HOUSE OF COMMONS

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: National Food Strategy, HC 686

Tuesday 21 September 2021

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Geraint Davies; Rosie Duffield; Dr Neil Hudson; Robbie Moore; Mrs Sheryll Murray; Derek Thomas.

Questions 1 - 72

Witness

I: Henry Dimbleby, Lead Non-executive Board Member, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Henry Dimbleby.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the EFRA Select Committee. We have Henry Dimbleby with us this afternoon and we are going to talk about his national food strategy. Henry, would you like to introduce yourself for the record? You are then going to give us a five-minute spiel at the beginning on where you see the whole thing going. Then we have some questions, and we will probably broaden the questions a bit, because we are really keen to get the most thoughts out of you this afternoon.

Henry Dimbleby: Thank you very much for inviting me here today. My name is Henry Dimbleby. I am the lead non-executive director at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I was the independent lead for the national food strategy, a report that was commissioned in the summer of 2019, which seems like a very distant time. It was commissioned in the wake of the work that was going on in Defra by Michael Gove. The Environment Bill and the Agriculture Bill were in progress then, but there was no joined-up thinking across Government about how these things would fit together with issues of food security and health to create a food strategy for the nation. That was my brief.

In the summer of 2020, I was due to publish an interim review, which was going to be a diagnosis of the system—what it delivers, good and bad; why it does that; and what problems need to be fixed—in preparation for part 2, which was then going to be the actions. Last year, on 23 March, we went into lockdown and decided that we needed to do something much more urgent, dealing with the problems that Covid had caused and the Brexit transition period, which was due to end at the end of the year.

In July, we published part 1, which covered those things and made seven recommendations: four on food and food poverty, and three on trade. The Government have already implemented three of those actions on food poverty. They introduced the holiday activities and food programme running over the holidays. They increased the value of Healthy Start to £4.25, and we managed to persuade most of the supermarkets, if you are on the Healthy Start scheme, to top that up by another pound or so. They implemented some of the recommendations on trade but not all, and I am sure that we will come on to that later today.

We then published part 2, or what we called the plan, in July of this year, and we set out to achieve two things. One was to create a narrative and describe the food system, because so much of what people believe about the food system and how it works is wrong. We set out to describe the food system—a system that, if you care about biodiversity and deforestation, is the primary cause of biodiversity destruction and deforestation worldwide. If you care about the oceans, it is the primary cause of loss of life in the oceans and of freshwater pollution. Alongside energy, it is the primary cause of climate change. It is also, increasingly,

the primary cause of preventable non-communicable disease in this country. In fact, the health service now thinks that, by 2035, it will have to spend more on treating type II diabetes than it will on all cancers combined.

You have a system that has done miraculous things since the war but is now causing huge problems, many of which are visited on those who already have the least in society. We tried to create that narrative, describe that problem, and then identify the two big causes of that. One, which I am sure we will come on to in more detail, is what we call the junk food cycle: the toxic interaction between the commercial incentive of food companies and our appetites. The other is what we call the invisibility of nature: the fact that nature is not built into our food systems.

The second thing we tried to do then was to suggest actions that we need to take now to begin to shift the food system to another form of operation. We tried to do this with two principles in mind. One was to be very data driven. We did an enormous amount of research and had a ferociously hardworking team of civil servants. We also enlisted people from outside the Civil Service. We hope that, in the report itself and all the accompanying materials on our website, we have created a database that can be used by other people working in the system.

The other was to engage broadly. We had citizens dialogues and focus groups, and ran quantitative sessions on our recommendations among low-income voters in various parts of the country. We consulted children. We had a huge stakeholder engagement.

The critical thing that I am now thinking quite a lot about, looking forward, is how we get this implemented and make sure that this happens. Before I started my work, the Government said that they would have a White Paper that would report on what I had done and the recommendations six months after, and then invited me back to review progress six months after that.

The biggest areas of jeopardy are those where there is still cross-Whitehall consensus required, or where the actions are a primary concern of the country but a secondary concern of the Department responsible for delivering them. I think particularly here of education and trade, and their respective recommendations, of innovation, and of the legislative framework and the good food Bill putting this on a legislative backing.

There is somewhere where I hope that we can work with the Select Committees to try to unite the forces of education, trade and this Select Committee to ensure that we do not have a situation where, because those fundamental issues of join-up did not happen, someone else has to come along and do a similar job in five years' time because, once again, we have slipped the responsibility as a nation of getting a grip on our food system.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you, Henry. It is a huge brief that you engaged in. The one great criticism of the common agricultural policy is that it was always talking about producing commodities like wheat, milk, beef, lamb or vegetables, but it never really talked very much about linking what was produced to what we eat. As you know, I have talked to you about this before. I do not think that our new agricultural policy talks enough about food, or about trying to broaden the types of food that we eat and that farmers and growers produce. How do we link the two, in your view?

Henry Dimbleby: What is interesting about the Agriculture Bill and, to some extent, the Environment Bill, as they are currently written, is that they are merely vessels into which you can put incentives and regulations. The incentives and regulations themselves are not yet clear, so you could still have a situation with the Environment Bill and the environmental land management scheme, for example, where you end up with something very close to the common agricultural policy or something very different. You are right that the intention for food is not yet explicitly there.

We as a country produce 65% of our food. We produce, in particular, much less of our fruit and veg than we might do. Golf courses cover 10 times more surface area of our country than orchards do. There is a real opportunity, which we mention in terms of incentivisation and getting the regulation right, to boost those areas of productivity. You have a time with the environmental land management scheme where a lot of things are going to unblock and there is a real opportunity to use that to create a dynamic, productive—

Q3 **Chair:** The ELMS, as we see it at the moment through the guidance coming from Defra, is in many ways, quite rightly, about biodiversity and land use, but it does not really talk very much about the types of food that we grow, where we grow them and the need perhaps to produce more fruit and vegetables. It talks about planting trees but not much about farming itself. How do we get that up the agenda? I know it is something that I keep on about all the time, but I just think it will be a missed opportunity if we do not embrace it. We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, so where is the food?

Henry Dimbleby: When we talk about land use, we talk about the huge increased stress on our land. For thousands of years, we used the land for everything: fuel, clothing, food and materials to build our houses. We then found fossil fuels and used them for almost everything except for some building materials and food. We are now going back to a situation where we are expecting the land to create food and biodiversity, and to sequester carbon. We recommend that the Government need explicitly to think about what our land is good for and which parts of our land are good for what. That is the purpose of the land use framework.

I would expect that, within that framework, you would talk about the kinds of yields of grains, vegetables and horticulture that you could grow sustainably. There is no point in propping up with subsidies something

that is not economically sustainable, but certainly in terms of vegetables and horticulture there is a huge opportunity for growth. The Government need to show a lead with the land use framework in that area.

Q4 **Chair:** We will talk about trade deals in a minute. There is an argument that we need to make sure that we have good home production. Otherwise, very often, we might well be importing vegetables and fruits that are bad for the particular environments that they are grown in within the exporting countries. I am just worried at the moment that we seem to be hellbent on, quite rightly in many respects, looking at the environment, but is the way we produce food and the type of food not part of the environment as well? We could be doing damage across the world to other environments if we do not produce, in our climate, the right types of vegetables, cereals, meat and milk that we can do so well. We just do not talk much about it, do we?

Henry Dimbleby: We take it for granted, to some degree, and we take our landscapes for granted. Seventy per cent of our landscape is defined by farming. It is impossible to answer that question without getting on to the detail on trade.

Chair: Do not go into detail, because I will be stealing other questions.

Henry Dimbleby: I will not do that but, in short, there is a coherent vision of a future for English/British agriculture where we continue to feed ourselves significantly from our land, potentially more, restore the environment and sequester carbon. If you do trade deals where you allow those harms to be exported elsewhere in the form of cheap exports, it does not work, so you need to get the trade deals right, but we will talk about that in detail.

Q5 **Chair:** We will leave that bit on the trade deals. You talked about England. When you were doing this national food report, did you find it restricting in a way? Because agricultural policy is devolved, it is not talking about Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Henry Dimbleby: I was more relaxed about that than some people who were involved with the process. You clearly have a situation where I was asked to report on some things that are devolved—for example, education policy, where it touches food, and agricultural policy—and some things that are not devolved, for example trade policy. There are then things in the middle that might be devolved but some level of co-operation makes sense. Six hundred farms lie across the borders of England, Wales and Scotland.

The way that I tried to deal with that was to work quite closely with the teams in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to keep them in the loop. I said, "Feel free to steal any of this". I stole quite a lot of their ideas. In the recommendations, we are quite clear about what is England and what is UK, but, hopefully, we have created a blueprint that other people can use.

Some people got very touchy about that, because there are sensitivities about how England behaves in respect to its DAs, but I found that, as joining equals all trying to fix the same problems, it really was not an issue.

Q6 **Chair:** Did you find, when you were talking to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, that they were also very interested in what you were doing?

Henry Dimbleby: Yes, and there were people who were ahead in certain areas. For example, as you will know, as the UK we are now catching the Welsh up in terms of what we replace CAP with. They had published their vision before we had in this country, and so there were things to learn from them. In Scotland, they are very interested in the right to food and food poverty, so there is stuff to learn there. We had some great, very useful discussions.

Q7 **Mrs Murray:** Henry, if I could just turn to the food strategy part 1 to begin with, why did you split your review into two parts? What kind of key areas emerged from your first report?

Henry Dimbleby: As I said, we were going to do this diagnosis and quite a sitting-back thing, just explaining the system. I remember this very clearly. On 19 March, Defra was beginning to set up teams to work on a daily basis on food security. On the 21st, the Prime Minister shut restaurants, which was a concern to me as a restaurateur at the time. On the 23rd, we were in our first lockdown.

