



HOUSE OF LORDS

National Resilience Committee

Corrected oral evidence

Thursday 18 June 2026

10 am

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Baroness Coussins (The Chair); Lord Farmer; Baroness Helic; Baroness Hunter of Auchenreoch; Lord Marland; Baroness Mobarik; Baroness Northover; Lord Oates; Lord Peach; Lord Spellar; Baroness Winterton of Doncaster.

Evidence Session No. 12

Heard in Public

Questions 116 - 124

Witnesses

Professor Tim Lang, Professor Emeritus of Food Policy, City St George's, University of London; Baroness Batters DL, Former President, National Farmers' Union.

Examination of witnesses

Professor Tim Lang and Baroness Batters.

Q116 **The Chair:** Good morning and thank you for coming to help us with our important inquiry into national resilience. I should remind you that this is a public session. It is being broadcast live. There will be a transcript sent to both of you within the next couple of days, so if there are any minor inaccuracies that you need to correct, that will be your opportunity to do so. When you have had a look at the transcript, if anything occurs to you that is not there and you wish you had said at the time, please feel free to send us supplementary comments or evidence in writing. That would be excellent.

Professor Lang, we have already had written evidence from you, of course, for which many thanks, and that is already registered in the public domain so you do not need to repeat what you have already told us there but this is a good opportunity for you to enlarge on that. We have a lot of questions for both of you. We will each ask some questions and when you give your first answer, please introduce yourself very briefly so we have that on the record as well.

I will kick off. I think we have you for about an hour. To set the scene, to what extent do you think UK supply chains are resilient to large-scale risks at the moment, particularly the impact of international disruptions that affect food security? We have heard evidence, for example, that the vulnerability of our undersea cables being cut could have a pretty immediate effect on food supply chains. How should we be working internationally as well as domestically to build, maintain and improve resilience of food security? Who would like to start? Professor Lang?

Professor Tim Lang: I am professor emeritus of food policy at the Centre for Food Policy, City St George's, University of London. It is a very long title. Thank you very much for inviting me and Minette Batters.

To what extent are supply chains resilient? It depends which risks, which foods—all of those. To unpack that, in my very large report for the National Preparedness Commission, the *Just in Case* report that came out last year, we spelled out about 15 different risks. Some are very big, like cables being cut, and some are less but longer term. Some will affect the public directly, some will affect different bits of supply chains. The public has been made aware most recently obviously of things like fertilisers, the enormous underpinning of the entire food system by oil and the oil and gas industries. My report, which took evidence, a bit like you, is partly modelled on Select Committees, although the hearings and interviews that we did for the *Just in Case* report were anonymised. I wanted to talk to insiders so that they were really frank.

The key issues that emerged were choke points. A Chatham House report a few years ago identified at least 15 for the future: oil, gas, energy costs, ransomware, malware, not just cutting of cables, disruption to concentrated supply chains. If you have a very few big firms dominating

supply, if they are affected in any way, the knock-ons can be enormous. The risks can be very disparate. It is one of the things that makes resilience such a complicated issue to address in food. It requires you to disaggregate the individual risk and then to put them back together because some of them come in combinations and some amplify, and you get loops and what the academics calls polycrises then having societal impacts.

Going into it a little bit more, some of the key ones that we are now aware of and that my report already flagged are, for example, the reliance on carbon dioxide throughout the food system. If you talk to people in food manufacturing or retailing or even back to fertiliser, CO₂ affects almost everything very quickly. If there is a strategic break in that, the knock-on effects would be very quick indeed. There are also, if you pan back 80 years since World War II, lock-ins to artificial fertilisers—we call them NPK, nitrogen, phosphate and potashes—that are the building blocks of “normal” food supply chains. If you look at another angle into large-scale risk, we have to start unpicking the pathways of impacts. All of these shocks to the food system could have different impacts on different sectors and no one really, apart from me opening up the issue, has looked at it seriously.

One of the big recommendations of the National Preparedness Commission report was that we have to get going and do the analysis. Why did I say that with such confidence? That is because other countries are doing it and Britain has not been doing it. The good news is Defra for England now does have a resilience unit. I am very glad about that and it is growing the number of people it is employing. The head of it told me last week that it is advertising jobs at the moment, but there are some things that are beyond Defra.

