Offord; Cat Smith; Claudia Webbe.

Questions 114-184

### Witnesses

**I:** Henry Dimbleby, Co-founder, Leon Restaurants, and Lead, Independent review of the food system for the Government: The National Food Strategy.

**II:** Minette Batters, President, National Farmers' Union (NFU), Sue Pritchard, Chief Executive, The Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, Chris Brown, Senior Director for Sustainable Supply Chains, Asda, and Peter Dawson, Policy and Sustainability Director, Dairy UK.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Dairy UK](#)

[National Farmers' Union](#)

[The Food, Farming and Countryside Commission](#)



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Henry Dimbleby

Q114 **Chair:** Good afternoon. Welcome to the Environmental Audit Committee, where we have two panels today in our inquiry into food security and the impact of climate change. We are very pleased, for our first panel, to welcome Henry Dimbleby, who was until recently a non-executive director at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the food adviser to the Government. Henry, can I start by asking why you resigned from those two positions recently?

**Henry Dimbleby:** Actually, I resigned as the lead non-exec at DEFRA. I published the independent review, and once you have published it, that's it—you're done. Actually, they had asked me to come back to review that work. If you are going to try to change a system, you have to do two things. First, you have to change how people understand it—the way in which people understand how the food system works is fundamentally flawed—and secondly, you have to get policies into place to change it. I felt that there was much more to be done publicly to change the way people understand it.

I knew that I needed to turn the food strategy into a kind of book, so that more people read it. I spoke to my permanent secretary about it, and we agreed that it would probably be easier for everyone involved if I talked about it openly, not as the lead non-exec at DEFRA. It would not be fair on them, frankly, for me to be talking openly about the problems that I saw in their policy while also being a non-exec at DEFRA.

Q115 **Chair:** Just to be clear, when were you appointed originally as a non-exec at DEFRA?

**Henry Dimbleby:** I resigned after five years—two years into my second three-year term.

Q116 **Chair:** So you were already on the board of DEFRA at the time when you were appointed to do the study into food security.

**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes. I joined the board of DEFRA. I then started the work in 2018 on the food system—on the national food strategy. I think that that was launched in 2019. I then left a year before my second term would be out.

Q117 **Chair:** Was that report intended to be an independent critique of Government policy, or was it intended to be a Government plan—part of the Government's strategic positioning on food?

**Henry Dimbleby:** It was intended to be an independent review. It was intended to be an expert review that drew in the best minds from around the world to set out how we can create a food system that not only feeds us but does so without making us sick or destroying the environment. In a democracy, I have always said, the Government then have to decide—



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they are elected; I am not elected—which pieces they choose and which they do not. But it was an independent view on an argument about, “This is what you need to do.”

Q118 **Chair:** So from our point of view, we can look at your work as being genuinely independent and not necessarily toeing a Government line.

**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes. It is my view, and I drew input from people all across the political spectrum. I have never been party politically affiliated in any form. I have never been a member of a party—I am not a big joiner of things. It was trying to be a really evidence-based view on how we change the food system.

Q119 **Chair:** Okay. We are going to come to lots of questions during this session on some of the detail of this.

The proportion of food supplied from within the UK gyrates around a bit each year. But an additional challenge to food security has clearly been posed by the consequences of Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and the disruption to supply chains across the world, which stemmed in part from the invasion and the energy crisis that it spawned. How secure is the UK’s food supply?

**Henry Dimbleby:** First of all, you have to do two things. You have to ask what you mean by “food security”. A recent academic work has found over 200 different definitions: from whether we, at a push, could have U-boat food security—if cut off completely from any global trade, could we feed ourselves from our land?—all the way to whether everyone can buy an avocado on Christmas day. Somewhere between those two extremes, there is a point where Governments fall, which is why Governments have always taken food security in some form very seriously, because it is a political issue.

In terms of the more extreme end of the situation—whether we will have enough calories—we are clearly in a much better position than many other countries. If you look at Egypt, for example, it has a population of about 100 million, which is projected to grow to about 200 million in the next 50 years. Currently, at the most productive estimate, their land could feed only half of their population. Before the war, they got 85% of their grain from Ukraine and Russia. They have food inflation of over 60%—they have just released the figures. So their Government clearly have what I would see as existential problems with food security, and given that a third of the population are in deep poverty, there are huge problems of hunger and misery for the population.

Although the wealth is spread very unequally, we are a very rich nation in comparison. DEFRA did a food security review, looking at our U-boat food security. Before the second world war, we produced 30% of our own food; we produce about 60% or so now. If we needed to, we could feed our much bigger population. We would have to have rationing; we would have to reduce the amount of meat that we ate and feed more of the crops to people, but we could do it. Being rich and smallish, there will be a lot of other countries that run out of that calorie food security before us.



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However, I think that there are two concerns. The first is that we should be thinking about security of nutrition, not security of calories, and there are a lot of people in this country, now, with the cost of living crisis, who are struggling to afford diets that will not just keep them alive but keep them thriving—you know, health. If you think about freedom, health is the kind of ultimate expression of freedom—being able to survive—and there are real problems of food poverty at that end.

I think that the other concern is a much bigger one. We live in a world where the way that we produce our food is the biggest danger to the way that we produce our food. The way that we produce our food is causing huge biodiversity collapse. It is the second biggest producer of greenhouse gases after energy, and—we put this in the food strategy—there are predictions from NASA and the UN of what global productivity of food looks like in a world that gets to 2.5°. Basically, wheat will increase in productivity in the northern hemisphere, with more CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere and warmer weather, and maize and rice in the equatorial zones and the south will decrease. That might happen gradually, or it might happen suddenly. The Mekong delta is the biggest exporter of rice; half the delta will be underwater in the event of a 1 metre sea level rise.

I therefore think that the biggest risk to our food security is proving that we can farm in a way that restores our biodiversity, puts assets into the soil—restores our soil so that we lock in future food security—and sequesters carbon. So I am worried about two things: what is going on for those who are living in poverty, and the much bigger question of whether we can, as a nation, show the rest of the world that there is a way of producing food in an environmentally friendly way.

Q120 **Chair:** Do you see environmental change in the UK as having a big impact on our food security?

**Henry Dimbleby:** Well, clearly, we are going to expect more frequent freak events. If you look at last summer in Europe, for example, all across Europe, including the UK, wheat yields were down, maize was down. We had a terrible drought; it caused a reduction in food.

I think that climate change—that greenhouse gas thing that I mentioned—may make our yields increase, actually. We will have very long summers, more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and warmer summers. If we manage to manage our water well, it may increase our yields, but we should also expect more freak weather. But I don't think that, as a nation, that is our primary concern in terms of food security, because of the relative amount of food that we have, the relative area of our nation that grows food, and our relative affluence.

Q121 **Chair:** Returning to your proposals, the Government have accepted some and rejected others. Can you give us a top-line summary as to how you think the Government have reacted to what you have advised?

**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes. On the environmental transition, it wasn't my idea—it had been formulated over a number of years. But on the idea of switching from common agricultural policy payments, paying for land, to

public money for public good, to restore nature, sequester carbon and improve water quality and capture, the framework of that is in place. The environmental land management scheme, with regulation, is in place. There is a potential disaster on trade, but we will leave that aside for the moment.

Obviously, there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip. Working out how you incentivise farmers to create outcomes in a complex system was always going to be difficult in terms of the politics. You will always get people shouting from both sides—the environmentalists saying this isn't enough or the right money, and the farmers saying this is squeezing them. Also, when you intervene in a complex system, you just don't know what will happen. I think that, at the moment, the team in DEFRA, led by Janet Hughes, in good faith, understand what needs to be done and are doing it, but I think there will be mistakes—inevitably, there will be mistakes—along the road. What I hope is that there will be the political leadership to push that through.

At the moment, I am very concerned about the 30 by 30 target and about our climate change targets, but I think the structure is in place; it is about how you give the money.

Briefly, on the other points, to get that money right, you have to create a land use framework. You have to say, "What land do we have? What do we want to incentivise where?"—because the quality of land where I spend a lot of time, in the south-west, is very different from that in the fens and the north-east. You need to decide what you want to do and incentivise that right. The land use framework is being launched. It is very politically difficult, because it goes back to deep-seated ideas about a person's ownership of land; I don't know what they are going to come out with, but they are doing it.

Minimum standards for trade have not been done. I think that the Australia and New Zealand deals were historically awful deals. Even the Australians couldn't believe what they had got. But that might not be a problem, because of the way trade works. We can talk about that in more depth if you want.

They have put some money into innovation—it is unclear whether it is in the way that I talked about it. There was also a data programme—creating a data map of the food system and the land in the UK. That is under way. I don't know whether they will create anything like what I suggested. Procurement doesn't seem to be happening. Then there was a whole legal framework that I suggested, which doesn't seem to be happening.

Q122 **Chair:** On procurement, do you mean a "buy British" policy for Government procurement?

**Henry Dimbleby:** At the moment, the procurement is optional. There are Government guidelines for spending Government money, but they are not obligatory. What we suggested was that you needed to update the guidelines more regularly, taking into account biodiversity, carbon and

health, and that those guidelines should be compulsory. That was one thing.

The second thing is that the way of creating good food in institutions is to have people who care. If you go into any school, any hospital or any Government office that has good food, they haven't done it because someone has passed a law. They have done it because they have decided that it isn't good enough. You do need the laws and you need the money; they are necessary, but not sufficient.

We recommended that there was a procurement programme that enabled the hospital to buy food not just from the big wholesale companies, but from local suppliers, because that increases the care. If you know your supplier, you take more care about your food; you take more care about the way it is cooked and the way you serve it.

Q123 **Chair:** That wasn't possible while we were in the EU, and it now is.

**Henry Dimbleby:** That wasn't possible while we were in the EU, and there is work being done on it. Again, I don't know where that is going to come out. It may be that they do that; it may be that they don't.

Q124 **Caroline Lucas:** In your report, you refer to the "invisibility of nature". Could you say a little bit more about what you mean by that and why it is a particular problem in the food sector in particular?