Very quickly, it became clear that there were people who were being affected much more by this lockdown than others. I have a charity, Chefs in Schools, that works in an inner city area with schools with 40% to 50% free school meals, and it was clear that these schools and communities were really struggling.

At the same time as this was going on, we were going to have the end of the Brexit transition period at the end of the year, so we decided then that it was necessary to say something very specific and targeted about those two things. That is why we made those recommendations on food poverty and expanding free school meals, on expanding the holiday activities and food programme to everyone and expanding Healthy Start, and on trade, to increase parliamentary scrutiny and ensure that we maintain our standards in line with what the Government had said in their manifesto.

Q8 **Mrs Murray:** Do you think enough was made at the time of maybe educating people about healthy eating? For instance, people were working from home, so they may have had more time to buy raw ingredients and cook food from scratch rather than relying on pre-prepared meals. Do you think an opportunity arose there that perhaps was missed for domestic science education on healthy eating and preparation of healthy meals?

Henry Dimbleby: I will answer that in two ways. On the ground, a lot of organisations were doing that. There was an extraordinary scramble on the ground to support those people.

Mrs Murray: I am thinking about individuals.

Henry Dimbleby: In terms of the Government, having seen it from the inside, I was on the daily calls with the food industry, which some of you may have been on. In education, they were scrambling to get laptops and wi-fi into houses of people who did not have it. Almost everything got knocked off the list, except for educating children and getting them fed.

The "eat and learn" recommendation is in there because food education is always going to be an issue. Everyone you talk to in the food system thinks that we have lost a generation of skills. We need to teach our children to cook and to understand food properly. Even the most libertarian person who does not believe in any other intervention will say, "We have to do it in schools". Everyone thinks that, and yet it is always going to be outside the top 20 of whoever is the Education Secretary at the time, because his or her mandate is education.

That is a real problem, but we have an opportunity now and I am looking forward to meeting the new Secretary of State for Education. We have an opportunity to right that problem. It will be a real shame—a disaster—if we carry on as business as usual. Since I did the work on school food with my business partner, John Vincent, in 2004, cooking has been compulsory on the curriculum for every child up to the age of 14. I go into schools all the time and it is still not happening for too many children. That is not right. Although at the time it would have been pretty tricky to have mobilised it, now is the time to make that change.

It is really interesting. If you speak to Chris Whitty or anyone in healthcare, everyone is obsessed with how we make the interventions upstream. At the moment, everyone gets sick and we treat them with medicine. It is expensive and costly in terms of misery for them and their families. We have to do something as a nation about trying to move our interventions upstream and helping people not get sick, rather than treating them when they are sick.

Q9 **Mrs Murray:** Do you feel that the Government have done enough throughout the pandemic to ensure that the most disadvantaged children are not left behind?

Henry Dimbleby: I cannot speak to education. I can really only speak to food. Last October, there was a political frenzy about it, and the holiday activities and food programme and Healthy Start were announced. So far, both through Government intervention and through the extraordinary work of lots of voluntary organisations, people have been fed. That is really all I can say. I cannot comment on education.

Q10 **Mrs Murray:** Turning to the impact of us leaving the European Union, was enough done to promote people eating healthy options like

domestically produced fish? Was an opportunity missed there by Government?

Henry Dimbleby: We have an extraordinary fishing industry. Basically, we eat fish that comes from the Barents Sea and we sell all our fish to Europe. I am a director of a friend's fish restaurant, so I have to declare an interest, but there is a huge opportunity to change what we eat in this country and to eat some of the fish—hake, for example—that we do not eat in this country. It is a great resource. Our fishing areas are increasingly sustainable and there is an opportunity to be a bit prouder about the produce that we produce in those areas.

Chair: Fish is also a great protein, which we sometimes miss on.

Q11 **Robbie Moore:** I have a very quick supplementary to one of the points that Sheryll picked up on, which was to do with this issue of a generation of young children potentially being left behind in terms of knowing how to cook food and where their food comes from. Would you agree that it is not the generation of young children who are going through the schooling system at the moment, but that there is a risk that there is already a generation of parents now who do not know how to cook good food at cheap cost, or where their food comes from? That risk is now almost a second generation, because of home economics not being taught in schools as it previously was for such a long time.

Mrs Murray: That is why I asked about the food parcels that were put together.

Henry Dimbleby: We definitely and immeasurably have a problem with people having the skills to cook. It makes it much more expensive to eat healthily if you do not have the skills or the equipment. That is a relatively long-term trend. You could argue that it goes back to moving to the cities and the Industrial Revolution, but let us take it back to the 1960s and 1970s. It goes back to the sexual revolution, both parents going to work, and the increase in processed convenience food and not cooking from scratch. Like a lot of things in the food system, that was a good thing, but it led to unintended consequences that we are now left having to deal with.

Q12 **Chair:** As a final point on this, a lot of people who are struggling to live do not necessarily have access to cooking facilities. To what extent should the school also be teaching not only about food and cooking but about microwaving? It may not be a perfect way of cooking but it is probably a better way than having all-processed food. I do not think that we altogether face up to society as it is. We face up to society as we think it is. Dare I say it, we come from a middle-class perspective, if we are not careful, and we think that everybody has access to all these things. How do we get to the hardest to reach in society and, to the point that Robbie was making, the generations that either cannot cook or do not have the facilities to cook?

Henry Dimbleby: There are all sorts of reasons other than just the cost of food that make it difficult to eat well if you are less affluent. Someone will say, "Frozen veg is really cheap compared with a frozen pizza", but you might not have a freezer. You might be worried about what your child will eat. If they do not eat the healthy thing, you cannot just afford to offer them something else, so you would rather give them something that you know they will eat. You might not have the equipment. It is a multifaceted thing that requires welfare change as well as education.

There is an opportunity to do things. I would answer the question about cooking in two ways. First of all, I am slightly allergic to people saying, "This is a middle-class concern". Come and see our schools in Hackney, where kids on the local estate, alongside non-free school meal kids, are cooking and eating aubergine or whatever. Do not give me that, "This is just middle class", because it is just not true.

Secondly, there is an opportunity to teach more basics. What you see on TV is not realistic for most of us. I do not know if you have seen any of the Instagram stuff by Marcus Rashford and Tom Kerridge, but they did a brilliant job. They poached an egg in a kettle. Tom turned up at Marcus's house to do this. They were looking around and Marcus did not have a kettle, because he has one of those fancy taps that produce hot water, so they had to go and buy a kettle.

When you are talking about teaching children to cook, you are not talking about what you might see on Channel 4 on a Friday night. You are talking about really basic skills of how to feed your friends and family.

Q13 **Chair:** Is that getting into and being taught in our schools? I agree with you that it is not all a middle-class perspective, but it is about how we do a report and how we, in Government, push things forward. Are we getting that information into schools and asking them to do the basics of cooking?

Henry Dimbleby: I drafted the curriculum, and it does say that in the curriculum, but it was a real lesson that you cannot just pass a law to make things happen in society. Just because you have something in the curriculum, it does not mean it happens. It happens because individual headteachers and school managers decide that enough is enough and they want to do something better, so you have to support those people. That is why we recommend in the review that some form of accreditation, whether it is Food for Life or another body, is a requirement for schools. Those bodies not only set aspiration; they help us understand what is possible and give the training. Unless you do that, you are not going to get the change that you want to see in schools.

Q14 **Chair:** One of the strengths of our education system is that there is still, quite rightly, quite a lot of autonomy for the headteacher, governors and others to form a school, but there has to be absolutely clear guidance on this. Otherwise, some might decide, "It is not necessary. We are here to educate the children. We are not necessarily here to teach them how to

cook". It is about trying to get those things in.

Henry Dimbleby: You need guidance and you need to inspect it, as you inspect any other kind of lesson. At the moment, as you will know, the only lesson that Ofsted has to inspect every time is reading in primary schools. Then it normally dips into three or four other subjects in the school, but it almost never dips into the cooking lesson. If you are giving cooking lessons, you know that Ofsted will not visit you. If it just did that on a random basis as much as it did other subjects, it would make people read the curriculum. It would make people realise that Ofsted might suddenly say, "Can we see your cooking lesson?" Then you could not just be teaching them how to do cupcakes.

Chair: It would probably concentrate the minds of some schools.

Q15 **Mrs Murray:** While we are talking about cookery lessons, could we not start describing them as domestic science, which is what was taught when I was at school? You learned the value of the foods compared to your health. You also learned how to make sure that you kept your cooking utensils and everything clean. It is not just cookery; it is the whole system around it. If it was described and taught in the same way as the old domestic science lessons were taught, and if you could get a really good qualification at the end of it, more people might take an interest and maybe Ofsted would start inspecting.

Henry Dimbleby: That is right. Another thing that we recommend in this area is that the nutrition and food A-level is reinstated, because it has been dropped. When it was dropped, a whole load of teachers who were teaching younger children fell out of the profession, because you did not have a lead in food. In the hospitality sector, we now have a huge skills shortage and we need to be training up the next generation of chefs and managers, so there is also an opportunity to review the qualifications and to see what is there in terms of BTEC and others. We have asked the DfE to do a full review on that.

Chair: They interconnect, really.

Henry Dimbleby: Yes.

Q16 **Rosie Duffield:** While we are on the subject, can I please put out a shout-out to all the amazing people in communities across the UK who work in community centres, neighbourhood centres and Sure Start, where it still exists, and teach people cookery—even cupcakes? It is something. It is getting children interested in food and fresh ingredients. They might be cakes, but they are still fresh and not processed ingredients. That army of people does a brilliant job in getting children interested and involved, so we should thank them, because they usually do it for nothing after a busy day at work.