A key risk that came out in Covid was: what if a new pandemic hit the food workforce? Do we have an understanding of where the strategic risks of particular industries and particular workforces lie? The answer is no and I spelled that out in chapter 5 of my report, if you want to look at that. Then there are some very hard military-conflict type risks and threats that even some of my friends and colleagues thought I was being a catastrophist raising, which is that 94.5% of all British retail food comes from nine companies. Those nine companies have precisely 131 distribution hubs. If you think of the drone warfare that we have seen going on in Ukraine, you see how those very quickly become a strategic risk. Again, that is spelled out.

To summarise—I am sorry this is a long answer but it opens up the whole picture—the problem with food is it goes into everything and it relies upon everything. Everyone assumes that they will have it yet it is on a just-in-time system of delivery. There is no storage or very little storage. We can perhaps come to that. That is why a major recommendation of my report, which I flagged in my submission to you, was that we must start engaging with the public to be grown-up about this and not take the attitude that many of my interviewees said they really fear, which is that

we patronise the public by thinking we must not frighten them or we will only encourage panic. We do not need to do it like that. Other countries show a better way.

The Chair: Thank you. We will be going into more detail on some of the issues that you have touched on in later questions. Lady Batters, would you like to add anything to that?

Baroness Batters: Yes, very briefly. Thank you for having me in today and I am sure you have seen the *Farming Profitability Review*, but if not I would like to resubmit it to you because I think it bears a lot of relevance to this committee.

I think we have learned a lot about our international supply chains and our relationship with Europe. Most of the 40% of food that we import still comes from Europe and that is probably unlikely to change as our closest trading partner. However, we have seen the cracks in our food system very clearly in the last few years. I remind this committee of the billion fewer eggs that were produced in 2023 due to the rise in the price of wholesale gas—the rise in energy effectively—that meant that the cost of production contracts that the egg producers had with their packers and retailers were not fit for purpose and they stopped producing overnight. We saw in the same period, in 2023, rationing of salads from Morocco, with weather events in Morocco causing that shortage of salads that we were totally reliant on. In certain times of the year we are completely reliant on importing salads. If you remember, Baroness Coffey gave the turnip more credence than it has probably ever had by suggesting that the country could eat them. It is a real sign of the times that we face and the need to become much more resilient here.

I also remind this committee of the challenge in Covid when people were panic buying loo rolls. There was never a shortage of loo rolls but when you have 70 million people on an island and they start to panic buy, you very soon create a shortage. We have seen the mentality when it is tested and what happens. If that plays out with the food system and the national just-in-time distribution network that really does not have more than 10 cans of baked beans spare in it at any one point in time, you can see what would happen. I think that paves the way for the need for immediate change.

The Chair: Thank you. Lord Oates, do you have a quick supplementary on this question?

Q117 **Lord Oates:** Yes. I want to ask specifically about the point that Professor Lang made on fertilisers. My understanding is that over the last 20 years we have lost all domestic production of synthetic fertilisers. Do you feel that this needs to be reversed with some kind of strategic position taken on domestic production of synthetic fertilisers or should we be moving away from synthetic fertilisers?

Professor Tim Lang: Antony So, a colleague who helped me on the *Just in Case* report, and I have just written a new briefing paper for the

National Preparedness Commission on that and we outlined four options. You can try to get off the treadmill, in other words go organic or go biological circular economy, recycle the phosphates rather than keeping on getting them in from rather suspect or risky sources. The fundamental issue is that in the short term there is huge reliance on artificial fertilisers. It is the issue that Baroness Batters just alluded to: we are locked in still to European sources of supply, in this case para-European in the form of Norway. There is a very big strategic problem there, which is a political issue that has to be resolved.