**Henry Dimbleby:** That was a phrase in Sir Partha Dasgupta's "The Economics of Biodiversity" report for Treasury, which is in three forms—a summary version, which is about 30 pages, a short summary version, which is about 100 pages, and then the full version, at 600 pages. I regret to tell you that Partha strongly resisted doing the summaries. The 600-page version is by far the best, so you have to go through it. It is an extraordinary piece of work.

What he pointed out was that nature is invisible in two ways. First of all, a lot of it is silent, so you cannot pick it up—plants, trees and such—and you cannot hear it. It is invisible. It can be under water or under the soil. It is also mobile. It moves across national and county borders. It is hard to get a measure of. The second thing is that we do not even try to measure it very much, and we certainly do not put it into any of the mechanisms we use to see how successful we are as human beings. You cannot find it in a wallet, in the balance sheet of companies or in our measure of GDP.

He says two things: first that we need to measure it, and secondly that, in some cases, we need to value it. He points out, for example, that we are, at the moment, effectively, destroying nature at a rate faster than it is restoring itself, and that our current economic growth is burrowing under, and built on this destruction of, natural capital. He says that, in the end, at the current rate, this will lead to extinction. If you just look at the maths, it will lead to extinction. He says that we have to, in some cases, cost into the system the costs of that destruction of nature. But he recognises that it is not always possible to cost it, and he worries about whether, if you cost everything and get it wrong, you destroy nature. He says that, in





some cases, you have to understand that nature has a sacred value and you cannot cost it. He argues that you have both costings and absolute restrictions on the destruction of nature. That includes, for example, if you get the definition right—I am not sure if we will—the 30 by 30, which is theoretically an absolute restriction.

Q125 **Caroline Lucas:** On costing it, when it comes to the food sector in particular, could that lead to higher food prices? What would be the implications of that?

**Henry Dimbleby:** Interestingly, not as much as people think, but it would in some areas. We have a food system that was created not costing in the carbon produced by the Haber-Bosch process. Fertilisers account, both in terms of the energy used to produce them and the release of nitrogen oxide when they are put on the land, for about 2% of total greenhouse gases. That is just for fertiliser. We do not cost that in. We also do not cost in the biological destruction. There are lots of NGO reports that have tried to cost it. They have said, "Actually our food should cost twice as much." When I started the food strategy, I thought, "That's an exaggeration. I don't believe it. You're just campaigning." I dug into it, and because in all of those studies the health impact is under-costed, I actually think it is going to be worse. At the moment, if you built in all the externalities, the cost of food would probably be more than twice the cost of what we pay at the checkout.

However, that is because we have not costed it. If you look at something like the energy transition, you can see a potential energy transition where solar panels become incredibly cheap. That did not look possible even 20 years ago. We did some work looking at fruit, veg and grains, and if you focused human creativity on farming efficiently and using not just yield but yield and nature and carbon, actually I can see innovation really getting a lot of those costs. So it was not much more expensive.

The issue will be meat. Meat just takes up so much land; 85% of the land used to feed the UK is used to rear meat or for plants to feed to animals. I cannot see any way that you do not need to get some of that land back. If you do, that will put up the cost of meat and its production. The fact that, at the moment, food costs twice as much as what you pay at the checkout does not mean that a better system has to cost twice as much. You just refocus human ingenuity, and human ingenuity is an extraordinarily powerful force.

Q126 **Chair:** Can I interrupt to ask what you mean by that—food costs twice as much as the checkout price?

**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes, if you cost in the price of the carbon produced by the food system, which is between 25% and 30% of all global carbon emissions, if you try to estimate the cost of the destruction of biodiversity, and if you put in the healthcare costs and the productivity costs. Andy Haldane says that the biggest threat to GDP growth is ill health, and food is the biggest cause of non-communicable disease. If you cost those in as externalities in a Pigouvian way—Arthur Pigou was the economist who



came up with the idea of externalities—then currently food is underpriced by about half.

**Q127 Caroline Lucas:** My colleague is going to come back to meat in more detail in the next question, but if I could press you a little more on the internalising of costs, would it be dangerous to do that in the UK alone, if you are not also, for example, factoring in the cost of getting frozen chicken from one end of the world to the other, or any other thing that is coming from New Zealand? The carbon associated with the transport costs is not being internalised, so if you were internalising it at home but not for imports, would that be a problem?

**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes. First of all, I would say that internalising the costs now would not be a good idea. Any Government who put up the cost of food by double would fall immediately. If you look at the energy transition, there is an interesting parallel. There was some price increase, but also a lot of investment in innovation and a clear sign that the future was not here but there. Then, as the cost of alternative supply comes down, you can build more of the externalities into the cost.

The answer to your question, though, is yes. There is absolutely no point in creating a farming system in this country that is carbon neutral, restores biodiversity, feeds us, and has higher levels of animal welfare, which our citizens care a lot about, and then allowing the import of foods that are cheaper because they do not do those things. If they do those things and are cheaper, that is fine by me. I do not care where they are produced, but if they do not do those things and are cheaper, you are basically just exporting those environmental harms, those animal welfare cruelties, and that destruction of biodiversity abroad, and the whole thing becomes a sham. You also completely undermine our farmers. That is why I was so worried about the Australia trade deal.

**Q128 Caroline Lucas:** I have a few questions about the sustainability metrics. What metrics do you think we should be measuring on farms, how big is the current measurement gap, and how far progressed is the global farm metric that you referred to in your review?

**Henry Dimbleby:** If you have not already taken evidence from the Global Farm Metric Coalition, I would strongly suggest that you do so. It is a group of supermarkets that has been pulled together by Patrick Holden of the Sustainable Food Trust. He has intentionally gone out—I think Mars is involved. They are trying to say that we do not even have a way of talking about nature reduction, soil health or carbon sequestration. Before we even set targets, no one is defining it in the same way.

The parallel that we use in the food strategy is the weights and measures body in Paris, which used to say, "A metre is this very particular bar at this temperature," and now says, "A metre is a certain number of wavelengths of light at a particular frequency." That then becomes the global standard, and that is what they are trying to do. It is complicated because nature is complicated, but that does not mean that we should not try to do it. I will not go into the details here, but they have them,





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importantly, not only on soil and biodiversity but on farm incomes—because you want your farms to be profitable—on how the employees are treated, and on a number of other things. I would definitely get them to come in and tell you where they are, rather than me trying to guess.

Q129 **Caroline Lucas:** Do you know how far off they are from having a workable metric?

**Henry Dimbleby:** No. I saw them a couple of days ago, and they seemed to be quite optimistic, but I did not get into the detail.

Q130 **Caroline Lucas:** Should the Government be seeking to set standards for sustainability metrics for farmers and food manufacturers, once we have a common understanding of what those metrics might be?

**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes. I think the Government should set the baseline. When Michael Gove was in DEFRA, one of the pieces of work was for the Government to set a gold standard. That I worry about, because the Government are so slow—just because they have to consult—that actually there is a risk that the gold standard is five years behind what the actual gold standard is. So I think you need to have competitive bodies competing to set gold standards—whether that is the Soil Association or Red Tractor, whatever views you have on that, and so on—and then the Government, who have a baseline that continues to rise over time. They should definitely set the minimum baseline. In some areas, like sow stalls, they do, but that should be extended to a broader set of metrics.

Q131 **Caroline Lucas:** You discuss environmental impact labelling in your report. It may be fairly obvious, but can you say a little about why you think that it is important?

**Henry Dimbleby:** I do not think it is obvious, actually. If you talk to the supermarkets and marketeers, they will say that a very small percentage of people actually have the time in their lives to look at labels. The one label that people do care about or pay a bit more for is a Union Jack on a product. If you talk to focus groups and do quantitative research, as we did on the food strategy, people told us, “I want the animal to be treated well, but that is not my job; that is the Government’s job. I just want to know that there’s a basic level of sustainability and animal welfare in the product I buy. I don’t have time to look at all the labels in the aisle.”

What being forced to put something on a package does do—I know this from experience at Leon, the restaurant chain that I set up and used to own a bit of—is really focus the people in the business. The people in the business are the people who care, actually. So I think it is a very good tool for increasing the focus of people in the business, and I like it from that point of view; I think it is pretty flimsy as a way of changing customer behaviour.

**Caroline Lucas:** Thank you. That is really interesting.

Q132 **Anna McMorris:** I will explore some of what you have already talked about. You mentioned that agriculture is the biggest driver of habitat and biodiversity destruction and the second biggest contributor to climate



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change after the energy sector. We know that, I think, 12% of UK emissions came from the agricultural sector in 2020. What are the most significant changes that we can make to reduce the impact of the agricultural system?

**Henry Dimbleby:** First of all, this is why you need a land use framework. Until the late 18th century and early 19th century, we used sun hitting land to produce pretty much all the goods that we used. So whether that was the cloth for our clothes, the wood for our houses, the food we ate or the wood for our fuel, everything came off the land. Then we discovered fossil fuels, which are basically millions of years of stored sunlight, and suddenly we used those and oil to produce plastics and used those millions of years of stored sunlight to produce all these goods. We cannot do that any more, so suddenly we find ourselves having to produce not only food from the land, but energy as well. We also need to restore biodiversity and sequester carbon, so you have multiple uses for the land.

The question we asked is: can you do that? Is it possible, with the human population the size it is, to do all of those things? The answer is: you can solve that equation because quite a lot of land that is good for biodiversity restoration and carbon capture does not produce much food. About 20% of our farmland produces about 3% of calories. You can pay farmers good money to reduce the stocks in the uplands, to move some sheep to cattle, to re-wiggle the streams, to use AMP grazing so the grass is growing longer and you are getting more biodiversity, and so on. If you do that, you can do all those things, but you have to eat a bit less meat. You cannot do it eating the amount of meat we eat at the moment. The way to do that—sorry; this is a long answer to your question—is a combination of the land use framework, public money for public goods, increasing regulation and trade deals.