Moving back to the questions and what we are talking about, how did you determine the four strategic objectives in part 2 of the national food strategy? You might want to remind people what those are.

Henry Dimbleby: We said that there were four things that needed to be done. One was to escape the junk food cycle; the second was specifically to try to relieve food inequality; the third was to make the best use of our land; and the fourth was a long-term change in our culture.

When we started, a lot of people said, "You need to take a systems approach", and we were like, "Well, what do you mean by that?" Some of you may be familiar with the Foresight obesity map, which is a map showing all the various things that influence obesity in this country. It looks like a huge ball of string; it is beautifully done, but it just makes you think that it is complicated and makes you want to give up. That is one view of systems that we did not want to follow.

The other one, which is true, is that, across Government, responsibility for this is very diffuse. That is also the case with quite a lot of other things. It is particularly acute in food but is not the root cause of the problem. We looked at the work of system dynamics scientists to try to understand what the feedback loops were that were causing the problems and what was fundamentally going wrong.

The first thing we identified as going wrong was what we called the junk food cycle. This is the fact that our appetite makes us seek out the foods that now are making us sick. When we eat them, we do not get as full. What has happened is that, through no malicious intent, food companies have noticed that we like those foods more. They have marketed them more and spent more in R&D on that. Over time, we have eaten more and they have marketed it more. Now over 50% of our calories come from this stuff, and it is what you would call a reinforcing feedback loop. That is going to be broken only by changing the economics. When we said, "Escape the junk food cycle", we said, "You are going to need Government intervention".

Chair: You are moving on to question 4.

Henry Dimbleby: Sorry, so that was that one. The second feedback loop was the invisibility of nature and the fact that, in all the P&Ls of companies and in the way we measure GDP, nature is invisible. This was much more eloquently set out by Partha Dasgupta in his review on the economics of biodiversity for the Treasury. That led us to an examination of what would happen if you did value nature and diversity as much as you value finances, which led to an issue about land and the fact that we have to do much more with land. That is why we talked about how we make the best use of our land, now that we are asking so much from it.

There were two other things. Inequality is going to be with us for a long time. However successful levelling up is, inequality has increased pretty much in all societies since the beginning of time in the absence of mass mobilised warfare or plague, so it is going to be with us. It is not my job to work out how you create an equal society, but we recommended specific, in-kind interventions on food, helping people get healthy food,

which, above and beyond raising incomes and reducing inequality, can help people eat better diets.

The final thing was the long-term structural shift in food culture. People have been coming back to this subject again and again, and it needs a longer-term legislative framework and cultural change. That is why we put in place those four things.

Q17 **Rosie Duffield:** It is accessible to most people. You have joined together the things that people know are related, in a readable and accessible way, so thank you. There is one last bit to my question. How well did Defra Ministers and officials engage with your work and your team throughout the evidence-gathering and report-drafting process? Were they helpful?

Henry Dimbleby: I went and got advice about how to do it from a former Labour MP who had done a lot of independent reviews. He said, "There are two ways you can do it. You can lock yourself up in a room, think clever thoughts with your team and then publish it afterwards, but no one will read it and it will end up on a shelf, or you can actively engage as many people as possible and thereby the act of writing it becomes the first act of change".

We took that advice and not only the Defra Ministers but Ministers across all Departments, stakeholders and ex-politicians have been incredibly generous with their time. I have not had a single situation where we have asked someone to get involved who has not.

That has spread internationally. For example, in the area of nutrition and trying to understand the junk food cycle, we tried to work out who the six people in the world were who understood this best. One of the good things is that you get them on Zoom and watch them talk about it for two hours, and then they help you get to the conclusion. We have very much been helped both by Ministers and by almost everyone else.

Q18 **Derek Thomas:** Thank you, Henry, for coming along. I sat on the Health Select Committee some time ago. We looked at health and food, and went to Amsterdam to look at what is being done there, so I have been interested in the subject for a long time. I come from west Cornwall. We have quite a lot of deprivation in Cornwall. Despite an amazing environment and the food that we produce, it would be fair to say that we do not eat the healthiest meals, and that would be fair of most parts of the country.

Your challenge is how we break the junk food cycle. How can it be done? We have somehow developed this over three, four or maybe even five decades. It is a huge thing to turn around, when, in Britain, we really like freedom of choice and like to decide what goes into our bodies. If we were to do nothing, what impact would that have on the health of individuals and the NHS?

Henry Dimbleby: Sometime in spring of last year, there was a Sun Says editorial about Boris wanting to get more active on interventions in food. It was talking about the sugary drinks levy, which has actually been relatively successful. It said, "We need to have less of this interventionist, nanny-statist claptrap. What we need to focus on is common-sense things like exercise and education".

What is interesting about that, as we discovered as we did the work, is that, first of all, it is just not true. Education and skills are important, but people know what they are meant to be eating. For reasons that I will not go into here, exercise is absolutely fantastic for all sorts of things but not for helping you lose weight. Yet that is a view that is held by many people, including a lot of people who struggle with their weight and with their diet.

I went to see the editor of the *Sun* before we published and I said, "If you can do one thing, do not repeat this thing about education, because you are sending people to the gym; they do not lose weight, because exercise does not make you lose weight; and they give up. It is the worst possible thing". Although *The Sun* attacked me on the taxes, it was really good and has not repeated that, which is fantastic.

In terms of what you do, if you left it with no Government intervention, we would get, as a society, up to some level of maximum sickness with regard to our diet, with the NHS costing a huge amount. You might get more medical interventions, and there are quite interesting things on appetite pills at the moment, but it would be pretty ugly.

What is interesting is that almost everyone I talk to behind the scenes accepts that this is a problem. The supermarket CEOs will know it. They are the least threatened, because we are going to buy food from anyone. The fast-moving consumer goods companies—the people who make crisps, sweets and ready meals—know it as well, but for them the discussion is about how fast the transition is. If I have just built a factory that is making millions of sugary, salty delights and you are suddenly telling me you want to intervene, that is a painful commercial decision for me. The only people I have come across who do not recognise this are those who are paid because they are industry federation people, who still trot out the line that it is all about education.

That, for me, is really positive. The fast-moving consumer goods companies know it is going to come. The question is how bad we are going to let it go. They are all internally working on how they can get round this. They are terrified. They have these sunk assets. It is one of those things where it is a huge shift but we have won the battle of minds. People accept the argument, and now the question is how bad it gets before we start to do the serious interventions.

Q19 **Derek Thomas:** Can we talk a bit about the tax on sugar and salt? At the time, we introduced the tax on sugary drinks. As you have referred to, the report clearly shows that the industry adjusted and that the

Government have collected far less tax than they anticipated, which is a result. There is still choice and people can still pay extra for sugary drinks, but they also have a choice not to. Are you suggesting a similar thing? In west Cornwall, we have cream teas with lots of jam. Are you going to put a tax on Cornish cream teas?

Chair: Even if you do put it on the wrong way round.

Henry Dimbleby: Just explicitly on Cornish cream teas? As someone from Devon, maybe we will.

Mrs Murray: It could be on Devon cream teas as well.

Q20 **Derek Thomas:** I am quite supportive of really deliberate and dedicated taxes that force manufacturers and food producers to change their behaviour, and you have kind of hinted that they expect some intervention. How do we go about that without driving some of the prices up?

Henry Dimbleby: It is a really interesting and subtle question, both politically and economically. People accept that you have to make an intervention. Food companies say that they are not going to do this voluntarily. Roger Whiteside, CEO of Greggs, and a whole bunch of supermarket CEOs wrote a letter to the *Times* the day after I published, saying, "We need Government intervention". If you accept that we need Government intervention, the question then is what form that intervention takes. The answer to that is partly that we do not know yet, because you have to try things and see if they work.

The reason we suggested the sugar and salt tax was that it is technically feasible. It is easy to understand and you can minimise the impact. There is a lot of opportunity for reformulation.

However, as you say, it is very difficult to reformulate value jam. Most jam contains a lot of fruit and it is branded, but value jam is just sugar and colouring. There are things that are difficult to reformulate, and the prices of some of those things would go up. The question then becomes what the political appetite for that is. We talked to low-income groups and swing seat groups. Any intervention on meat would be politically very difficult. There is quite a lot of support for this. People know that sugar and salt are bad and that they should not be eating as much. People are fed up with their kids having this stuff advertised to them.

You would end up with a situation where most of the stuff got reformulated. For most people, it would be pence in the weekly shop, but you would definitely have someone whose granny is a high consumer of value jam for whom it would be problematic. Then the question is whether that exception blows everything up politically, because you think, "I just cannot have that person saying it is a problem".

There is a real opportunity to do this. The impact could be between 15 and 38 calories per day. This was modelled by the Institute for Fiscal

Studies. It might not sound like a lot but, if you reduced the calories we all ate by 24 calories on average, we would all stop putting on weight as a nation, so it could be huge.

Q21 **Derek Thomas:** Can we dig into what is wrong with the CEOs? If they are saying that we need intervention, why can they not just go ahead and do it? If they are saying that they cannot, is it because they fear the fact that they will have to put their prices up?

Henry Dimbleby: They cannot go ahead and do it because of their competitors. Let us take the example of someone who makes ice cream or sweets. If I decide to put up the price of my ice cream or not to do sweets, someone else will just pile in and take that from me. Competitively, I would be at a disadvantage. In Europe, CEOs are now talking about this. They call it pre-competitive intervention.