Before appearing at this committee, I was looking at the Swiss. Switzerland has a strategic reserve, which is unusual in rich countries. It has three months of food supply of major stocks and I can send you information about that if you like. Indeed, I was in touch with the Swiss Government to find out the latest. There has been a debate about whether they should move from three months' storage to 12 months' storage of food and fertilisers. I was just looking at the information the Swiss authorities sent me overnight. They hold three months of national fertiliser stocks, for example. That requires money and funding. For the total food system for Switzerland, 280 firms have contracts, funded by the state but the cost feeds into the price of food. The price of food goes up in Switzerland because of that strategic stock. People used to laugh at this system, and the economists did not like Switzerland for doing this—"Just let market forces run"—but now no one is laughing at Switzerland.

The question you ask is ultimately a matter that you people—well, actually the House of Commons—have to decide: what do we want for resilience and security? If we do not want to have strategic stocks of fertilisers, what are the other routes that we can take? There are very good arguments for going more biological for fertility, but that is not a quick option at present. It takes time to go organic. It takes time to build a new sewage system to collect the phosphates, for example. These are big issues that you cannot deal with in the short term; they are do-able but long term.

Lord Marland: Picking up on that fertiliser point, we are very reliant on the Middle East for fertilisers and that will be a problem. Are you suggesting that the Government have to intervene to create a fertiliser business in this country or do you not think that there is a business model that commercial people could—

Professor Tim Lang: You really need to bring in Minette on this as well.

Lord Marland: I am very happy for either of you to answer that.

Professor Tim Lang: I will give my tuppence-worth very quickly. This is an example where Britain currently lacks a framework. We do not know what Government wants from the food system. Since leaving the European Union, we have lost the architecture of the European Union. We do not have a post-Brexit Food Act. We have had an Agriculture Act and an Environment Act but no Food Act. One of the big recommendations that came from my interviews for the *Just in Case* report for the National

Preparedness Commission was that we need a strategic sense of what we want from the food system, not just from farming but from the entire food system. That requires Government to act. I recommended that we need a new food security and resilience Act to fill that gap, to answer both the questions you have raised and many other questions.

The Chair: We might come on to possible legislation later. Lady Helic, do you want to ask your question?

Q118 **Baroness Helic:** I have a question that nicely follows on from what you have just been saying. It is about a move from and how far the UK should move from just-in-time to just-in-case supply chains to improve the food security. What effect would that have on businesses? Also, should the UK create national, regional and local food stockpiles for this transition to work?

Professor Tim Lang: We can both address that. I will go first because my report was heavily about just what you have asked. The just-in-time system is brilliant. It has got rid of storage. Depending on the commodities, the storage is two or three days, sometimes four days, sometimes almost none. The food system is moving all the time from point of production. One of the things my report recommended was that we need to put the Government's own resilience framework principles into action. They are not applied to the food system. The three principles are: a whole of society approach; prevention is better than cure, and; getting a shared understanding of what the risks are. We have not applied these to food yet. A bit of thinking is emerging and I hope your inquiry will be a very big contribution to that.

There are things that industry can do in the transition from just-in-time to just-in case. After my report, some big retailers said, "We could do more storage". Well, they have spent 60 years getting rid of storage. Maybe they are quite important in that but other countries say, "No, we need strategic stocks as well". I think that the mindset in Britain needs to change. Britain constantly thinks—and it is the imperial past—that other people will feed it. Why? Why do we make that assumption? Why do we assume we can afford it? Others do not do, even when they are very affluent countries such as Sweden and Switzerland.

Should the UK create stockpiles? My answer is, yes, we should. At the moment all we have is a government website called Prepare. I have been quite critical of that because it is too limited, but I have constantly reminded—and I think it is right to be reminded so I am reminding you—that it is good that we have something rather than nothing. However, to ask the British public to store a few bottles of water and a few days of food is not dealing with the strategic risks to our food system.

Lord Spellar: Stockpiles of what?

Professor Tim Lang: What are they asked to stock, did you say?

Lord Spellar: No, not the public. You talk about having stockpiles. Are we going to stockpile lettuce? No, probably not. So stockpiles of what?

Professor Tim Lang: Grains, fats. Going back to the 1930s, in 1936 there was a debate about needing to stockpile more whale fat. No one is calling for that now but Switzerland stores three months, I think it is four months, of plant-based oils—

The Chair: Lady Batters, would you—

Professor Tim Lang: Some key ingredients to the national diet.