Q133 **Anna McMorris:** I know that you were an adviser in DEFRA, so you were looking at England. Did you look at what is being done by the Welsh Labour Government? They have introduced an agriculture Act, or a piece of legislation and a consultation, on ensuring that farmers farm more sustainably, and paying them to do so. I know that the farmers' unions have said that this is an absolutely groundbreaking, forward-thinking piece of legislation that is coming through. Did you take any learnings from that? I know this is not about being party political—for you, although it may be for us—but about taking what works, and what proposals could work, and recommending that in other countries in the UK, so essentially in England.

**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes, we did. We had a group that was England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, and for both parts of the report we discussed all the ideas together. The reason we did that was because in devolution, there are some things, such as trade, that are not devolved but have a huge impact on other parts of the country; there are some things that are devolved, but if you do not get link-up, might cause problems—for example, there are hundreds of farms on the Welsh borders that exist on both sides of the border—and then there are some things that are devolved, but you could learn from each other.



Q134 **Anna McMorrin:** Did you learn?

**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes. The Welsh are probably the most progressive, although I have not looked at the latest iteration since I published, which was in July 2021. I think there is a lot to be learned from the Welsh on farming. I think there is quite a lot to be learned from the Scottish on food poverty and dealing with that. There is quite a lot to be learned from the Northern Irish on trade. They are the best at that. I think there are all sorts of matters to be learned.

Q135 **Anna McMorrin:** The Government has said publicly that it does not see its role as telling people what to eat, but there are political challenges, as you have said, in reducing meat and dairy consumption. What interventions did you advise in your report, and would you advise now, that the Government could take towards people having healthier, more sustainable diets?

**Henry Dimbleby:** If you look at the focus reports that we did, and the quant research, the citizens clearly want to take action that changes what we eat. We asked that very specific question, and a huge number of people wanted to do that. That is very different from telling people what to eat. In some cases, telling people what to eat may be useful; in some cases, it is not productive.

If you look on the health side—I will come to the environmental side, but I will be very brief on the health side—the support for things such as banning advertising to children is completely overwhelming. I am worried, actually, that Labour see this as a red wall issue and are nervous about being seen as being nanny statist with some of the things that are very politically popular in the red wall. I have noticed certain comments that support the eating of unhealthy food, as if it was some kind of national thing that made you one of the kids, or at least down with the citizens. That is not where the citizens are.

On meat, it is much more difficult. In all the focus groups we had, when we talked about meat, there were a significant number of people for whom it almost felt like being a meat eater was quite a strong part of their identity. It was for the British. We used to laugh at the French when we went across because they were so weedy and all our citizens ate meat—they called us “the roast beef”. I think there are limited options for a Government that wants to remain in power to move on meat, so we said that the Government should do a few things. It should invest in innovation on alternative proteins and methane reduction. In procurement, there are things it can do to make sure there are more vegetable dishes in hospitals, schools and offices.

**Anna McMorrin:** Do you have a view on lab-grown meat?

**Henry Dimbleby:** I do. Can I just finish the last point?

**Anna McMorrin:** Yes. I am just conscious of the time.



**Henry Dimbleby:** Because the Government finds it so difficult, one of the two things that I am doing now in public life—i.e. unpaid—is trying to create a campaign with M&C Saatchi, the CEO of whom read the food strategy and wants to use all their pro bono work to see whether they can reframe the reduction in meat as something that is not threatening to meat eaters.

The other question was on—

Q136 **Anna McMorris:** On lab-grown meat.

**Henry Dimbleby:** I am probably one of the few people here who has eaten a lab-grown meatball, and it tasted of pork. There are three kinds of alternative protein. The biggest part is plants that are made to taste like meat. There are fermented proteins, which use genetically modified fungi. And there is lab-grown meat.

I personally do not think that lab-grown meat is ever going to be cheap enough to take a lot of room, but people who are much richer than me are investing in it, so I may well be wrong. Because 57% of the food we eat is processed, I think there is huge potential for other alternative proteins to reduce the amount of meat we eat quite quickly as soon as they get cheaper. It is not going to make it much healthier, but we have to use the fact that we eat so much processed food to take pressure off the environment quite quickly, so I am a big fan of using alternative proteins in processed food to reduce that pressure. I think it will be lower cost than meat quite soon.

Q137 **Anna McMorris:** Thank you. Just finally, I know that you looked at the outline Government buying standard for food. How would you like to see that redesigned? Can Government procurement play a role in shifting how we all eat? You might have picked this up in your work around the different nations. In Wales, we have the future generations Act, which looks at the sustainable procurement of anything. It looks at the carbon cost, the climate cost, and the sustainability cost when any public sector organisation is looking to procure.

**Henry Dimbleby:** I think you need to have that. It needs to be mandatory. Alongside that, you need dynamic procurement and the ability to enable big institutions to buy locally rather than just using the big wholesalers.

**Anna McMorris:** Thank you.

Q138 **Claudia Webbe:** I am going to ask about what you described at the beginning. One of the things that the Government did accept, of course, is your recommendation on the rural land use framework. Indeed, I think it is due to be published this year. What do you see as being in that framework, or what would you like to see in that framework?

**Henry Dimbleby:** The best example of it has been created by one of the next panellists, so it might be worth asking her. Basically, what it has to set out is, first of all, what our land is good to do. That should be on a quite granular level, so that local groups can use it. I literally mean a map



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that says what land is suited to do what. Then it has to take a view on what we want to happen on which bits of land. That is the bit that will be incredibly contentious. People have said, "This is a Stalinist thing. It is imposing a plan," but it is not Stalinist to have a view about how you should use resources. It is sensible, and it is sensible to make that information available and to let people know that you will henceforth be creating Government incentives to support those things rather than other things.

We already pay farmers across the Union £3.4 billion a year for various goods. All this would be doing is saying, "We are now going to use that money to incentivise farmers or landowners to do the things that we think need to be done in each area." In the uplands, that would include giving them money to destock and restore wildlife and trying to make that worthwhile. There will be different things in other places. Things that will be contentious include housing, which has a tiny amount of land use but is always contentious. Solar panels will be contentious, as will the uplands.

My guess is that you will end up having one document inside DEFRA that has the full detail. Then there will be a less politically explosive document that is published, and everyone will say that that doesn't do as much. But let's wait and see.

**Q139 Claudia Webbe:** You talk about three compartments, and that you definitely want to see that.

**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes. It is actually more of a continuum. It is the case that some wildlife species thrive on unfarmed land and some thrive on farmland, because we have farmed for so many thousands of years, but that farmland is generally farmed less intensively. Then we also need to produce some high-yielding, low-input land. That might look like a monocrop, but it would be a monocrop that did not have a lot of chemicals on it and did not produce a lot of carbon. In order to solve the problem of having enough food, enough wildlife and enough carbon sequestration, you need a range of different land use types. Again, what that looks like at a higher level and at a more granular level should be set out in a land use framework.

**Q140 Claudia Webbe:** Thank you for that. I want to ask you about post-Brexit trade deals. You are a bit critical in your report on trade deals. To what extent do post-Brexit trade deals risk undermining UK farmers and the UK Government's wider sustainability agenda? How could the Government mitigate those risks?

**Henry Dimbleby:** We have done a bunch of roll-over trade deals from the EU. The three significant new trade deals are with Australia and New Zealand and our recent joining of the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. The New Zealand and Australian trade deals allow the import of food that is reared at higher carbon levels and with levels of animal cruelty that we would not accept here. However, because of the geography most of that food currently goes to China and elsewhere. Theoretically it is a problem, but unless China has a trade war



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with Australia, which could happen, I do not see it as a huge threat to our farmers.

The CPTPP is slightly different and has a slightly different set of risks. As it is, we had trade deals with all of the 11 players but Malaysia and Brunei. I am not going to talk about country of origin rules or the potential upside; I am just going to talk about the food system. We had trade deals already with all but two. We do not know yet about the quotas. For example, we excluded pig farming from the Australian trade deal. When you join the CPTPP you agree quotas. Those have not been made public yet. My assumption is that the same restrictions that were put in the Australia and New Zealand trade deals are continued. If that does not happen, all hell will break loose, but my assumption is that that is not the case.

What really has changed is that the 8% tariff on palm oil will be zero for Malaysia. Eight per cent. is kind of within currency fluctuations, so my guess is that you will see a movement of palm oil from Indonesia to Malaysia; it is not going to be a big deal.

The question is—there are two things—first, what happens with future membership? America might join at some point. We have a theoretical veto, but will we feel that there is too much to lose so we won't use that veto? If America or Brazil joined, that would be disastrous. The second question is whether generally CPTPP will have a freezing effect on us trying to raise our own standards. In the EU, we raised our standards to above EU standards, but we let them import their food at lower standards in a number of areas. Will there be a freezing effect? So, where we need to improve standards, we don't, because we joined the CPTPP.

**Q141 Claudia Webbe:** In your report, in any event, you basically said that we risk undermining what we are doing domestically with UK farmers and with their goals for tackling climate change—what they do about restoring nature, for example, and animal welfare. We risk all that if we then—

**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes. As I said at the beginning, it would make a complete sham of everything we are doing.

I do sense something, from reading the tea leaves, rather than having any more knowledge than you. In the Liz Truss era, when those deals were signed, it felt like "Supermarket Sweep", going around the supermarket with a trolley, throwing as many trade deals into the trolley as possible before the clock ran out, regardless of their quality. As I said, the Australian trade specialist press were aghast at the quality of the deal that they got from us.

It feels to me, however, with the delay of the India deal and CPTPP—which is not in itself a disaster, as I said—that Kemi Badenoch is taking a different approach. It feels less like we are running off a precipice. As I said, I don't know, but there is a different feeling to it.

**Q142 Claudia Webbe:** You called for a good food Bill. Will you set out how legislation in this area could improve the governance and sustainability of the UK food sector?





**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes, this is absolutely critical. As I said, it is a complex problem, which will be across multiple parliamentary terms. If politics carries on like it is, there could be multiple Administrations within those parliamentary terms, and it is difficult: when you intervene, you do not know what is going to happen, and it is politically difficult.