I used to work in telecoms many years ago. The amount of money you can make in telecoms, because it is a natural monopoly, is almost entirely set by the state. The laws of the state determine where the money is made in telecoms. We need to have laws of the state that determine that you cannot make money from the stuff that is killing us in the food system. That is what needs to change, but it is difficult, and that is why they cannot move on their own.

If you look at Greggs, Roger Whiteside has taken a huge amount of sugar out of his products, but there are things that he cannot do and things that his customers complain about. He is already noticing competitors coming in with huge doughnuts alongside his shops and he loses share, so it is a bit tricky.

Q22 **Derek Thomas:** What I am understanding is that it is not so much the cost of doing it and putting the price up of the product, but also that we are going to potentially not have as tasty or as attractive food. Is that what you are drifting towards?

Henry Dimbleby: Food that is very high in sugar, salt and fat will be either reformulated or less profitable for companies that make it. That is what has to happen; otherwise you do not get a change.

Q23 **Derek Thomas:** So people with lots of money can just carry on buying the lovely, tasty stuff—and I am being really general here—because they have a bit more to spend, whereas others will just be left with bland food.

Henry Dimbleby: Whenever you have a tax or a fiscal intervention, you can always buy yourself out of it. I do not know if you have noticed, but during lockdown a lot of extraordinarily rich people suddenly seemed to be on foreign islands and having a lovely time, while we were all—in my case, in Hackney—trying to home school three kids. You can always buy your way out of anything. The question is how, as a society, you change for the better.

The other alternative is to do bans and restrictions. The gameplay on those is more of a risk than a direct fiscal intervention.

Q24 **Chair:** Henry, I am going to throw you a relatively hard ball on this one. If you take a fairly low-income family that is eating a lot of burgers a week, how much tax are you going to put on those burgers to make them change their minds? I do not think that you can put enough tax on there to change them at all. All they will do is land up spending more money, which they do not have, on the food that they like. I get the business of taking out salt and fat, and reducing it in the product, but will you change people's buying and eating habits with a tax and will you land up just taxing the poorest in society?

Henry Dimbleby: You are never going to stop people eating burgers via a tax. In the restaurant game, the joke is that you do not put a burger on your menu because it will suddenly be 80% of your menu and you will not be able to sell anything else. What this is trying to do is to reformulate. For example, if you look at a value curry, which might cost £1.10, it would, un-reformulated, go up to £1.14. That is based on value curry with a lot of sugar and salt in it. You are trying to nudge reformulation there. Marmite, which is quite hard to reformulate and is very salty, would go from £2.70 to £2.85, so you might encourage smaller portions.

It is not as if burgers are suddenly going to cost three times as much. It is marginal stuff, mostly trying to drive reformulation. With that marginal reformulation, you can achieve quite a lot.

Q25 **Chair:** If you are considering a sugar, fat or salt tax—and I do not think you have mentioned a fat tax as such—how are you going to judge your burger as to whether they reduce the salt and so on? How do you incentivise McDonald's or Burger King to make that burger healthier? You have largely accepted that they are going to eat the burger, come what may.

Henry Dimbleby: If you are taxing salt or sugar that you buy in industrial quantities, it may be pennies on each individual burger, but for the financial director of McDonald's that is going to add up, so they could reduce their salt by a small amount and save themselves a lot of money.

Q26 **Chair:** With sugary drinks and chocolate, to a degree, you can gradually take more and more of the sugar out. What I worry about with sugar is that you replace it with something like an artificial sweetener that may be worse for you than the sugar was in the first place. How do you make sure, through a sugar and salt tax, that the sugar and salt are not replaced with something else?

Henry Dimbleby: There is always a risk of unintended consequences. Looking at the things that they might replace it with, sugar in sugary drinks was partially replaced with sweeteners, but they also reduced the sugariness of drinks. As you say, our palates adjust over the long term. For example, if you want to reduce your child's sweet tooth, you can do it

gradually by reducing the sugar. Likewise with salt, they will go for more umami or monosodium glutamate, but it is scientifically proven that neither of those things is nearly as bad for you as sugar and salt. As you try it, the system will move, we will see what happens and we will have to react, but there is a good chance that you could take a lot of sugar and salt out of the system and make our diet much healthier on average.

Q27 **Chair:** I was raised on Cadbury Dairy Milk, although I did eat other things. The point I am making is that we were raised on chocolate and these types of things that we really like. We will accept a certain amount of change to them, but we will not accept total change, will we? How do we re-educate a whole generation? Probably we do not, but we educate the ones who come on. What do we do?

Henry Dimbleby: Interestingly, Cadbury Dairy Milk, to people who have not eaten it since childhood and do not eat it regularly, is unbelievably sweet. If they do not change the size of it or change any of the sugar, it will go from 60p to 68p per bar, in case you are concerned with that.

This is one intervention. This is why you also need the societal changes, the education changes and the changes in Government procurement. It is why you need a much broader range of measures rather than just one fiscal intervention to create the change in the long term.

Chair: I was being slightly facetious but it is all about our habits.

Q28 **Derek Thomas:** You helpfully set out some of the cost increases that we might see. In your report, you suggest it could be up to £3.4 billion raised for the Treasury. At the moment, the Treasury would bite your hand off if you could get that kind of money. I do apologise, but have you suggested in the report and in your strategy how that money could be used? Presumably, there are ways of using that money to address some of the issues that you flagged in the report.

Chair: Sorry to interrupt, but who is going to pay that £3.4 billion? Is it going to be the companies or the poorest in society? If it is going to be the poorest in society, that is an awful lot of money.

Henry Dimbleby: The literal answer is that it will get paid by the company at the point of buying the salt and sugar, but as we know, any tax, in the end, either gets passed on to the shareholder in the form of lower profits or to the customer in the form of higher prices, or is avoided in some way. If you look at the cost, for example, of that curry, the manufacturer might reduce the sugar a bit in order to keep the price at £1.10, in which case they would still pay the tax on the existing sugar, but they would have reduced the amount of sugar. You will get a lot of reformulation. I imagine that some chocolate bars may become slightly smaller. Is that passing the cost on to the consumer?

Chair: We do notice when the bars get smaller, and then we buy two, but that is another matter. I understand where you are coming from.

Henry Dimbleby: Reformulation is the primary driver of this.

Q29 **Derek Thomas:** Have you identified where that money could go and what it could address?

Henry Dimbleby: For most of us, food is a smaller amount of our household expenditure than it has ever been, at under 10%. For the least affluent 20%, it goes up to 15%, and so we want to try to support those people. We have suggested that £1 billion of that goes on four measures intended to support the diets of children: during time term with the extension of free school meals; during the holidays with the holiday activities and food programme; with the Healthy Start programme in preschool; and with the idea of social prescribing for adults, which is beginning to take hold, with some really interesting stuff in Washington and Oklahoma in the States.

People on low incomes and struggling with health problems are not only prescribed fruit and vegetables but given cooking lessons. That has been shown in the trials in the States not only to reduce the weight of the people involved but to reduce the long-term medical costs. It is a net positive, and that is a really exciting thing that we should be trialling.

Derek Thomas: That would be one way of helping to support the argument, if you could definitely deliver it.

Chair: You are beginning to persuade me perhaps on this tax after all.

Q30 **Rosie Duffield:** Is it just as important, in your view, to incentivise people by lowering the price of fruit and vegetables, rather than just taxing everything else? Can I just put in a bid for my poor fruit farmers at the same time? We do not want them to be losing even more money, so we cannot make it that cheap, but a punnet of blueberries is £3.00 to £3.50. I could never have afforded that when I was on tax credits—no way.

Chair: Even if the fruit is produced in Kent, by the way, but that is an aside.

Rosie Duffield: Obviously—the best place.

Henry Dimbleby: The reason that we focused on benefits in kind—the Healthy Start programme, for example, gives portions of fruit and veg to families with children—is that, if you try to introduce market incentives to subsidise the cost of fruit and veg overall, because of the amount of fruit and veg and where it is consumed, you end up subsidising the fruit and veg of the richest people. You end up subsidising my peaches, which we thought was not fair and would be politically difficult. That is why we tried to target families on low incomes.

What is interesting is that, if you look at those interventions, they result in, maybe not unsurprisingly, a greater increase in the fruit and veg consumption of those families than raising their income alone would do. If you talk to people, for example, on Healthy Start—and this may be an experience that you have had—they say, "Being able to put a fruit bowl on the table for my kids without feeling guilty that, somehow, I have

wasted money on that versus something else was incredibly liberating". That is why we made that intervention.

Q31 **Mrs Murray:** In your opinion, which of the recommendations that you have identified to reduce diet-related inequality would have the biggest impact?

Henry Dimbleby: Recommendation 7 is social prescribing. If that works as well as it seems to have done in the trials in the States, it could be a fundamental change to the way that the state deals with this. It would make a lot of people in the health system and in DHSC happy to see that trial, because you would be saying, "We are going to help these people get off this addiction to this junk food cycle". It could be huge, because it is not just children; it is adults. I would say that that, because it is across all of society and not just children, would probably be the most exciting change in the way that we deal with these issues.

Q32 **Mrs Murray:** What was your rationale for focusing most of your recommendations on reducing diet-related inequality on families with children? What about people who do not have children? What about the single person who comes home from work, cannot be bothered to then cook for themselves, and just gets a takeaway every night?

Henry Dimbleby: Funnily enough, we tried, quite explicitly, to move the debate on from childhood obesity. The reason the debate started at childhood obesity was that campaigners and Government felt that that was an area where they had more freedom to intervene, because it was children, and that the libertarian, anti-nanny state arguments did not apply as strongly. Clearly, the problem is spread across the whole of society. On the whole, we talked much more about diet-related illness and obesity across the population than we did just in children.