Baroness Batters: You will see in my review that I found for a start—my review is for England only but I obviously spoke to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—that the devolved nations had much closer relationships in a whole supply chain. They knew who was in the supply chains and exactly how much food was in the supply chains. That does not apply to England at all. England relies on being Great Britain and it does not have the same knowledge of its supply chains. I recommended setting up agri-growth hubs in every region and to set up farmer resilience groups in every catchment—93 catchments in the country—to work with those agri-growth hubs, very much to create a much closer relationship with local authorities and district councils.

That is in probably the worst state it has ever been in. We do not have those relationships at a local level, so we need to know what raw ingredients we are growing in the first instance, what we need to be growing more of, what local processing we have, and we have some diamond projects. The Greater Lincolnshire Food Partnership is one, where they are supplying the local school, the local hospital and they know their supply chains. That really wants to be happening across the whole country, but at the moment you do not even have the dialogue. I worry that at the moment everything is being focused on the mayoral districts. That is fine but we are creating more diamonds and leaving the white space. You cannot afford to leave white space; you have to fill the gaps. I am not talking about funding in particular. This is about setting up relationships and structures so that the relationships can build and build in resilience.

Q119 **Lord Farmer:** Thank you both for your valuable contributions today. My question is about long-term self-reliance and I will address Baroness Batters first. How can the UK improve its long-term self-reliance, such as through increasing domestic food production, the different types of food production with the climate change and protecting the natural environment?

As a secondary question but added to this, in your recently published memoir you described an encounter with a children's village school head teacher and you suggested that we need to have children who want to be farmers of the future, and the head said, "My children should aim high, not to be seen having straw in their head or carrying carrots". What is your attitude here to making sure that we have a farming community that can farm and produce food for us in the future rather than have it dying out at the moment?

Baroness Batters: I unashamedly recommend the reading of my book and I am glad that the new farming Minister in Defra, Stephen Morgan, has purchased it on his first day and he is now reading it.

Professor Tim Lang: What is the title of it?

Baroness Batters: *Harvest.*

It is absolutely right that you raise this question because I think probably since the last financial crash in 2009 we have taken a very relaxed attitude to food. Indeed, the scientific line has been, "We are a wealthy nation, we can afford to import our food". We have got massive reports like Sir John Beddington's Foresight report that was written at that time of that moment and predicted the perfect storm of 2030. I asked the question when I was president of the NFU, "Is that work still being looked at in Defra?" Not one single person remembered it. This is the problem.

We have to have a comprehensive plan that goes across Whitehall, that of course is focused on education—the farmers of the future, those who will work in the supply chain, understanding how your food is produced when we waste more food than any other country in Europe. The obesity crisis that we face is also important, but you come back to the problem of lack of a plan. We left the European Union in 2020. We have had a change of Secretary of State every year since, so we have had no consistency. In the last Parliament, the approach was, "We will leave the market to run food and we will focus the resource on public money for public goods to invest in environmental delivery". We need a radical reset of that approach.

Everybody I have spoken to in the press, leading this review, is the environment reporter. Emma Reynolds is the Environment Secretary of State, so you do not have in Defra the commercial expertise and acumen that is needed right now. At the Cabinet table in the last Parliament, the previous Parliament and in this Parliament, food is not at the heart of Whitehall. It is not represented. At the moment we are leaving Tesco to run the show. It does a very good job, but what if? Now we have to prepare for the "what if" and you have to bring the food expertise into this. Emma Reynolds at the very least should become the Secretary of State for Food and Environment, so she has the right Civil Service support to make the decisions that are made.

It is not just one thing of focusing on fertiliser or anything else. You have to look at a plan and we have not had a plan for farming or food ever since we left, and indeed we did not have prior to that because we left that to the European Union. There are some big things coming like the farming road map, which is meant to be published in June, but we really need to see change now.

Lord Farmer: Do you have any comment on the second question about the long-term training of our young people in farming, quickly?