To keep us on track, you need something similar to the climate change legislation. We have statutory targets already for carbon and biodiversity; we need statutory targets for health. We then need to have, outside Government, a third-party, independent body reviewing progress on an annual basis. We recommended that, rather than create a new body, we get the FSA— already independent—to do that. It could get input from the Climate Change Committee and from the Office for Environmental Protection. Between them, each year, they could say, “Here’s what’s working in the Government approach, here’s what is not working, and here are some ideas.”

I think the Climate Change Committee has been fundamental. We are not nearly far enough along, but I do not think that we would be where we are without it. For example, whether this happens or not, I do not think that the Government would be not allowing non-electric cars after 2030 had it not had that regular wake-up call from a non-political body.

Apart from those two things—health targets and some form of non-political body—other things need to be done. A lot is happening locally, so I feel that there should be an obligation on local authorities to create local food plans. Defra has said it will do a food security review every three years. Given the current volatility—at the moment, we look pretty secure, but who knows?—I think that that should be done annually. The two biggest things are a statutory target on health and an independent review, to keep us on track across multiple Administrations.

Q143 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** Mr Dimbleby, I want to ask about technical innovation in farming, such as AI and precision breeding, and we have talked about lab-grown meat. Which do you think show the greatest promise, and do you think Government are committing enough funding to encourage those practices in the wider sector?

**Henry Dimbleby:** I do not have anything invested in any of those technologies, which means that I do not know which show the greatest promise, but the range of innovation is extraordinary, from AI being able to see every plant in a field and identify which are sick, massively reducing the application of pesticides, herbicides and nitrogen, to robots that are weeding, to new ways of creating proteins.

The piece I worry is not being done enough is social innovation. If you could get all farmers within the food system to have as much understanding as the best farmers, that would be transformative. There is not enough money going into thinking about how we work locally to create that join-up, and there is not enough training anyway for those farmers; there is not enough support for farmers to bring them through the transition.

Likewise, if you look at the health side of it, there are some really innovative things going on. For example, in my borough, Hackney, the Alexandra Rose Charity is trialling something from Washington, which is giving people living in poverty vouchers for fruit and veg. It looks as if they are repeating the results from Washington, which are quite significant improvements in physical and mental health. We suggest that £1 billion should go into it. There is currently £500 million going into it.

**Cherilyn Mackrory:** Into which bit, sorry?

**Henry Dimbleby:** We produced breakdown, and I can give you that. There is about £500 million going in. As a physics graduate, before I started this work I was probably a bit susceptible to this bias, which is that you get very excited about big science and forget about social science and social innovation.

Q144 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** We need to make it easy for farmers, in my opinion. Your report says that “it is not yet clear exactly” how the money for ELMS will be distributed to farmers. On the ground, farmers often speak about the difficulty of getting the right grants for the right piece of work. Do you think that farmers are getting sufficient clarity to make it easy for them? We have only seven years over which ELMS is being introduced. How do you think that trajectory is going, and what more do Government need to do to make it easy and cost-effective for farmers, so that they are incentivised to do the right thing?

**Henry Dimbleby:** In the time I was at Defra, we went up to no-deal Brexit and back again four times, we had a pandemic and a war, and I had five Secretaries of State and served under four Prime Ministers. It is definitely the case that Defra is behind. A business that had been through that would be behind. One of the concerns about the current Secretary of State was that she would be a Trussite and very much free market. I cannot say too much about it because there is a certain level of confidentiality, but she is really focused on carbon and biodiversity and she has accelerated the programme.

There is still not enough vision for the future—the framework for what we are trying to do. If we look at the current fight about whether it is revenue forgone or whether there is another way of paying, in the end, I do not think revenue forgone will be the model that works. You have to work out what payments give the most results, because you do not want to pay too much, but at the same time, you want farmers to be incentivised to be able to live and do the right things. My concern is that it has already got so political that the wiggle room for a Secretary of State to say, “That didn’t work,” and come back is quite small. Then what happens is that you basically get stasis and we go back to basic payments, which would be an absolute disaster.

Q145 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** Do you think that something like—I don’t want to put words in your mouth—more people on the ground who can help farmers from season to season would be a good investment?



**Henry Dimbleby:** Yes, and there are some good people doing stuff on this. The Prince's Trust are trying to do it. I do not think there is nearly enough support for farmers to make that transition at the moment. All the farmers who lean in know what is going on, but a whole bunch of farmers who just do not like politics do not know. We have the least co-operatised farming system in Europe, and that is because farmers here, for whatever reasons, can be quite solitary figures. I think there is a huge amount of work that needs to go into training. I talk quite often to big trusts about where they should be spending their money in the transition, and I think that money spent supporting farmers to get through this transition would be well spent and we need more of it.

Q146 **Chair:** Thank you very much. That concludes our first panel. I should have said, as there was some discussion about meat, that I am a farmer and a meat-producing farmer. That should be on the record. Members of the Committee are aware. Thank you very much for giving us your time.

## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Minette Batters, Sue Pritchard, Chris Brown and Peter Dawson.

Q147 **Chair:** Welcome back for our second panel this afternoon, as we continue our inquiry into environmental change and food security. I am pleased to welcome to the panel, from my right, Sue Pritchard, who is chief executive of the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission; Peter Dawson—particular thanks for stepping in for your chief executive, who I think had a personal matter to attend—from Dairy UK; Chris Brown, who I think is the director responsible for sustainable supply chains at Asda; and Minette Batters, the president of the NFU. I know that the first three of you heard Henry Dimbleby's remarks and Minette did not, but some of the issues that we raised in the first panel may come up in the second, and by all means please refer to them.

I am going to start with you, Minette. We heard under Henry's description of his time at DEFRA some of the multiple challenges that farmers have had to go through, and that the Department has had to contend with, in the five years that he was a non-exec director. Could you just highlight for us the impact on the farming community? Again, I should just say that I am a member of the NFU so I'll get that on the record as well. However, what is the impact, for the generality of your members, of both the geopolitical events—so the consequences of the invasion of Ukraine and the impact that had on energy costs—and of climatic issues over the past few years? What is that doing to the way in which farmers think about how they can feed the country?

**Minette Batters:** Thanks to you and the Committee, Chair, for the opportunity to be here today. I think it is really hard to do justice to what is an unprecedented set of events—leaving the European Union, the global pandemic, and then the war in Ukraine. It is fair to say that the war in Ukraine makes the previous two look insignificant, and that is quite something to say in itself.

Energy prices have been off the scale. There is a lot of focus on why food inflation is not coming down faster, and a lot of that is because farming is a long-term business. If we look at the situation with fertiliser, many of food and farming's costs are driven by the price of gas, so a tonne of ammonium nitrate fertiliser would have cost nearly £1,000 last year. This year, it is down to £400, but a lot of people bought their fertiliser last year. For the protected crop sector, we are seeing the lowest level of tomatoes and cucumbers being produced since 1985. If we look at the price per therm of gas, in peace time, effectively—in 2019—it was about 50p per therm. It is still up 150% higher than that, and last year it went up to 600% higher.

All these costs have driven higher costs for feed materials, for fuel, and for energy in general. Of course, with the Government scheme ending and the failure, if you like, of primary production to get into the ETII scheme, it has meant that we are seeing contraction in all sectors; we saw nearly 1 billion fewer eggs produced in 2022 compared with 2019. A lot will need to be done to give the sector the confidence to keep producing at the scale that it was.

Of course, in the fruit and vegetable sector, we need to be producing much more than we were previously, so we are, I fear, at a bit of a crossroads on food security. These costs are unprecedented in my lifetime, and, actually looking at general economists' views, I do not think that anybody has seen anything like it since the post-war era.

**Q148 Chair:** You mentioned that food inflation has been very high—we just had the figures this morning that it was 19% in the year to the end of March—but also that the fertiliser cost has started to come down closer towards pre-Ukraine levels. It is obviously impossible to predict what might happen with Ukraine, but are you beginning to see some stability in pricing returning back to a normal level?

**Minette Batters:** I just don't think that we can go there on that. I think the ability of Russia to weaponise this going forwards is enormous. I think that the global picture on grain pricing at the moment is extraordinary; I do not think that anybody quite understands what is happening, but I do not think that we can take it for granted.

I would also say that Russia produces a lot of the world's fertiliser, as does Ukraine. Ukraine is going to be potentially 30% to 40% down on plantings; that will have huge ramifications globally, so I do not think that we can give any assurance that things are going to change any time soon.

However, for my members—for primary production—they really do need confidence, in a time of such huge uncertainty. I know that you will come on to it, with the environmental land management scheme, but we have had a long time of very little certainty for farming. We need certainty. With the intensive sectors, such as pigs, poultry and horticulture, I think that we need a different approach as to how that market is functioning and how Government, retailers and supply chains can give them the



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confidence to stop the contraction that we are seeing in all of the surveying that we are doing.

Q149 **Chair:** Well, this inquiry is mostly focused on climate change and the environmental impact on food security, and that is not something that the Government can control with a piece of legislation overnight. Last year, we had one of the driest years in recent memory and we hit record temperatures in July. What impact did the climatic change have on your members?

**Minette Batters:** We have been surveying our members a lot on this for many years now, and two thirds of them are saying that extreme weather events are changing their business decisions. Last year, of course, there were exceptional conditions. The drought brought a whole load of new challenges on the back of the storms in the earlier part of the year. We then went into extreme cold. It reached minus 12° at our headquarters in the winter. It has been unprecedented.

There were big issues with feed costs. I was feeding my own livestock right the way through the summer and the autumn. We are still feeding now, and that is the situation for many dairy farming businesses as well as the livestock sector. What I would say is that it was enormously appreciated that Government made half of the direct support—BPS funding—available for the summer. That made a big difference going forwards. We should be talking about extreme weather events and how we manage our risk and volatility for the future, because these weather events are only getting worse with climate change. Being able to manage to feed livestock and your families is a key part of this, I fear.

Q150 **Chair:** Can I come to you, Peter, and ask the same question? What was the impact of the heatwave on dairy production last year?