In terms of the intervention, while we have those three specific things for children, we had, for adults, the social prescribing. We had a £500 million fund to try to shape communities to move to prevention rather than cure; that would deal with those inequalities. There was the procurement and so forth. Although it happened that there were three recommendations for children, we felt that we were trying to make this much more about our problems with food across all ages, rather than just children.

Q33 **Mrs Murray:** Going back to the Cornish cream tea or the Devon cream tea, is it possible to make jam without sugar, perhaps using artificial sweeteners? That would make the jam much healthier and the fruit in it more dominant.

Henry Dimbleby: At the moment, it is difficult to make it taste as good without sugar. You can make it with a lot less sugar. There is a lot less sugar in some jams than in others. We also use jam in quite small quantities. Although the cost of a pot of jam might go up by 5p or 10p, if you are using it in small quantities, the impact on the overall household budget will not be as harsh.

Cakes are something that people think are very hard to reformulate, but one of the big supermarket CEOs told me a couple of months ago that they think that they have cracked it, so you might also see things that we cannot do and reformulation working in ways that we do not yet understand.

Mrs Murray: I am going to be quite right now in suggesting that the odd Cornish cream tea, where, of course, you have to put the jam on first and then the cream, could be seen as not really that damaging to your health and not that much more expensive, but, if the Chair used jam with sugar in his constituency and put it on the wrong way, probably the price would double. I am sure that Mr Thomas would agree with me.

Chair: I am not going to bite on that.

Derek Thomas: The problem is that it would not be absorbed by the scone.

Q34 **Chair:** Henry, you have talked quite a bit about providing food to children and low-income families, food insecurity, free school meals and the holiday activities and food programme. Are we doing enough? Are we getting it to the right children? It is a very difficult issue.

Henry Dimbleby: I do not think that we are doing enough at the moment, which is why I made the recommendations that I did. If you combine those recommendations with the broader societal stuff and the education, we will be in a much better place than we are at the moment.

Q35 **Chair:** We had an argument over whether it should be school meals or food parcels that are provided and how it is best done. When we took evidence on this at another inquiry over Covid, there were mixed reactions, because sometimes the food parcels did not have the right food in there that the children wanted to eat. Even if it was perhaps good food, it did not suit. How do we get to those who really need food the most?

Henry Dimbleby: That thing about parcels is really interesting. During lockdown, the charity I helped found in Hackney was doing food parcels. A bit like school food or like serving anyone food, you have to give people the kinds of things they want. Our first lot of food parcels went out and we took a lot of feedback. By the end, they absolutely loved them after a couple of weeks, because we were doing the right thing. I was not really surprised that there were some complaints about some of that state-delivered food parcels, because any good plate of food that is put before anyone is good and nutritious because someone has cared about it. The more that we can use that infrastructure, particularly with children at schools and communities, and do it at a local level, the better.

Q36 **Chair:** We have to hold our nerve and serve up food in both our schools and food parcels that is healthy to eat, even though perhaps sometimes those receiving them do not necessarily want that particular food. That seems to be an argument. You very often get parents who come on the television and other places, saying, "My children would not eat it". As a

politician, it is very difficult to say, "You must eat that, and you must eat that now".

***Henry Dimbleby*:** That is where you have to get the role of the state and the role of the local school, in this case, right. For example, if the state banned packed lunches, it would be an absolute disaster. There are loads of schools where I would rather send in my child with a packed lunch than eat the school food, et cetera. In my children's primary school, in Hackney, which is where we started working on this before founding the charity, we spent quite a long time trying to work out how to get children to eat more healthily.

For example, you cannot just take away the fried fish on day one. You replace the fried fish with breadcrumb fish, and then next term you do a hard roasted fish, and then, the next term, they will eat it in tomato sauce. It takes time, like with your own children. It takes time to persuade people to eat well.

This term, after doing this for eight years, we have made packed lunches not a thing that you can have in the school, but it takes time and care. That is why, in those school settings, the accreditation scheme, which helps people do that, is the right thing. Anything that is done without care and without the buy-in from people doing it locally is likely to backfire.

Q37 **Chair:** On the free school meals and providing meals in holiday time, are you satisfied with the holiday activities and food programme? It has helped, but has it reached out to everybody?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** I have not seen the assessment of it or the data, so I do not know. I have spoken to people in Hackney, where I live, and they were incredibly well received and much busier than they thought they would be. We had it for both children on free school meals and other children. It was something that any child could go and do during the holidays. There seems to be a buzz from around the country about it, but we are awaiting the assessment. Until we have the assessment, it is impossible to answer that.

Q38 **Chair:** In our Covid report, we discussed whether there should be a right to food, and in your report you did not recommend it. Why was that?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** There are two answers to that question. A right for anything is something that the Government are obliged to do by law, and if they do not do it they can be challenged by the judiciary. Someone can take them to court, and the judiciary can decide whether the Government have allowed this person to have their rights. In a country with a well-developed welfare system, it becomes a question of what specifically those rights are. At one extreme, does my right to food mean I should not starve to death and the state should intervene before I starve to death for want of being able to buy food. To take an absurd example, at the other extreme, should the state deliver me dinner? What is my right to food? What does the state owe me?

You then come down to defining those specific things. I did not use the expression itself, "right to food", because it had become quite politicised and polarised. I thought it was unhelpful to talk about whether or not you have a right to food. At the moment, a campaign is being led by Ian Byrne, the Labour MP, on the right to food. They have five asks, and I addressed each of their five asks. I agreed with most of them in part, such as universal free school meals, community kitchens, increasing benefits, an assessment of food security by Government, and some form of independent enforcement. I will not go into each of those in detail.

Q39 **Chair:** Ian Byrne is a member of this Select Committee. We all feel passionately about food for children, but he really does talk very passionately about it. When we were doing the report, he had a very great input into it. I have a lot of respect for exactly where he is coming from. If he was here, he would be asking you questions on those five asks.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** I have long been a champion of universal free school meals. As a result of the work done on the school food plan that I did in 2004, infant universal free school meals became a thing. With finances as they are at the moment, I made the decision to recommend that free school meals were increased but not made universal. I actually believe it would be good for the nation, for all sorts of reasons, about education as well as nutrition and poverty, to have universal free school meals, and I made that argument in the school food plan back in 2004.

On community kitchens, we actually went a bit further than they did in some ways. We said that there should be a requirement on local authorities to devise food plans, of which community kitchens would be a part. The UKRI fund would provide funding for exactly that kind of thing: interventions in a local area, to see if you could improve the health of the nation.

They wanted benefits to include an explicit calculation of the cost of a healthy diet. It was not in my scope to tackle benefits. It is a huge system. One of the interesting things that came out of our focus groups, particularly with people on benefits, was a slightly jaundiced view of what people would do with the money if they got an increase in benefits. Even people on benefits said, "If you increase people's benefits, they will spend more on booze and fags". We noted in the report that that is categorically not true. If you increase people's benefits, they spend less on alcohol and cigarettes, and they spend more on nutritious food, but I did not make a specific benefits recommendation because that was not within my scope.

On food security, I am in strong agreement with them. We said that should an annual public report by Defra, particularly in the current climate, when things are so volatile. Finally, on independent enforcement, we said, with the FSA, there should be a body that holds the Government to account. We probably agreed with more than we disagreed with, but I did not use the explicit phrase "right to food" because I thought it was

politically polarising and therefore would distract attention from the detail of each of those proposals.

Q40 **Geraint Davies:** It is good to see you again. On the right to food, you will obviously be aware that there is a plan to cut universal credit by £20, so £1,000 a year, and national insurance will be going up for a lot of people on universal credit. Real incomes are down because the exchange rate has been down since 2016. In my constituency of Swansea, there is a rapid growth in the use of food banks and a shortage of nutritious food.

I know you said this is a political point, but in fact I think my constituents very much think that people do have a basic right to nutritious food, which is part of the right to life, if you like. Is this something that you might revisit? I appreciate you do not want to talk about all the complexities of this social security system, but do you not think a minimum standard social security system should enable the delivery of the right to food, so we do not have children going without meals in a normal day?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** I do not have the ability to revisit it because I no longer have any standing in this area, but I can explain why I did not. On benefits, as I said, it is clearly the case that, if you increase people's benefits, they eat better, drink less and smoke less. Likewise, if you squeeze people's incomes, they will eat worse, drink more and smoke more. It was not for me to recommend a specific level of benefits, so I did not, but the minimum income that people have should be enough to enable them to eat a nutritious diet. That is clearly the case, and we say that in the report.

Q41 **Geraint Davies:** Not to lead you, but it follows from what you are saying that, if universal credit is cut, more people will be in food insecurity, will not have enough nutritious food, and will literally eat less nutritious food because they are not able to buy it. That is not rocket science, is it?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** I agree. By definition, if costs go up and income comes down, people will be more financially squeezed than they were before.

Q42 **Geraint Davies:** Finally, I know you have not mentioned the right to food as such, but have you thought of anything in the social security system that could underpin or deliver that right to more people, other than just giving people more money?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** There is a lot in the "other". There is the education piece and the social prescribing, which we have talked about quite a lot here before you. At the moment, we have the three recommendations on food inequality for children, but then there is this idea of social prescribing. I am not sure people have grasped how huge a change that could be. This is the idea that, if people are struggling both financially and with their diet, you would actually prescribe them fruit and vegetables and give them training. There is evidence in the States that that not only improves their livelihood but reduces the cost on the state

in terms of dealing with the medical consequences of a poor diet. We recommended all sorts of things in the plan that could do that.