Baroness Batters: Sorry, I thought I opened with that. You have to put it on to the curriculum. It is in the interest of every child in this country to understand how their food is produced, to get closer to nature. We all know the peer-reviewed science; if a child does not get close to nature before the age of six, they will not value it as much. We need to close the gap between rural and urban communities. That is absolutely essential and that is why I talk about building the relationships at a regional and a catchment level. I will come on to it but biodiversity net gain as a credit to open up infrastructure actively excludes food. That is totally wrong. It makes those credits very expensive and we should broaden it out. But, yes, training children for the future should be part of the curriculum.

The Chair: Professor Lang, do you have something to add to that very briefly? I have one eye on the clock and we are not half way through yet.

Professor Tim Lang: Minette and I would completely agree. It is folly to allow production to decline. There is a big debate in my world about how much would be good strategically, what the level of self-reliance or self-production would be. It depends on what. You do not expect Britain to produce pineapples but we can grains and dairy produce. There needs to be a bit of strategic thinking. It is back to Lord Spellar putting me on spot. One of the things my report said is we want advice about stockpiling, whether for households or at national level. We have a scientific body that is appropriate to help on that, SACN, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. I recommended—it has not happened but I have recommended it, so I recommend it to you—that we ask that body to say what we need as basic ingredients for the national diet and whether it is at the domestic level in product terms or at the strategic stockpiling level. That level of detail would inform public policy-making in the way Minette said. We do not yet do that.

Switzerland gives every citizen a calculator. You can go online and calculate: how many people are in your house; what they need; how are they; and how long you want to have storage for. It is very consumerist but at least they are helping people to engage in their own production and storage. We are not doing that at any level. Minette and I would agree that all the questions we are asking are not things that can be resolved by the central state or by households. Security and resilience are a multilevel challenge requiring different actions at national, regional, local, community and household levels.

Baroness Winterton of Doncaster: Can I ask very quickly on that?

The Chair: Very quickly.

Baroness Winterton of Doncaster: Do you get any sense that at regional or local authority level there is any advice being put together about that, this is what you could live on for—

Professor Tim Lang: Not advice yet, but there is a bubbling up of concern. Like Minette running round with her book and her report, I have spent the last year running round talking about mine. I calculated I have

addressed 10,000 to 12,000 people. I always ask them, "What do you want to know?" The public is interested in its security and resilience. The Prepare website is a start but it is not engagement the public yet in the way I think Minette and I would like.

The Chair: Lady Mobarik has a quick supplementary, but we will all have to be briefer in asking and answering questions if we are going to hit the bottom of this question list.

Baroness Mobarik: If food security was treated more as critical national infrastructure, for example, how differently do you think Government would regulate, support and protect food supplies?

Professor Tim Lang: You have raised one of the major shocks, to me, when doing my report for two and a half years. Why is food one of the 14—or 13, depending on how you calculate it—CNIs but is not taken seriously? Why did the National Infrastructure Commission not look at food? There is not enough joining-up of the principles behind CNIs with food system realities; yet to the public, food is absolutely essential, so there is a mismatch going on there. It symbolises everything that Minette was just saying about the "F" in Defra. If you remove the "F" from Defra, it just becomes Dera—and "dearer" is quite good to avoid.

Q120 **Baroness Northover:** Part of my question has been addressed in what you have been saying, but this is on the advice that the Government might give the public to ensure that an average household can achieve a realistic level of resilience on food shortages. Do you want to add anything to what you have just said? I will come to Baroness Batters first.

Baroness Batters: In some places, yes. If you are part of the Lincolnshire food partnership in that area, yes. Where I farm near Salisbury in south Wiltshire, the relationships are not there. I go back to there being some diamond projects to learn a lot of lessons from but you have a lot of white space. Most local authorities do not even have a ring-fenced budget for their school food let alone relationships at a local level.

Professor Tim Lang: My answer is probably starker than Minette's. Frankly, we are in cloud-cuckoo-land in Britain. We assume food comes from somewhere, as Minette put it, leaving it to Tesco et al, but the realities are that the food system is being shocked, food is being weaponised and threatened in all sorts of ways. Ransomware is rapidly rising in the manufacturing sector generally and in food manufacturing as well.