**Peter Dawson:** There was some impact, but as it turned out it was not huge. Farmers did have to resort to purchasing more bought-in feed, but luckily there was movement in raw milk prices to help compensate them for their increased operating costs. Overall, milk production in its entirety across the course of the year was not badly affected, but as Minette has pointed out, these extreme weather events may become more frequent in the future and may come to affect the milk-producing regions of the country that to a degree were exempted last year. We are more into the west and the north, but you never know the extent of drought impacts going forward.

Q151 **Chair:** Chris, Minette mentioned the challenges in the tomato and cucumber sectors, and we have seen gaps on the salad shelves as a result of issues not necessarily in this country, but with imports. Can you tell us how Asda reacted to those problems and whether you were as affected as others?

**Chris Brown:** We were affected. Unprecedented weather in the UK and, unfortunately, in Morocco and southern Spain had a major impact on the social structure of Morocco. That meant that supply to the whole of the UK was tight. We obviously understand our customers, but it is a fluid food



market. In one week during the period when there was a shortage, we had 3,000 baskets across our stores in which there were more than 10 cucumbers and tomato packs. Customer purchases during the start of the year show that that is not our normal amount. It was because other markets were not being supplied and their customers were coming and buying from us. That is the nature of a free market, but it did have an impact on our business. We ended up with spikes in demand from other people that were short of products.

We programme and work with our suppliers. We have long-term relationships and commitments for over 15 years now with Morocco growers for the period in the year when the UK is not perfect for growing tomatoes.

**Q152 Chair:** As a barometer of customer shopping habits, do you think that incidents like this, if they become more frequent, should encourage market participants like you to encourage customers to buy more seasonal produce and not be so reliant on imports of exotics from around the world that cannot be produced?

**Chris Brown:** It is difficult to tell your customers not to buy things. I think there is a flipside to that: when is seasonality? Do you wish to go back to only having strawberries in August? With modern, covered production systems in the UK we have extended the season for soft fruit, and it has been a fantastic success story for UK horticulture. There is also a trade benefit. There are a million people in sub-Saharan Africa who are employed in producing horticulture for the British market.

**Q153 Chair:** I will take that as a no. Sue, what is the impact from the shortages we have seen in the supermarkets? From a UK grower's perspective, does this provide opportunity, or are we all caught up in the same global challenge from the climate?

**Sue Pritchard:** I want to disclose, as you did, Chair, that I am also a farmer.

**Chair:** That is why you are here.

**Sue Pritchard:** I think I am here as chief executive of the FFCC, but I am also a farmer. I am a Welsh farmer and an NFU member like you.

We have heard a litany of shocks in the food system, very eloquently expressed by colleagues, and they all point to how lacking in resilience the food system is in general. And the further shocks coming down the line are supply chain disruptions and price rises. But the Government's own 2021 food security report pointed out that the biggest medium to long-term risk to the UK's domestic food production comes from climate change and other environmental pressures. So I think the strategic question that we need to be responding to—as well as the very practical and immediate question that has already been raised—is this. Can we tinker with the system to make it a little bit more resilient, or do we need to think about transforming the food system so that it is more resilient and more adaptable in the long term?



The evidence that we heard earlier from Henry indicates very much that all these pressures suggest that we really do need to be taking this opportunity to be thinking much more strategically and creatively about the possibilities for a transformed food system. The crises that we have been talking about are still only a fraction of them. Some 6.9 billion meals-worth of food is wasted on UK farms. One in eight people in the UK is currently food insecure. And the NHS, as Henry said earlier, is currently spending about £12 billion a year on diet-related ill health, at a time when it can ill afford to do that. So change is essential, but the good news is that there is widespread support for that change.

Just before Christmas, WWF convened a group of producers, retailers, green NGOs and farming organisations in a letter that called for change. In fact, it said ELMS is the “cornerstone for a resilient and secure food system” and it called for “bold, decisive action” around ELMS. It called ELMS “the single largest act of leadership and support that government can provide to this shared endeavour” of meeting the UK’s net zero commitments and tackling the polycrisis that we have been talking about. So yes, there are huge issues, but I think there is now widespread acceptance that this is the moment for ambitious and bold change.

Q154 **Chair:** Did you say that that group called ELMS out in a positive way, as providing the opportunity to make this change?

**Sue Pritchard:** As a framework and as an intention of providing public money for public goods. It does not say that it is currently properly funded or, as yet, setting out clearly enough the strategic vision that it needs to set out. So it is not saying that ELMS is perfect at all, but it is calling on Government to resource that transition and provide the right support to farmers to make ELMS work.

Q155 **Chair:** That is a good segue into my final question, which is to ask each of you to give me your top line on the Government’s food strategy, published last year. What are the good—if there are good—bits of it and what are the less good bits of it? Minette, can we start with you?

**Minette Batters:** I think it is still—I am sure Government would admit this—a work in progress. I was part of Henry Dimbleby’s work; I was on his board, and it was a very comprehensive piece of work. What we have now is a work in progress, and it needs to be developed into living, breathing policy, effectively.

I think that the Food and Drink Sector Council, of which Tim Smith is the recently appointed industry co-chair, has a great opportunity to join up the dots for, effectively, British food at home and abroad—we have now got the export council on the back of it—but focusing in at home and particularly on procurement. Public sector caterers have recently been appointed to that. I hope we can now develop the bones of that food strategy into a meaningful policy document.

I think what has happened with the war in Ukraine—I have been told many times, “We are a wealthy nation; we can afford to import our food.” I don’t think that is the rhetoric of today. Things have changed, and we



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need to react to that. So the food strategy now needs to be developed into a policy document that really will deliver on what this country needs and, importantly, incorporate the ambition of net zero and joining up food production with environmental delivery.

Q156 **Chair:** Chris, do you think that this strategy will help persuade Asda to think about the resilience and sustainability of your supply chain? Will you be more inclined to buy British?

**Chris Brown:** Chair, we have been thinking about sustainability and resilience for a long time. Back in 2018, we used the IPCC climate change models across our produce supply chain and published the results. Henry Dimbleby and his team have done a great piece of work in coalescing some of this together, but I don't take your charge that we have been asleep on the job.

I also think there is a piece that this flushes out. One of the questions we have all talked about is the metrics on sustainability, and we have a real problem in that. In the Paris agreement, which we are all working towards, paragraph 1(a) of article 2 talks about climate change restrictions to 1.5°, but 1(b) says that we will not threaten food supply. Everybody only ever talks about 1(a) and never talks about 1(b). We need to build that food strategy conversation and make it broader.

We do need to understand that—there will no doubt be a question about meat—rather than just having a conversation about emissions and carbon, we need to start talking about global warming impacts. An awful lot of that fundamental understanding needs to be developed before we can take a food strategy forward into Government policy.

Q157 **Chair:** Thank you. Peter, what is Dairy UK's view about the food strategy?

**Peter Dawson:** There was actually very little in there that was dairy specific. We still do not have a clear conception of what the Government would like from the dairy industry in the long term. We hoped that the Government's land use strategy would provide that framework, but all we have at the moment in the strategy document is a generalised statement about maintaining production at broadly current levels, and that is a cross-sectoral commitment.

What we would have liked is more emphasis on assisting the dairy industry in maintaining and improving its international competitiveness, because we operate in a global marketplace, and that is imposing ongoing challenges for the sustainability of dairy farming. That may get worse in the long run, depending on the nature of the free trade agreements the Government is seeking to negotiate.

What we would also like to see is help in meeting regulatory compliance costs, which are a significant challenge for dairy farming. Because the focus at the farm level has been on restructuring enterprises to achieve efficiency, there is a recognised backlog of investment in slurry management. Government assistance in that area is certainly something we would welcome.



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**Chair:** Thank you. I am conscious that we may be disrupted by votes in a few minutes. Sue, you have about two minutes.

**Sue Pritchard:** I can be quick. We very much support the national food strategy. There was a lot in it that did not make it into the Government response, and that is a disappointment. The good ideas that need to be brought through and implemented are on the economics of the food system—I am sure we will talk more about that shortly—food justice and action on ultra-processed foods, agroecology and a transition to agroecology in a fairer food system.

**Chair:** Thank you. We are expecting three votes shortly, which means we will have a half-hour break. We will start with the next set of questions and see how far we get.

Q158 **Duncan Baker:** I will get them done in 30 seconds. In this series of questions, we will talk about climate change and adapting to climate change.

Minette, I will come to you first. I represent North Norfolk, which is a very agricultural constituency, and a number of these questions dovetail specifically with where I represent. The NFU have now published their new sector resilience plans.

Touching a little on what you said to the Chairman earlier, we know that climate change is going to affect crop yields. Water storage is a particular problem in my constituency in East Anglia. Soil quality and so on will also be affected. What are the key measures that the farming sector needs to implement now to prepare for the projected changes we will see in climate change over the next 25 years?

**Minette Batters:** No county probably showcases the challenges of water security better than Norfolk. A huge proportion of our food is produced in Norfolk, and water is a key requirement. We suffer very much in this country from too much and too little. On the western side we have too much, and on the eastern side we often have too little. Ultimately, we waste a lot of diffuse water into the North sea.

In many cases, I see us as the lucky ones, because we are not Spain, we are not Portugal and we are not Italy, who declared a state of emergency last year. We have a temperate climate here; it is just that we are not making the best use of it. We really need to look at the planning framework to make sure that we can store water on farms. We need to build some bridges, if you like, with on-farm water storage and abstraction. There is a real danger that when we are looking at everything through the environmental impact lens on abstraction, we do not take into account the food security element or the socioeconomic element. We have to take in all three factors.

Water security is huge, but we are lucky in that we can do something about it. Our water management strategy, which we have worked closely with DEFRA and the Environment Agency on, provides a lot of the answers to the challenges that we face. We also need, through public moneys for



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public good and through ELMS, to focus on food production and environmental delivery. As a bare minimum, we have talked about a national approach to measuring soil health and carbon sequestration, knowing what is working and knowing what is what, and coalescing around the baseline metrics and the tools with which we measure them.