Q43 **Geraint Davies:** On that point, as you will know, poorer households are often isolated in poorer estates without very good shops, certainly without low-cost, nutritious and healthy fresh food. Therefore, they tend to buy more expensive but yet cheap, un-nutritious food. As you know, if you have a potato and you want to make money out of it, you will convert it into dragons, cover it in grease and fat, and freeze it, or whatever. Even though they have less money, it costs them more to buy nutritious food. Is that something that you have considered? Do you have any suggestions?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Yes. We have described a number of factors there. We have good evidence that, particularly for people without cars, it can take them a long time to get to a shop that sells nutritious food. That is known as a food desert. There is even more evidence that there are food swamps. There are twice as many fast food joints in the least affluent areas as in the most affluent areas. There is a whole vicious circle between the environment and poverty in those areas that leads to a bad diet. I agree with that.

Q44 **Geraint Davies:** I have one question on a slightly different topic. You may be aware that, in the next year or so, an app is going to arrive where you can scan carrots and other vegetables, which will test their antioxidant and nutrition level. I was wondering whether you were aware of this, and whether your report would support recalibrating the farming industry towards more productive, lower-pesticide, more nutritious food, more widely available and possibly subsided for poorer communities?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Nutritional density will become a huge thing. I did not know that there was going to be an app within two years, but I am speaking to the University of Nottingham and there are definitely technologies where, within a number of years, you might be able to literally tell the nutritional difference between two cauliflowers on a supermarket shelf.

Beeswax Dyson, for example, is looking at whether it can kitemark its carrots to be nutritionally better than other carrots. It will start at a premium, but I think that will very quickly become the minimum. Nutrition, rather than volume, will become one of the things that are very important to consumers and supermarkets. As soon as it is measurable, I think it will change very quickly.

Q45 **Robbie Moore:** This question focuses on making the best use of land. I want to look at the way that we are moving out of the common agricultural policy. There is obviously a shift, coming away from basic payment schemes and going towards ELMS. One of the recommendations within the report was maintaining the current budget of agricultural payments up until 2029.

Can you just emphasise why you feel that is so important and the

Government should keep to that, and go above and beyond, as you suggest, the current level of payment?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** There are two parts to that answer. First, why that amount? We made the calculation. Twenty per cent of our land produces 3% of our calories—our least intensive land. If you want to put some of that land into much less intensively, more ecologically grazed farmland, to create woods and species-rich grassland, and to restore peatlands, almost a million hectares of the 9 million hectares that we currently farm could go into that form of conservation, with very low production of food. That would cost you between £500 million and £700 million of the ELMS money.

On farm, we calculate, helping farmers farm and paying farmers to farm in ways that sequester carbon, increase biodiversity and improve animal welfare could cost about £2.2 billion. If you add to that the 9% to 10% that Defra wants to pay on productivity, you get quite quickly to the £2.4 billion or £2.5 billion of CAP money in England. We think that you need the money to deliver the results you want. That does not include access, which is set out in the Environment Bill, and that kind of stuff. That would require different money.

First, we think that the amount of money you are getting is required to deliver what you want. Secondly, it is about timing. At the moment, 40% of farms rely on CAP to be solvent. If you get the transition wrong, it is very risky. With those farms, if you got it wrong, you might see the reverse of what you want, which is that they will increase intensity because they will be desperately trying to replace the money they have lost through CAP. In the long term, the amount is right, but pulling it away quickly could be absolutely disastrous, because you would not only not deliver what you wanted, but you would also put a whole bunch of farmers unnecessarily out of business who could be doing productive things, as guardians and stewards of their land.

Q46 **Robbie Moore:** With the development of ELMS focusing on environmental stewardship and biodiversity, we are yet to hear from Defra on what the exact nature of ELMS will look like and how it will practically be implemented on the ground. What impact do you feel not maintaining these payments would have on our food supply and security? I ask that on the basis that the policy is very much going in that environmental direction rather than food production. Do we have that strategy right? Are we going in the right direction if we are to be focusing on food security and producing nutritious food?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** That depends on trade, which I am sure we are going to come on to.

Chair: That is the next question. Hang on.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** But there is definitely a path that you can map that sees us use our land to produce a little bit more food, sequester carbon, and restore biodiversity using that money in the ELMS budget. If we get

trade right, there is a very optimistic potential outcome for our farmland, our farmers, and all of those of us who live in cities to whom, even though we do not live in the countryside, being a farming nation that feeds itself is quite important as part of our cultural identity.

Q47 **Robbie Moore:** Just before we go on to trade, if we are serious about increasing our self-sufficiency above 63% and producing more food, are the Government taking the right strategic direction by going down the ELM route and focusing so much on that biodiversity and environment side rather than rewarding farmers through a payment mechanism for producing food?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** We should not subside direct production of food. We should invest in productivity. If you look, there is a potential 13% to 15% productivity increase, so we should help farmers with that and help them to farm in a sustainable way. By doing that, you can see a future in which we continue to produce as much, if not more, of our food.

Q48 **Chair:** Just as an aside to Robbie's question, how do you see gene editing and some of the new technologies? Will that help us? You talked about producing more food on less land. Do you see that as a bonus?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Yes. I see gene editing as a continuation and acceleration of crop-breeding techniques. If you look in South America, where gene editing is regulated in a lighter-touch way than GM, GM is owned by all of the multinationals, whereas gene editing is owned by small companies and start-ups, which are producing all sorts of crops that have marginal benefits and help a little bit here and there.

Potentially, if we get gene editing right, it can be hugely helpful. If we get it wrong, it could just be like GM and become something that is only owned by the multinationals. A few species owned by multinationals is not a particularly sensible future.

Q49 **Chair:** There is certainly disease resistance and other things.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** There are all sorts of potential benefits: disease resistance, drought resistance and reduction of pesticides.

Q50 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you, Henry, for being before us today, and for all your hard work in this area. It has been a really useful session for us. I completely concur with your comments about making sure the transition for our farmers goes smoothly and there are no cliff edges in terms of funding because we can then find the sweet spot between producing food and looking after the environment. We need to allow our farmers to be able to adjust to do that so that they are not pushed into making intensive decisions.

I want to now get on to the issue of trade. You have said a free trade deal that did not protect our core food standards would be "an extraordinary failure of joined-up thinking". I declare an interest in this as a vet that I am passionate about upholding our animal welfare standards

in food production. How joined up is the Government's approach to negotiating these trade agreements? Is it joined up?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** We know that the Government said in their manifesto that they would not compromise on high environmental protection, animal welfare, and food standards. The Trade and Agriculture Commission was set up as an independent body with quite an interesting make-up, with some pretty libertarian free traders and farming unions. I never imagined for a second that they would come to a consensus recommendation and was amazed when they did. When they did, they said that the Government should set out core standards in climate, environment, ethics and animal welfare, and if countries could not demonstrate equivalence with those core standards they would not be considered for zero-tariff, zero-quota access. I said that as well.

If you look at the situation as it stands, the Government have committed to something in their manifesto. They have asked two independent groups to give recommendations, and they have given them the same recommendation. We do not formally know what is in the Australia deal, although I read the Secretary of State's evidence to this Committee. It seems pretty clear from reading the tea leaves that it may well be that those standards are not protected.

You asked whether that means there is no joined-up thinking. I guess the test is whether it undermines another policy. If there was no protection of those standards, yes, it would. For example, Australian beef has 45 kilograms per kilo of carbon footprint, whereas UK beef has 30 kilograms. Australia clears 7,000 hectares of trees a year, largely for beef farming; we clear a negligible amount. Australia allows mulesing, which is the slicing of the ewes'—not the lambs who are sent to market, but their mothers—rear quarters to form scabs to prevent flystrike. Australia allows 48 hours of transport for adult lambs and beef, and we allow 12 hours. Take chicken stocking density and so forth.

Q51 **Chair:** We are busy reducing our times as well.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Yes. There, we have explicit animal welfare and climate goals. If we allowed food in that was produced to lower standards, we would simply be exporting the cruelty and the carbon emissions abroad where we could not see them. Clearly, if that were the case, it would undermine other parts of our policy. I would also argue that it would undermine some of the rural policies of Defra because, by doing this, you also undermine the economic position of our farming communities.

At the moment, we think this has happened with Australia, and we presume it is going to happen with New Zealand. The Government will break that manifesto promise. Those two deals are not, in terms of the impact on our farming communities, the carbon impact and the animal welfare, necessarily disastrous. For example, I would be very surprised if any supermarket in the UK brought in lamb from a sheep that had been

mulesed. The amount of beef produced in Australia is very unlikely to undercut this market. But those are testers for deals to come.

The real issue is Brazil for carbon and the US for animal welfare. I was very pleased to see the Prime Minister say today that we want to get the right deal with the US and not the quick deal. This is something that civilians care passionately about. If you look at all the focus groups, they do not want a two-tier food system where we produce to one level and other people produce to a different level. But somehow that has got lost, and the Australia and New Zealand deals seem to have got through. I hope that the better, slower deal will protect our animals from those harms.

If you do not do that, you will see a huge amount of very high-tariff Brazilian beef with 70 kilograms per kilogram of carbon come into this country and destroy our beef markets. You will see animals treated in ways that we find inhumane in this country coming in from America. Australia and New Zealand should be a warning sign. I hope the new Secretary of State in DIT will examine these issues very closely and make sure that we do not take the Australia and New Zealand deals as the template for the Brazil and US deals.

Q52 **Dr Hudson:** I agree. The British consumer really cares about the provenance of their food and the standards that it is produced to, and that is why over a million people signed the NFU food standards petition.

You have really encroached into part 2 of my question. You covered Australia quite comprehensively, but you did touch on the Trade and Agriculture Commission. We as a committee have been pushing the Government very hard to reconstitute that commission forthwith so that the scrutiny can be continued, or actually start, and that the Government can respond to the Trade and Agriculture Commission's report.