In that context, it is essential to engage with the public, not just on what should you store. I ask audiences how many people store and audiences put up their hands. I say, "Where is that storage? In your deepfreeze? And if there is an electricity outage, which the Government say is the number one likelihood of any crisis, how long is it supposed to keep?" The hands go down, and that is fair enough.

The public advice and process of engagement with the public ought to cover those sorts of eventualities. Does that mean everyone should try to

store some food under their bed? Well, a fifth of the population cannot afford a diet that meets public health advice in the first place. That needs to be thought through. It is not just advice, yes or no, but what sort of advice and what process and how. Getting this right goes to the heart of resilience on all matters, just not food.

The Chair: The leads on very nicely to Lady Hunter's question.

- Q121 **Baroness Hunter of Auchenreoch:** By the way, Baroness Batters, I am going to buy your book. Just leading on from there, I know, Professor Lang, you have been very interested in looking at people on lower incomes and how they can store their food. Can you tell us what you think the Government should be doing in advising people on food storage? We heard from the Nordic countries and they are very specific about what you should do. What can we do to reach people, particularly people on low incomes?

Professor Tim Lang: I spent a lot of time in my report research process talking to at-risk groups and the good news was that everyone I spoke to, whether they were top people in very big and powerful companies or people working in a small district in the north-east of England or very poor areas, got it that the people on low incomes are really canaries in the mine.

What can we do? Well, it requires money. It requires a lot more thinking. Food banks are sticking plaster and when I interviewed food banks and talked to the whole of that movement, they said they do not want to be doing this any more. Could they become local community food stores? Well, that is an interesting idea that was proposed, so I just recommended that we need to explore that: could that happen; could they be developed? There is a whole movement, a new movement of social supermarkets trying to do low-cost food for at-risk populations. There is quite a lot of practical experience in the food and poverty and low-income world of talking about going beyond the sticking plaster.

Ultimately it becomes a matter of money. More equal societies like Sweden look after all of their populations. Britain is a very unequal society and, therefore, we have this very big problem of people on low incomes. This building has witnessed many debates since it was built about these issues, but resilience is one way of looking at it. Again, it is back to Lord Spellar's question to me. It is one of the reasons I recommended we ask SACN to look at stockpiling, storage and different social groups within that. For example, Germany gives different advice with the different dietary choices that people have. We could be much more flexible than we are.

The Chair: Lady Batters, do you want to add to that?

Baroness Batters: No. I know you are short of time.

The Chair: No, carry on. If there is something to add on differentiating government messaging to different groups and you have some advice, we would love to hear it.

Baroness Batters: There is a big conversation that Tim has alluded to on individual households. I personally do not think anything changes unless you change the national approach. We have a different national approach on energy and defence and we have to put food in the same bucket as those two things. If you have a national approach and a strategic approach, you then have a plan and that starts to come down to a grass-roots level. Without that national approach, I am afraid you will not do what is needed.

Professor Tim Lang: I agree with that completely. Can I add a big point to throw at you? I talk a lot to the military and defence people because of the impacts on food. There is a big argument about getting defence spending to 3.5% of UK GDP. What we are forgetting at the moment, but I ask you not to forget, is the goal is actually 5% and that extra 1.5% is for social stuff such as civil preparedness. This is where action on food poverty and low income could come into play. The Baltics and Scandinavians have the notion of “total defence”. If you want to have a resilient society, you have to engage the whole of that society. On the back of defence spending, we need more social infrastructure spending. My Just in Case report proposed total food defence and civil food resilience as within that 1.5%.

Q122 **Lord Peach:** It is very nice to see you both. I think you will answer my first question positively. Do you therefore see food security as part of national security and—let rip now, please—what do you think we should see in the way of increased ministerial responsibility for national resilience? Should it rest in Defra or should we have something separate or different? What do you think?

Baroness Batters: Lord Peach, that was the problem that I faced in doing this review and it would have been very easy to say that farming should sit in the Department for Business and Trade. There is failure across Whitehall to address the problem that needs to be addressed. You have different tribes in different departments that are counterproductive to the aim that is trying to be achieved. You have raw ingredients in Defra and you have processing and manufacturing in DBT. What I put in my review is how you bring them together. We could solve a lot of these issues if we freed up planning. Defra retains the bureaucracy and the process of planning. MHCLG deals with planning and does not deal with the process. I could go on and on, but you get the problem: Whitehall does not function for a functioning food system—end of.