We could do that right now. Northern Ireland has showcased a way of doing it, and I would say that it is essential for the United Kingdom that it comes together. It has such a huge rural landmass that it would be very good to know what is going on. Otherwise, there is a danger that land will get bought up. It is getting bought up already for tree planting, by people who are not even residing here and paying their taxes here. I do not think that putting down public moneys to do that achieves what is needed, so we should be measuring the baseline.

Back in the summer, the Prime Minister made the point about setting a new self-sufficiency target. There is a real danger that, when we look at targets for nature, the environment, house building and green energy, all of which are incredibly important, if we do not have targets for food production in local plans, we will just produce less and less because it will not be featuring in them. It is about levelling up, effectively, within the land use strategy to make sure that we get what is working not only for North Norfolk but for Cornwall, Cumbria and where I am in Wiltshire, all of which will have completely different requirements.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. I am afraid that the Division bell has gone, so I am going to call things to a temporary halt.

*Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.*

*On resuming—*

**Chair:** Welcome back. Apologies for the disruption. Duncan Baker was in the middle of his questions. He is not quite back yet, but because we are quorate I am going to move on to Cat Smith.

Q159 **Cat Smith:** I have a couple of questions on measuring and monitoring. Mr Dawson, could you tell us what the dairy industry is doing to measure and reduce its carbon footprint? What measures are you taking to ensure that the dairy sector is net zero by 2050?

**Peter Dawson:** We have an industry initiative called the dairy road map. That has been running for some time. It was actually initiated by DEFRA, and the NFU and AHDB participate in its governance. It seeks to set targets for improvement in the environmental performance of both processors and dairy farmers.

The most immediate target we have is for all dairy farmers in the United Kingdom to undertake carbon footprinting, ideally by the middle of this year. I do not think we are going to meet that target, but there is already very high participation among dairy farmers in that activity. We estimate that at least about 40% of farmers are regularly carbon footprinting, and that accounts for about 60% of milk production.



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One of the challenges of winning farmer engagement is that there are always concerns that the IT tools that they are using to do this come up with different results. We have set up a working group with the tool providers to try to come up with standardised metrics so that everybody can be confident that they are measuring the same thing and that data is going to be comparable.

Once we have that consistency of data, the objective will be to try to pool it in one form or another, track our progress and then, ideally, set targets for improvement of performance going forward to meet that 2050 target. We are very actively engaged in that agenda in terms of determining the industry's carbon footprint and ensuring that all individual businesses know what their footprint is and are actively seeking to manage it.

Under the dairy road map, we will be looking at other areas, such as feed, fertiliser, animal health and welfare, and genetics. It is not just carbon—the dairy road map will actually venture into other areas of data gathering and target setting—but we are working quite intensively on carbon at the moment.

**Q160 Cat Smith:** Thank you. Ms Batters, may I ask a similar question about the rest of the farming sector? Are you able to give us a sense of how developed other farm sustainability metrics are in terms of what is being measured and what is not being measured?

**Minette Batters:** What I detect across all sectors is a real desire to be part of the solution on all of this. I think it is a real missing link in the Government's ELMS strategy that they are not defining the baseline. We really do need to be measuring where we are now, rewarding what is working and incentivising what is not working. We need to define those baseline metrics, certainly at GB level and ideally at UK level, and make sure that we are coalescing effectively around a couple of measurement tools. As Peter alluded to, the consistency of data is absolutely key. I am sure, Chris, that you will come on to this too. We want to have consistency right across the country. If we do not, we will not have accurate data. When land and the value of carbon are potentially competing with the value of food, we need to know what we start with.

I think there is a real opportunity for us to provide global leadership on climate-smart agriculture. We must define the baseline, because the voluntary carbon market can never be credible unless we know where we start this journey. Both for production and for the voluntary carbon market, we need to know where we start from. There are effectively three levels of thinking for us on the journey to net zero, and I think the one that you are very much focusing on is productivity, efficiencies or green growth—whatever you want to call it—but it is effectively how we are going to produce more on less land with less inputs. It absolutely should fit within the new policy thinking, because decarbonising does come with a cost. I think there is a challenge as to what the consumer will be prepared or able to pay and what should come from public investment. But if we have not started this journey by measuring it, I think it is going to make things much more difficult.



Q161 **Cat Smith:** That quite neatly leads me to ask Mr Brown about Asda and what it is doing to calculate its carbon footprint. Are you able to give us an overview of your scope of emissions from the business and what you are doing to reduce them?

**Chris Brown:** We have an ESG report that details—pardon the jargon—our full scope 1, 2 and 3. Our direct and indirect emissions information is broken down into distribution and all sorts of other things.

I think the real challenge, just building on what Minette said, is that we are incredibly reliant—falsely, in my view—on a very small number of academic papers in this area. Everyone is talking about—there was even coverage in the press today—avoiding meat because of high emissions, but none of that is agreed. If you look at ruminants—the Chair might come back to me on this—the question is about how much new carbon they are putting into the atmosphere. Relative to digging oil out of the ground, putting it into a jet engine and letting the CO<sub>2</sub> come out the back, a sheep in a field is consuming grass which took the CO<sub>2</sub> and it is putting methane into the atmosphere, which breaks down back to CO<sub>2</sub> and goes around the carbon cycle. We are not having these types of conversation.

We are talking about whether we are going to be able to put this in front of consumers. If you look at our nutritional information, we either do it as a percentage or per serving. They are done per 100g of protein, for example. If you want to do it on potatoes, people are referring to greenhouse gas emissions per 1,000 calories. They are not the same thing. If you look at the protein quality, and at the amino acid content for proteins, wheat and peas would be half that of beef. That is not included in any of this information.

If you are going to do it per kilo, a kilo of cabbage is 90% water, but a kilo of beef is only 30% water. All these things are unagreed and, frankly, need regulation. We need the Government to come and say, “Let’s pull some of the ideas together and actually come up with a coherent answer,” so that we have the metrics to be able to compare between products, rather than what at the moment strikes me as a lot of personal opinion.

Q162 **Cat Smith:** You highlighted there some of the different issues about comparing different types of food, and we appreciate that. When it comes to demand for foods from tropical regions that have to be imported, often by aeroplane, what due diligence does Asda do to ensure that the products that are being flown in are not fuelling deforestation abroad, while also measuring its carbon footprint here?

**Chris Brown:** A lot of the products that are at high risk from deforestation are not air-freighted. The Government, under the Environment Bill, is talking about having due diligence on deforestation-risk commodities, and they are things like soya and palm oil. In the report, we present information on where in the world we source things from and how much is physically segregated and comes from sustainable certification schemes. Air freight is really small. Historically, it is for something like flowers out of Kenya, but we have for the past seven





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months also been using sea freight to bring in flowers, as part of a major trial, which is looking promising in terms of quality.

**Q163 Chair:** Can I quickly follow up that question about metrics? You said very clearly that you think that there is not much science on the metrics of food production and its carbon footprint. Is that something that your sector, the supermarket sector, is willing to invest in to try to develop and are you doing so?

**Chris Brown:** Again, forgive me for the jargon, but we use a global warming potential of 100 years, which is the stuff that is used—

**Q164 Chair:** I was thinking of the examples you were giving of meat versus pulses and the respective carbon footprints.

**Chris Brown:** There are several initiatives to look at this in the grocery sector. I am sorry, I ought to have said that, under the DEFRA food data transparency partnership, there is an eco working group that will attempt to bring this together. It is not just my personal opinion; the Government is recognising the seriousness of the issue and putting a working group together on it.

**Chair:** We perhaps ought to take evidence on that. Sorry Minette, do you want to come in?

**Minette Batters:** That very point that Chris has made is why we need to start to measure the baseline of production. We do not have the data, so that is the real danger; the food data transparency work could demonise the livestock and dairy sector simply because we do not have the data to show what we are doing.

**Chair:** Thank you. Duncan, we went ahead because we have a hard stop at 5 o'clock. Back to you.

**Q165 Duncan Baker:** We finished off with Minette talking about how climate change was affecting the agricultural sector and what changes we could put in place to try to deal with that. The same question to Peter: effectively, what can the dairy industry do to combat the climate change that is coming up over the next 25 years? What specific measures are you able to implement to deal with the impact you will see on the dairy industry?

**Peter Dawson:** I cannot say that I can speak with any great authority on that, because the greatest challenge will obviously be at farm level and I haven't seen any modelling of what impact change in rainfall and temperature patterns in the UK will have on dairy farming.

If I may, I will venture an observation. If we are going to have a land use strategy that will change the utilisation of land, it logically implies that if you are going to cut production in some areas you are possibly going to have to intensify it in other areas. If you want farmers to do that, they will have to restructure an enterprise and probably invest in new buildings and other infrastructure that would also have to address the issue of climate change. In order for them to do that effectively, you need a flexible

planning framework to allow them to adapt their farms to do that. One of the biggest concerns dairy farmers have is that they are running up against local planning restraints that are not allowing them to adapt their businesses. Whatever recommendations the Government come up with in a land use strategy, it has to be harmonised within an appropriate planning framework.

**Q166 Duncan Baker:** Thank you. Sue Pritchard, it is really interesting to read in our pack about how you can use agroecology to work in a number of ways—hand in hand with nature and in other different ways—to apply ecological concepts to farming, which our Committee would find particularly interesting. The Food, Farming and Countryside Commission advocates a shift in that direction to increase the resilience and sustainability of farming. Can you give some of the benefits you would see across the industry of moving into that realm?

**Sue Pritchard:** First of all, I would like to clarify the definition of agroecology.

**Duncan Baker:** That is really useful for people who are not in the room and are watching around the country.

**Sue Pritchard:** Not everybody is familiar with it, but there is no mystery to agroecology at all. It is simply the name that is given to the body of work coalescing around fairer, more sustainable food systems and, importantly, aligned towards progress towards the sustainable development goals. It is not just about what happens on the farm, but about the whole of the food system. One of my colleagues, a farmer in Oxfordshire, calls it the bookshelf on which many other tomes sit—things like regenerative agriculture, organics and nature-friendly farming, but also economics, governance and culture. Those latter terms are probably more familiar to all of you. Regenerative agriculture, organics and nature-friendly farming all form part of the movement towards agroecology.