That gets me on to scrutiny. We need a strong Trade and Agriculture Commission with teeth to be able to scrutinise these deals, and for Parliamentary Select Committees such as ours and the House to be able to look at these deals. Are you content that the current oversight mechanisms for these trade agreements are suitable?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Largely, yes.

Q53 **Dr Hudson:** If not, what could be done? What suggestions could you make to the Government?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Largely, yes, if they were happening. The Trade and Agriculture Commission, which is meant to assess these deals, was meant to have been set up on a statutory footing already. It seems to have disappeared into the ether. I was meant to be going to the International Trade Select Committee last week; I am going to it tomorrow. There was some suggestion that that was because something was imminent on TAC, but we do not know. If it is set up as constituted and has the right membership, that will be a good body to give scrutiny.

The one area where I wish they had gone further is that they say they will give time to committees to scrutinise, but in many countries it is a statutory duty to give committees a certain time to scrutinise trade deals. That would be a good addition to the current setup.

Q54 **Dr Hudson:** One of the things I have been calling for is the addition of tariff rate quotas to these deals, but also specifying certain types of standards or products that are completely unacceptable. The whole debate has been focused on chlorine-washed chicken and hormone-treated beef, but there are other products that are in a greyer area, not covered by those two. Those two products are banned in UK law and will remain banned, but what about excessive use of antimicrobials and other products? What do you think about tariff rate quotas so that, if too much cheaper product were coming in, we could just turn down the tap so that the market could adjust, and British farmers would not be undercut? We could also specify for certain things, "Just do not put them on the boat to us because we are not going to take them." What do you make of that?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** On the first of those two things, one of the reasons that the campaign to save standards foundered slightly was that it was seen as a protectionist campaign by farmers to save their livelihoods. Animal welfare and the environment are fundamentally important to all citizens. I would be wary of mechanisms that are simply there to protect farmers. Our farmers do an extraordinary job of producing fantastic, high-quality food at high standards, and it is outrageous that we should allow people at lower standards to undercut them, but we should not protect them per se. If someone is able to grow something in a climate in which it is more efficient to grow it at a lower carbon footprint with stronger biodiversity, that is fine by me.

In terms of whether specific things should be banned, as you said, some things are banned in market already. You are not allowed to sell them. That is a stage beyond. The first thing is to ask, "What are the standards? What do we, as a country, believe are the animal welfare and environmental standards that it is not appropriate to breach?" That is the first thing, and the first job of the Trade and Agriculture Commission should be to oversee those standards.

Q55 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you. That is really helpful. I just have one final point on that. I agree that there has been a lot of debate about protectionism. I actually believe this is standing up for our values in terms of where we believe our food should come from. In terms of the Government upholding those standards in international trade deals, what about domestic procurement? We have taken evidence in previous inquiries about public sector procurement. In the Government buying standards that are published, there are still loopholes that say that, if for reasons of economics those standards cannot be met and it is going to be cheaper to buy something that does not abide by them, a case can be made for buying substandard foods in the public sector. We have been pushing to close those loopholes.

What do you make of that? It is setting an example to the world. If we do not practise what we preach in this country, how can we set an example in terms of trying to uphold animal welfare standards around the world?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Can I just make a comment on what you said at the end there in terms of protectionism and trade? When we left the European Union, there was a lot of talk about taking back control and what that meant. It seems to me that there are two forms of Brexiteer. One is a freewheeling, free-market internationalist who would say, "I would even open up my tariffs to you because I get cheap stuff from you. We'll just have free trade and that will be good for everyone". The other is a group that believe in protecting British standards and taking back control. The whole trade deal has got lost in a fight between those groups, and it is clear to me that the British people, from all of the surveys and focus groups we did, believe in standards. They do not believe in protectionism, but, particularly with animal welfare, we as British people believe there is a right way to do things. That is not protectionism; it is just about values.

The second piece is on procurement. There needs to be, and we recommend, an overhaul of procurement with not only nutritional, but welfare and environmental standards, and that there should not be a get-out clause. But, to be able to make that happen, you need to help the purchasing departments in various areas of Government control what they are buying and easily access all the good local produce. I am sure many of you will be aware of it, but there is a south-west dynamic procurement hub.

Chair: We had evidence from them, yes.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** If you are a procurement person and you are stressed, you will buy it from 3663 because that is the easy way to do it. You will just do it and not care about it. What is interesting about the dynamic procurement and what we have done in the schools I am involved in is that, if you have an easy way of doing that—we have an online system in our school where local suppliers can bid for things, we buy them and they all come in in a box—you get better quality and a better price. But it is difficult. It is really hard to do, so the standards need to come alongside an expansion of the dynamic procurement programme that makes it easier for those buyers to buy to those standards.

Q56 **Dr Hudson:** I agree with you very much. We need to make it easier. The example that we were given in our inquiry was that the MoD in Europe, if it was cheaper, could buy low-animal-welfare produce because of the economics of that. We think that loophole should just be closed by saying, "No, you have to buy to the same standards as if that base were in the United Kingdom". Yes, we can help in different parts in the UK with how we do it, but the MoD gave us that wriggle-out, and we thought that was not acceptable.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** In the UK, people talk about the small amount of food that the UK buys. The Government buy 5.5% of all food consumed in the UK. It is absolutely huge. Think about McDonald's, for example. The free-range egg market in this country was way ahead when the EU had suggested we should reach certain levels of free-range egg buying. The reason was that McDonald's decided to go free range and it completely changed the market. Suddenly, farms across the country were doing free range and the price of free range came down, and 5.5% of the market is a very large slug to be able to influence the market for the better.

Chair: The interesting thing that we had from the Bath and north-east Somerset hub was that it saved 6%. It did not cost 6% more. With public procurement, the health service and others are always worried that it is going to cost more, and yet it does not if it is managed properly, as you quite rightly said.

Q57 **Geraint Davies:** In the Welsh Affairs Committee former Australian trade negotiator Dmitry Grozoubinski said that, in terms of the US trade deal, 15 years ago they had very little penetration in the beef market. Now they have a third in value. Remembering that the United States has a much bigger population and eats a lot more beef per person than Britain, do you not agree that the Australian deal potentially represents a major incursion on our market and a threat to our beef farmers?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** The numbers that I have seen suggest it is nothing in comparison with what would happen if you did the same deal with Brazil.

Geraint Davies: Fair enough.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** We do not know because it has not been published, but, if it is as it appears to be, it is breaking not only the manifesto commitment, but also the recommendations of the two independent bodies that they asked for recommendations.

Q58 **Geraint Davies:** Would you sympathise with or support a border carbon tax? You generally have lots of dirty products like steel being produced. We are closing down our cleaner steel industry and importing Chinese steel, for example, that is burned with coal as opposed to electric. Would you agree with that in terms of cattle in particular, which produce a lot of methane? They have to move it around a lot. Might some sort of border carbon tax help to protect our food industry?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** In theory, yes. The economist Dieter Helm has done a lot of work and talked a lot about this. In theory, yes, because it allows you to use your buying power to improve carbon footprints and animal welfare abroad. The implementation will be tricky because you cannot tell at the moment whether a carcass has been reared in a high-carbon or low-carbon way when it arrives at your border. It would involve some form of accreditation beyond what we have at the moment and be complicated. Dieter says, "Start with the big ones, like steel, but then

move down." I can see that that might well be the case for many products in the years to come.

Q59 **Geraint Davies:** You would at least know about the transport distance. You mentioned that British people really do not want very cheaply produced food at the cost of cruelty. Would you agree that, if there is an increase in poverty because universal credit is cut, et cetera, and people have to make a choice between the feeding their children and cruelty to animals, they ultimately have to feed their children?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Definitely. That is the decision that any sane person would make given that choice.

Q60 **Geraint Davies:** Therefore, would you agree that, in order to sustain a strong position on environmental standards and against cruelty to animals, part of that is ensuring that everybody has enough money for decent food? Part of that is ensuring that they have access to nutritious food that is affordable compared to the cruelly produced mass market food we are about to import.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Funnily enough, we look in some detail at prices, and one thing that is heartening is that you can see a transition to foods that are environmentally friendly and not cruel that does not require a huge increase in price. It is definitely the case, particularly when you talk to people who are really struggling to get by, that they do not want to be forced to make that decision. They talk about a two-tier food system. They do not want to have a food system where half of the population eats environmentally friendly food that meets good welfare standards while people who do not have enough money are forced to eat something else.

Q61 **Geraint Davies:** You may be aware of a lot of emerging agricultural science about using regenerative practices where you do not till the land or use insecticides, and you allow the microbial ecosystem of the soil to enrich itself and become more diversified. That in turn increases measurable nutrition, but also the robustness of those plants to attacks from pests.

If that is the case and we want to generate more of that for more people, do you worry that rushing into certain trade deals where we are setting precedents for lower standards means that, when we then face the subsequent deal, which might be in Brazil, as you mentioned, it is more difficult to ratchet back and say, "We will not do it for this, even though we did it for that, because now we know we can do something healthier and more productive"?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** I have been pretty clear about my reservations with the trade deals. We did quite a lot of work on regenerative. I had a really extraordinary farmer, Craig Livingstone, on my advisory board. He used to be, and still is, a high-yielding arable farmer. By using regenerative techniques, he has reduced his fertiliser input by 40% and his pesticide input by 30%. He is making more money as a result from the same yield using regenerative techniques. I am not sure that trade deals will stop

that, but I do have reservations with trade deals for other reasons that I have set out.