You have to bring it together with a plan of how we will do this. I was quite encouraged doing this review and it is quite straightforward to do, but it requires leadership. When you change your Secretary of State—virtually monthly—they never get their feet under the table to make the decisions that are needed. I have talked to the Prime Minister several times. This is at that level. Unless the Prime Minister and the Chancellor are prepared to make the changes that are needed now to address this problem, nothing will change because the tribes are set up within the Civil Service for how it will operate.

I would like to add that I have completely reformed my views of the Civil Service, having worked in Defra with a small group of civil servants. Tasked and directed with the right information, my team was absolutely excellent. So I am not being critical of the Civil Service, but the national and overarching plan has failed, is failing now and it needs to be amended as fast as possible, and actually that is quite straightforward to do. We have done it with energy and we should do exactly the same with food.

The Chair: Do you want to add something, Professor Lang?

Professor Tim Lang: I agree with that. The fundamental problem is that Defra is small and has a weakened budget. There is a gap between what insiders think and what is happening. One of the things I looked at was emergency powers. When there is a crisis in food, we will activate emergency powers. The difficulty with that is you are doing things too late. That is why I drew to your Lordships' attention to the three excellent principles about prevention in the Government Resilience Framework. It is just that we do not apply them to food provision. Echoing what Minette said, the civil servants in the new resilience unit in Defra are excellent and they are growing, but they need political leadership at a framework level. I think that requires legislation. We must have legislation on that and we do not have it.

Baroness Winterton of Doncaster: In my day, which is obviously about 100 years ago, when you and I first did quite a lot of work together, we had interministerial committees, which I thought were quite effective as long as they were chaired by a very senior Cabinet Minister. Have you not recommended that at all?

Professor Tim Lang: Yes, I looked at this very closely and asked people on the inside and also outside in academia. You are right, when the Council of Food Policy Advisers was created in the oil and banking crisis of 2007-08 that led to the great recession, exactly that process was set up. There was an interdepartmental committee on food and there was an inter-devolved Administrations and England committee. It was all abolished in 2010.

Baroness Winterton of Doncaster: I see.

Professor Tim Lang: There was a strategy called Food 2030. It was a national strategic overview, agreed by industry and everyone, and because it was not in legislation, it could just be abolished within literally two months of the coalition Government. I think many people regretted that greatly. It was recommended from that process that we create what I have called in my report a council of food security and resilience. We need to have something long term. Just look at the impact of the Climate Change Committee. You might hate it; you might not like the Act, but because the Act is there that body has continuity and is a source of advice that can either be listened to or not. We do not have that in food and we should have that in food. It is something that Minette and I have

talked about, and many others. There is wide agreement beyond Whitehall that we need a council of food security and resilience.

- Q123 **The Chair:** Before we move on to Lord Marland's final question, I will squeeze in one myself to Lady Batters. You have been talking a lot about how central government structures need to step up and be co-ordinated and so on. Could you say something about what regional structures you think need to exist on resilience for food?

Baroness Batters: I talked earlier about and recommend setting up regional agri-growth hubs that are about supply chain relationships. I recommend establishing "Food and Drink England" in line with what Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are doing. We absolutely have to get to that place. England is massively at risk, as I see it at the moment, because it is the most reliant on a national distribution network that is run by the major retailers. That works when it works but, as I pointed out, when it does not work, you create shortages very quickly. We saw it in the fuel crisis and in Covid. If you set up those regional groups, ideally then to the catchment relationships, you start to create something that works for everyone everywhere rather than some places having everything and other places having nothing.

The Chair: That is really helpful. Thank you. Do you want to add something?

Professor Tim Lang: I agree with what Minette said. In my report process I recommended that the metro mayors for England need to be given food powers, but I totally agree with Minette that they do not have all the answers. One of the things I was asked to look at by the National Preparedness Commission was that the role of local resilience forums, the LRFs, set up under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. These are really the blue light brigade. If this place was bombed, one likes to think the fire, the police and the ambulance would all be here. There is no equivalent resilience service for foodcrises, yet they too can be harsh and quick.