We commissioned research back in 2019-20 to look at the prospects of a transition to agroecology in the UK and the kinds of benefits we might see if that were both agronomically and economically plausible. Thankfully, having spent the money on the research, it confirmed that, indeed, it is and, what is more, it helps us to tackle several crises simultaneously. A transition to agroecological practices will reduce emissions by upwards of 70% and restore biodiversity across the whole of the farm landscape. It keeps food production at the core of land management, ensuring that we sustainably grow more of the healthy food that we need to be eating more of. It ensures that we do not export our environmental impact—you asked about that—and supports greater food security through supporting viable farm businesses.

Multiple other reports share that conclusion, including the Sustainable Food Trust's "Feeding Britain from the Ground Up" and the Nature Friendly Farming Network's "Farming for Climate Action". Perhaps most relevantly to this inquiry, the Climate Change Committee commissioned a rapid review on agroecology, which was published last month. It says that, by

applying agroecological practices, farmers do more than just produce food; they also protect biodiversity and associated ecosystem services. In addition, the development of regional markets, based on localised food production and consumption, ensures a decent livelihood for small-scale farmers and fair food prices for consumers. That, in turn, makes farming economically more competitive and more resilient to global contingencies, supporting a fairer transition to net zero. Those were the Climate Change Committee's comments.

In addition, the Climate Change Committee's adaptation progress report—we are talking about resilience and adaptation, and the role that agroecology has in both resilience and adaptive practices—recommends agroecology as the key enabler to sustainable and climate-resilient working land and seas. But it says that agroecology needs much more investment in R&D and technologies, and funding support.

We recognise that this is not without controversy. We also commissioned a Chatham House report, written by Professor Tim Benton and Helen Harwatt, to scrutinise some of the assumptions that we knew we were making about the benefits of agroecology, and testing them against assumptions that others make about other versions of sustainable intensification. Tim and Helen conclude that this is no longer about the science or about justifying the scientific arguments for agroecology; they are now fairly well made. It is about values-based ideas. It is about the role of markets, the role of the state in making decisions, intervention in food systems and dietary change. I think we will probably come on to that at some point. Those other values-based issues are just as important as the science, the agronomy and the economics in thinking about a transition to agroecology across the whole food system.

**Chair:** I am sorry, but if we have a hard stop at 5 o'clock, we are going to have slightly snappier answers and questions.

Q167 **Duncan Baker:** I will bring in Chris Brown. Last year, we had extraordinary temperatures, although the forecasts suggest that 40° temperatures may not be extraordinary going forward. In one of our meetings, you commented about the malfunctions of Asda's supply chain refrigeration in those high temperatures. We saw that happen across the country in many spheres. Ambulances were not able to cope with running their air conditioning and broke down. How are you adapting your business to cope with your supply chains in these abnormal temperatures?

**Chris Brown:** We are having to react to it, to be fair. None of our design specifications are for 40° temperatures. A lot of our refrigeration is for mid-30s maximum, and it is the same for many farming systems. I have never seen so many fans going into dairy farms as has happened over the last 12 months. There is also that climatic change and a couple of other effects. It is harder to get water, as Minette has already said. There is probably a switch in potato production further north into Scotland. We never really talk about it, but we are still an island and it makes a difference to the seas warming up. Mackerel, which is a major



consumption in the UK market, is much appreciated globally. It is a straddling stock; they straddle different fishing management and they have moved further north towards Iceland. We, along with others, have formed an advocacy group—there are 19 retailers included in our global markets for those mackerel—to advocate on behalf of the mackerel with Governments, and we ask for better control and management. We are having to respond to food sourcing as we see climate change having an impact.

**Q168 Duncan Baker:** Great. Minette, we have to be snappy, but this is really important, and you touched on it before. Is the Government's new plan for water taking enough action to help and support farmers through droughts? We saw what happened last year. We have talked already about the eastern part of the country and how short their supplies of water are. Extraction licences are being taken away from so many people in the eastern part of the country. Are we doing enough in that plan for water?

**Minette Batters:** The short answer is no. We have to have the ability to store water on farms. On planning permission, you talked about the importance of a flexible planning framework. That is key to all of this. I talked earlier about building bridges. Abstraction is becoming more difficult, so we have to have more on-farm water storage that is accessible. Planning needs to be aligned. The challenge of only looking at abstraction through the environmental lens has also been incredibly prohibitive. We should be taking a wider look.

**Q169 Duncan Baker:** I completely agree with you. There is a huge issue there. People do not seem to realise it is two years for a reservoir: one year to get through planning and then—everyone forgets this—you have to fill the thing, which takes a year.

**Minette Batters:** Absolutely. So, no, it is not joined up enough. With the challenges of climate change and weather events, we will probably need to look at greater changes than being able to store water on farms in reservoirs. We are going to need real, serious infrastructure if we are to move it around the country in the way that is needed. But I think it is now being acknowledged, certainly by the Secretary of State, that water security is something that really does matter to this country.

**Duncan Baker:** Good.

**Q170 Chair:** I am going to ask a few quick questions on water pollution while I have you all here. Minette, you know our Committee did a lot of work in this area, mostly focused on the pollution coming from human sewage rather than from animals, but the farm sector accounts for a similar amount of pollution incidents. What has the farming industry done off their own bat to help recognise that that problem needs solving?

**Minette Batters:** I think all farmers absolutely recognise that, as much as we want high-quality soil health, we want really good water quality. We really do need to look at making sure that, with the public money for public goods, all our watercourses are incentivised to have grass buffer

strips. There is a disparity, effectively, between arable land and grassland at the moment on the payment rates. We want to make sure that, ideally, you have the same value on grassland as you have on arable land with a buffer strip. I know many arable farmers are frustrated that the slurry investment grant is only focused on dairy farmers. There is a great opportunity to take nitrates and phosphates away from watercourses and dairy businesses on to arable land, where it is very much needed. That is a big part of resource use efficiency delivering for net zero.

I think everybody in farming is really joined up on wanting to provide the solutions. As I say, on all the work that we have done with our water management strategy, we feel that we have put forward a lot of proposals as to what this could look like, because it really does matter that we sort it out.

Q171 **Chair:** Can you make sure we have sight of those as part of this inquiry? That would be very helpful.

**Minette Batters:** Yes.

Q172 **Chair:** Sue, can I turn to you in relation to the River Wye? I am not sure whether you farm in that catchment, but you will be very familiar with the pressures from poultry units on the Wye. Are there opportunities for poultry farmers to manage their equivalent to slurry, their litter, in a way that will allow the problems on the Wye to be resolved, or are we ultimately going to have to reduce the volume of processing and the growth of poultry in that catchment?

**Sue Pritchard:** Both, actually. The comment that Minette made earlier about moving nutrients from parts of the country where we have too many of them to parts where we need a lot more of them is a point very well made. One of the strategies being suggested for the Wye at the moment is anaerobic digesters. I am very unconvinced by that. Elsewhere in Wales, we have huge issues with pollution from anaerobic digesters damaging rivers irreparably at times.

Q173 **Chair:** Could you explain that? Is that from the residues being spread on the land at the wrong time?

**Sue Pritchard:** Leaks into watercourses.

A couple of things become important. It is really important that the Environment Agency and the other regulatory bodies take up their responsibilities to follow through on existing regulations. DEFRA's advice to the EA at the moment to operate on an advice-led basis, rather than prosecuting, is misplaced. As you may well know already, Chair, River Action and other bodies are starting to pursue legal action to invite a judicial review of that particular decision.

There is some good news. Some of the technological innovation in manure management, nutrient management, is showing small digesters that can be located on farms, where litter goes in at one end and out the other end comes a very saleable product that is easily transported to other parts of



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the country. So there are economic opportunities for farmers to make better use of the excess materials they have.

Q174 **Chair:** Are those being supported through ELMS or the SFI scheme?

**Sue Pritchard:** Not at this stage.

Q175 **Chair:** Not yet. Peter, may I come to you on the dairy? Minette mentioned slurry. There have been some quite well publicised dairy problems—I am thinking in particular of the Dairy Crest issue at Davidstow, where a significant fine has been imposed and I think further action may follow. I do not ask you to comment on that specifically, but will the measures that the Government are encouraging with the extra funding for slurry be enough? Are dairy farmers in particular aware of the problem and their role in it, and are they determined to do something about it?

**Peter Dawson:** They are very much aware of the challenge that they face and the importance of the slurry infrastructure grant. I think there is a very high level of demand. We would like to see a commitment by the Government to repeat that programme, possibly with a higher level of funding. As I pointed out earlier, there is a backlog of investment in that area, but the whole sector is aware of it, and people would like to see that addressed.

Q176 **Chair:** Are the processors willing to co-invest with the suppliers?

**Peter Dawson:** No, it is not something that processors are considering. They have their own challenges and their own investment requirements. I think it is a challenge that is falling very much on dairy farmers, I am afraid.

**Chair:** I will try to be exemplary and speed up. I will ask Cherilyn now—you have six minutes.

Q177 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** I will do my best. Sue, I will talk a little about the change in diet. Henry Dimbleby's report concluded: "Substantial shifts in the nation's diet are required if we are to reduce the environmental and health impacts of our consumption", and the tilt on that is a move away from meat and dairy. Will you comment on that and on whether you think sustainability in our food and farming system can be achieved if we see that change in diet?

**Sue Pritchard:** The change in diet is essential. I know that many people argue that that is an impossible task and seek to imagine changes without diet change, but the reality is that diets have already changed dramatically in the past 40 years. Public health say that they find it hard to change diets to more healthy eating, but industry does not find it hard at all. One of the reasons why is that, for every £5 spent on public health education, the industry is spending £200 marketing unhealthy junk food, so it is really important that Government set the right guardrails for industry to change its current practices and to direct the move towards more healthy diets.



This is not just us saying that. Recently, the People's Plan for Nature, a citizens' assembly commissioned by the RSPB, WWF and the National Trust, published its review. It had several chapters on food and farming. In that report, citizens were calling for a national conversation about food, arguing that all retailers and food processors must be absolutely transparent about the sustainability of the whole supply chain, from climate and nature to health and wellbeing. Producers should just stop producing food with negative impacts on nature, climate and health. They want to see Government putting policies in place that will enable more people to reduce their consumption of intensive meat, dairy and fish. They see that this is a structural issue.

As Henry said earlier, this is not a decision that consumers can be making on a busy Friday night when you are running around the supermarket and trying to make choices about what you choose and how. This is a structural issue, which Henry describes really eloquently in the national food strategy, that requires upstream interventions from Government placing the responsibility on businesses to create the right healthy food environment for citizens.

**Q178 Cherilyn Mackrory:** Peter, I wonder if you can respond to that and let the Committee know about any unintended consequences? Could you also let us know how the dairy industry is already responding to that call?

**Peter Dawson:** I think we would reject any argument that you would somehow improve the nation's health by moving away from dairy. All the most recent available research indicates that dairy, as part of a balanced diet, has a positive effect on health. The idea that somehow dairy consumption is associated with negative effects is based on some very outdated nutritional thinking that does not bear real, further scrutiny.

In terms of achieving a beneficial environmental impact from cutting dairy, just to build on a point that Chris made earlier, I think, because dairy and methane production are part of a natural cycle, the issue is the stock of methane that the dairy industry sustains in the atmosphere. As long as we are improving efficiency or marginally reducing the production of methane, we are contributing to global cooling. There are few other sectors that can make that claim, or other parts of the economy like transport or aviation. We are already making a positive contribution towards global cooling.

In terms of whether or not you would actually achieve any desirable impact—or whatever your objective is, in terms of production—changing consumption may have no impact on that whatsoever. Currently, we are getting strong messages from Government that we should increase dairy exports, so if there is a fall in domestic consumption, the processing sector may just redirect its output towards export markets, without any change being communicated down the supply chain to dairy farmers. As a means of trying to achieve a specific environmental objective, I would not have thought that changing consumption, given that you are going through the various steps of the supply chain, was actually a rational policy, because you cannot be confident that you are delivering the effect you are seeking.



**Chair:** Two minutes left.

Q179 **Cherilyn Mackrory:** In that case—sorry Minette—I am going to jump straight to Chris. I will ask you a two-part question, if I can. First, responding to that debate, has your sector seen a reduction in consumption and demand for dairy and meat? Secondly—declaring an interest as a Cornish fishwife—you spoke about the fish earlier. Could I ask you to comment on the responsibility or what interaction you and other supermarkets have in the eating habits of the consumer? We know that the quotas will be changing every year, depending on which species is plentiful and which is not.

What more can supermarkets do to get consumers to eat fish that they are not already eating that might seem quite unusual? If you put them out there with recipes on TV and all the rest of it, you can change people's habits. You are more powerful than I think you realise. Could you first comment on spending habits and then on that particular point?

**Chris Brown:** I agree with Peter, fundamentally. Very often, these things are proposed, but without any consequences actually being explored—nothing is without consequence. I think there is a broader, better debate that needs to be balanced by looking at and examining that.

Going to your fish point, I hesitate to say that we are not that powerful; I failed to persuade people to consume bubblegum-flavoured milk. The fish species—unfortunately, as you know—are the big five, and they are the ones that they recognise and enjoy. I think that is a really uphill task.

Q180 **Dr Offord:** I want to ask Ms Pritchard about the Government's land use framework. In what areas do you see that trade-offs will need to be balanced in order for that to work?

**Sue Pritchard:** I think it is less about trade-offs and more about optimising multifunctionality.

Henry was very generous in describing the work that we have been doing for the last five years now. I would just remind the Committee that the reason we are doing the work is because a very broad cross-sector of interests recognised that it was time—that we could not put off facing into the need for a comprehensive land use framework any longer, given all the pressures on land, which Minette summed up earlier.

We talk about a land use framework as a set of principles and processes for better quality decision making. We tend to resist some of the other interpretations of a land use framework, which perhaps, as Henry said earlier, assume that somebody will be sitting in some central spot directing how land will be used around the country. We don't think that is a very good idea at all. But we do think it is critically important to bring all the different interests together.

We talk about land for climate mitigation, nature recovery, rural housing, energy, transport infrastructure, but of course also food security. There are no processes that exist at the moment that bring all of those actors



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together to mediate and negotiate how we make decisions about land and land use. So we have been running two pilots, in Devon and in Cambridgeshire, on a county scale, bringing together all of the key players in both of those places, and we have just published in the last couple of weeks some of the emerging findings from that work.

What we have found is that a land use decision-making framework helps provide a road map, which does bring leaders together to define and to debate and to deliver the strategic goals, translating national priorities into how they are going to work in a local place for land. It joins up the planning framework with other land use decision making, so that it is truly useful.

Better use of data is absolutely vital. One of our partners in this work is the Geospatial Commission, who have been working with us in both places, as well as in their own pilot, looking at how we can use existing data and bring it together really effectively for better quality decisions. It absolutely should not be top down, but not just bottom up either. It is an integrating process.

Effective public engagement is key. So many really important decisions get kicked into the long grass or just put off because institutions are very anxious about public reaction, but we have found that citizens really do want to be involved in those decisions, providing they are involved early enough to be able to shape the process and make a contribution.

Landowners—*[Interruption.]* I will just quickly make this last point: landowners really value the opportunity to participate in a process from which they have previously been excluded. They have not been invited. Institutions are often invited, but landowners and land managers are not.

**Q181 Dr Offord:** Do you share some of the concerns that the Government may abuse this process, for example by seeking to produce bioenergy crops, simply for other sectors, such as the aviation industry, who are not going to cut their carbon emissions and that this is a way in which the Government can skew the process?

**Sue Pritchard:** That is a good question, but if a land use framework is inclusive and transparent and open, those decisions will not be made behind closed doors. Those trade-offs and conversations will be clear and open, and open to scrutiny, and therefore they will need to be accountable for those decisions.

**Q182 Dr Offord:** Ms Batters, environmental land management schemes. What concerns do you have about them?

**Minette Batters:** Gosh, what concerns, and where to start in the time available.

**Dr Offord:** You have two minutes.

**Minette Batters:** Look, it is tailored towards the environment. There is nothing wrong with that at all, but it needs—we have legislative pathways



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now. Net zero, clean air, clean water. Food production has to be part of this, and I don't feel it is yet. That is not to say that it can't be, because there is still time, but it is not there yet.

The other point that I would add, which I think has been the hardest point for us at the NFU to land, is how we deal with risk and volatility. The point last summer about half of BPS payments being paid up front was that there were serious concerns about how people would feed their livestock. If we are to continue with a policy totally predicated on the income forgone model—that is, you do stuff and you get paid for doing stuff—how do we manage risk and manage the challenges of climate change without really diverse side effects from that way of thinking? Income forgone is the biggest challenge in the current thinking on ELMS and it needs to change.

**Q183 Dr Offord:** You have also said that the sustainable farming incentive has to work. Where would you like to see changes there to make sure that it does work for farmers?

**Minette Batters:** On the arable side of things, I think it has improved a lot and we have very much been listened to. Now, you have a story of two halves, though. You have, for the arable side, something that, effectively, is working, and farmers can reclaim what they lost in BPS. On the grassland side, for both upland and lowland, you have much lower payment rates. It doesn't look like low-input grassland is being valued at all. For instance, you get a £98-per-hectare payment for low-input grassland; for arable conversion, you get a £220-per-acre payment, so it is nearly £400 per hectare. There is a huge disparity between the two. The livestock sector will be massively impacted by trade deals, potentially fairly quickly. So we have to have equality, I would say, in the first instance across grassland and arable land, and potentially be incentivising production. There are huge challenges now in the horticultural sector. We should be producing more. There are big issues for potatoes. How do we have a scheme that actually works for those sectors that have not been part of the previous CAP thinking in this country?

**Q184 Dr Offord:** Very quickly, to open this up to the other members of the panel, I want to ask what recommendations you think this Committee, in the report that we produce, could make to the Government to ensure the resilience and sustainability of the food and farming system in this country.

**Sue Pritchard:** Government needs to take food seriously. It is absolutely central to all our lives, yet the way food is produced is deeply implicated in the crises we are also having to manage: the climate crisis, the nature crisis and the health crisis. I think it's a false distinction that we have to choose between food security and tackling those crises. I would say we need a well-resourced transition plan, across all Government Departments, that is directed towards producing a more sustainable food system—based on agroecology, I would argue—and that gives farmers the right signals and the right resources to deliver both food production and climate and nature adaptation. And we need a level playing field for business. Paul Polman will say it has to be good business to do the right



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thing for climate, nature and health, and I think good businesses want clear, lined-up legislation to support their development.

**Dr Offord:** And the dairy industry?

**Peter Dawson:** Given that we are a market-driven industry, exposed to international competitive pressure, we would like to see continued support to help innovation at farm level, to improve efficiency and competitiveness. We would like to see help in meeting regulatory compliance costs. It would be helpful if the Government acknowledged what the industry itself is doing in terms of improving its environmental performance, particularly through the dairy road map. We would like a recognition that in the end, with the dairy sector, you are talking about 8,000 dairy farmers. They are all at their own particular point in their career cycle. They all have their own particular farm, their own circumstances and their own set of responsibilities and resources available to them. So that has to be recognised. The Government have to find a way of bringing them on board if they do want to achieve a degree of change, and they have to give them the tools to achieve the objectives that they are seeking. If you speak to those organisations that have the challenge of trying to change farming behaviour, you find it's a very complex and challenging issue, so it has to be informed by a degree of social science. As Henry Dimbleby said earlier, it can't be purely science-driven; you need to take people into account in all of this.

**Chair:** Thank you. You may not have quite finished, Matthew, but some people have to go, including me, so I'm afraid I am going to call a halt to the discussion. Thank you very much indeed to our panellists: Sue Pritchard, Peter Dawson, Chris Brown and Minette Batters. Thank you for your time, and I apologise for the interruption to the session. It has been very valuable.