Minette referred to the Lincolnshire food partnership. I recommended that the national system of food partnerships becomes that sort of advisory group, reflecting the food system at local level, whether in a metro or rural area. They could provide the food link to the local resilience forums. This connects back to Baroness Rosie Winterton's point about structures and interdepartmental liaison. We need that at the local level. We have to address food resilience at the national, the regional, down to the community and, last but not least, the domestic level. We don't yet have those institutional connections and duties.

- Q124 **Lord Marland:** Chair, I think my question is slightly redundant because they have answered it, but I will ask this other question, which relates to it. I heard your dulcet tones, Minette, on the radio this week, I think it was. You were alluding to the fact that people are being paid not to farm. Do you want to give us a little bit more insight into what you think should be done to pay people to farm? That strikes me as being at the heart of having our own security in food if we increase our production.

Baroness Batters: You are absolutely right and thank you for raising it. In the last Parliament it was decided that we should pay farmers to grow environmental crops and not food-producing crops. We are in the last year of that but there are many hectares across the country that have been growing environmental crops for the last three years, got rid of their staff and machinery and are feeding a very healthy crop of pigeons and rooks. I am sorry to sound a little bit facetious about it but it is not of today's world; it really is not.

I recommend bringing in protein crops. We should be growing peas and beans. There is a public good soil benefit from that. We should be growing oilseeds and pulses ourselves here. There is a public good benefit from that. You have to work on a whole supply chain basis because the worst thing that happens in agriculture or horticulture is you produce too much, you flood the market, you lower your price. You have to have a plan for what you are doing, but the point I made on the "Today" programme yesterday was that a farm can deliver on nearly all of government priorities for what is needed.

If we freed up permitted development rights beyond 1,000 square metres, we could extend our poultry buildings. At the moment we are importing more poultry meat because we have restricted what our farmers can do and the planning process is bureaucratic and takes years. With the ideal farm you want to have on-farm reservoirs and on-farm green energy—ideally more on rooftops rather than on agricultural land—but also to have the ability to put in wind turbines on farms so that communities can benefit from affordable energy.

The really important link that is getting missed between DESNZ, Defra and DBT is that raw ingredients and primary processing must be treated in the same plan. I can think of a very good dairy processor in the south-west that has £60 million-worth of cheese stocks, wanting to double the size of that business, exporting to 160 countries, exporting green gas to the local town, because they are obviously using our milk and processing it here. Imagine if that could be done across the country, that we are producing more of our green energy from our farms, storing more of our water, treating farms as businesses. At the moment, that is not happening because the Department for Business and Trade is not worried whether they are British raw ingredients or from anywhere else in the world. Why that matters is we want to keep more money in the UK economy.

The plan for growth in rural areas that I document in this review speaks to all the questions that are being raised today and that is about jobs, wealth creation and the huge wider benefits that farms can offer that go beyond food, that make this country resilient. We have a massive plan for building houses; we have no plan for the timber to put roofs on those houses. Farming can deliver on all of that if you bring a cross-government plan to deliver it.

Lord Marland: That is a very good way to end, I think, Chair.

The Chair: Yes, thank you very much. You have a final word, Professor Lang.

Professor Tim Lang: I do not think we should see environment versus food. It is not either/or, and Minette and I would agree on that. The issue is fundamentally that we do not pay primary producers enough money. Out of the £230 billion or so spent by the Brits on food and soft drinks, producers get £9 billion. This is ludicrous. You either subsidise it or you give a framework and allow the businesses to let rip or you just say we have to raise the primary producers' prices because it is a very small amount of the total production. I think that is something that Governments are ducking. You get a false war between environment and food, when in fact of course we need good ecosystems to protect food production capacity long term. It is not either/or.

The Chair: Thank you both very much indeed. It has been really helpful. I was going to say you have given us plenty of food for thought but I think I will not say that. Thank you very much indeed. We will now close the public session.