Q62 **Geraint Davies:** Should trade deals be encouraged to help protect farmers who are trying to move forward to regenerative practices for higher nutrition, rather than them being wiped out before they get going?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** We should not allow farmers from abroad to use poor environmental or animal welfare practices to gain cost benefits that they then use to undercut farmers in this market who are doing things at higher standards. No, that should not be the case.

Chair: Henry, I look forward to seeing you tomorrow when I guest on the International Trade Committee. I was promised by the now Foreign Secretary, the last Secretary of State for International Trade, that we would have the Trade and Agriculture Commission up and running this week and we would have the core principles from the original report. That report was done in March, and we are still waiting for the Department for International Trade to come up with it. Of course, Parliament passed the law to say that the agricultural deal with Australia must be scrutinised by the Trade and Agriculture Commission, so it will be interesting to see what comes about tomorrow.

I agree with you that a county the size of Devon is being destroyed in the Brazilian rainforest every year. We have to be absolutely clear as we do future trade deals. It will be interesting to see what questions and answers we get tomorrow over at the Trade and Agriculture Commission because that is very much what we have been promised. I think we will get it, but, my goodness, has not the Department for International Trade been very slow and dragged its feet? We are determined to get there in the end.

I appreciate the work that you are doing. I also appreciate the very clear evidence you have given us on that this afternoon. Anything you can do to get these rules in place, please do. I am not joking because we all need to work hard on it.

Q63 **Derek Thomas:** Henry, this picks up from my last question and is around the culture shift that is needed. Presumably, taxing sugar and salt will not deliver the cultural change. Do you have some other ideas that you have not already covered about what the Government's responsibility is to drive that cultural change towards a much healthier, more nutritious diet?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Yes. I see that two shifts need to happen. We currently eat over 50% highly processed food that is killing us, or at least making us very sick, so we need to make that less bad. That is what the fiscal intervention is about.

At the same time, culturally, we need to start to regain our culinary heritage. Some people think this is nuts, but it is the only way. We have changed our diets beyond recognition since the Second World War; we

can do it again. As well as making the bad stuff less bad, we also need to make a transition in which we cook more of the food that we eat and eat more whole and fresh food. That is going to be achieved through the education piece, the Government procurement piece, the work of supermarkets in educating us, and the work of local authorities with their food plans.

That is a huge, long-term shift, and that is why the good food Bill, which sets a statutory obligation on Government to set itself five-year goals and produce plans, and sets up outside organisations to monitor that, is so critical. As we have talked a lot about before, this is a complex system. Things will change that we do not expect. Some of the things we will do will have more impact than we thought they would. Some of them will not work and will have to change. We fundamentally need to change the structures of Government and the structures of our organisation so that they focus on creating a country that eats better food and goes back to a food culture that we once had and a proud heritage of cooking and eating fantastic, home-grown food that is nutritional and delicious.

Q64 **Derek Thomas:** I am glad of that answer because that addresses the sarcastic comment about bland food earlier, so thank you for that. I am looking forward to my Sunday roast with fresh veg on Sunday.

Going to the meat bit, you have recommended a 30% reduction in meat consumption rather than a switch to sustainable British meat. What is the thinking behind that? How could that reduction happen?

Chair: Can you make it clear that it is targeting processed meat? It is not just reducing meat consumption by 30%. That works me up hugely. I am sorry, Derek.

Derek Thomas: That is my mistake.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** You way you get to that meat reduction is that, first of all, you have to acknowledge that it is not enough for farming to be net zero. It has to be net negative because we need to use the land to absorb carbon emissions from industries that we cannot decarbonise, such as aviation and steel. At the moment, the agricultural sector emits about 67 megatons of carbon a year; it needs to absorb about 16.

The question then is where and how you absorb that? We make the argument that you have to combine biodiversity gain with carbon sequestration. Luckily, our landscape is very well suited to do that, particularly uplands. You take a large part of this 20% of land that produces 3% of our calories and reduce the amount it produces by more to sequester carbon to restore biodiversity. For the rest of the land, you have a range of types of farming. You will have regenerative but higher-yielding stuff like Craig, who I just talked about. You will have agroecological, in which you have much more nature living alongside food on a lower-yielding farm.

The question is whether you can do that and produce enough food. The answer is that you can if you reduce the amount of food we waste, increase productivity by the 13% to 15% we think you can, and eat less meat. At the moment, 85% of the land used to feed us is used either to graze cattle or to produce food that we feed to cattle. We need some of that land back. It is not just about carbon or methane; it is about land. We need some of that land back.

We propose that we do it with a three-pronged approach. First, you put a fund in to increase the research into decarbonising cattle and reducing methane emissions. Secondly, you try to create a cultural shift in diets, which is happening anyway with meat-free days and not eating meat for every meal. Thirdly, a huge amount of the meat that we eat is in the form of mince in processed foods. There is a huge opportunity to replace that cheaply by stealth with alternative forms of proteins without anyone noticing. Although we should eat less of this processed food, it is an opportunity for us to help get ahead on climate change while we make the broader transition.

Q65 **Derek Thomas:** This is your land use framework that you are talking about. The Chairman is right and wrong. You are saying 30% of meat, but you are also saying that, in the way that we process meat, we could easily take it out of the diet and replace it with, for example, alternative proteins. Is that credible? My wife does not eat red meat, though I do. She has alternatives. I do my own little bit when we have those meals. Are the British public ready to go for Quorn and other bits and pieces?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** We have not talked about dairy, and it is probably a complexity. But if you think that 30% of the milk that China imports is in the form of milk powder, as soon as you can produce a cheaper alternative milk powder, that will just end like that. That market will go. There is a lot of stuff like that in processed food for which technology will kill that market.

There is this thing about diet shifts and people shifting to eat more veg. In Burger King in America now, 10% of the Whoppers it sells are Impossible vegetable Whoppers. Over half of those are sold to people who eat meat, not to vegetarians. We are at the beginning of quite a big transition where we all eat a bit less meat, and 30% is not a lot if you eat meat every day. It is asking the Chair to go meat-free one or one and a half days a week. It is not a big shift.

Chair: You will have to educate the Chair a bit more yet before you achieve that, I can promise you.

Geraint Davies: Have just one meal a day without meat.

Chair: It can do that—breakfast.

Q66 **Derek Thomas:** I can see the sense in that except that, if you just replace the powdered milk with something that has been produced in

factories, there will be other processing bits and pieces that could presumably deliver the same kind of impact on the environment and carbon emissions that farms are doing. Maybe we should, as you say, just concentrate on really improving the regenerative bits and decarbonising.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** You have to do both. Processed food is here. You may not like it, but it is here, and we have an obligation to make that better for the planet and health. We are not going to click our fingers overnight and suddenly go back to everyone eating completely unprocessed food made from scratch.

Derek Thomas: It definitely provokes thoughts. Thank you very much.

Q67 **Chair:** I am not going to let you off on this one, Henry. We have some of the best grass-fed beef and lamb in the world. It can be argued that permanent pasture holds a lot more carbon than trees until they have grown to a fair height. There a lot of myths about growing trees and what they hold, and permanent pasture holds a lot of carbon. You should have nuanced your report a bit better on this. You have jumped on the bandwagon, dare I say it, of "eat less meat; we're going to save the planet". I am not convinced yet, and nor will I be, because it is how you produce that meat and what type of meat it is that matters. Much of your report I agree with, but I am not in agreement with you on this one.

Why did you not nuance what you were saying? It is a rather populist bandwagon, dare I say it, that you might have jumped on.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** There are 10 chapters on meat out of 16, so we tried to give it a bit of nuance. We go into some detail on the very different carbon footprints, say, of an ex-dairy cow and a Brazilian animal raised on an area where they have just deforested. At the moment, from our calculations, 55% of our countryside would still be pasture grazed. This is not a radical plan by any means.

For those people who want that to remain completely the same and not change, the evidence at the moment is not there, as you will know, that you can get your carbon level over a certain percentage by mob grazing, et cetera. You can definitely use livestock to restore carbon and lock in the soil, but after that it becomes more effective to plant trees over time. However, there are a lot of people at the moment who believe that you can continue to do it, and those studies are ongoing. We mentioned them in a footnote. It may be the case that they show that it is possible to continue to sequester carbon with cattle, but at the moment there is no evidence. Even Gabe Brown does not have the evidence to suggest that might be the case.

Chair: We will agree to be slightly on the same side and slightly offside.

Geraint Davies: While there are nuances, it is clear, as you have said, that rearing cattle and eating lots of meat produces more carbon than being vegetarian or vegan or eating less meat.

Chair: I thought you were my friend too, Geraint.

Q68 **Geraint Davies:** I am. Meat from well-produced, properly reared sheep is very good, but mass production of factory meat and processing are not good for the planet or human health. This may not be your remit, but as countries become more developed there is this idea that, as you become middle class or whatever you become, people feel that they should eat more and more meat. In some of the developing world, we are seeing that more and more meat consumption is contributing very heavily to climate change.

Does Britain have a role to fly the flag for being more sophisticated, less eating meat and more eating a variety of home-grown vegetables? What should we do, if anything, about that at COP 26?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Just to give a scan of how un-radical the idea of reducing meat consumption by 30% is, currently, animals that we are rearing for meat weigh twice as much at any one time as all the humans on the planet, and they are 22 times as heavy as all the wild vertebrates on the planet. Meat has completely dominated the planet, so reducing meat by 30% from that amount is not a radical proposal in the scale of things.

It definitely was the case that, as people became middle class or got over certain earnings thresholds in other countries, they were eating more meat. It does now seem to be tapering off. Even in India, China and Brazil, it looks as if we may be reaching peak meat, which is good news. As you know, methane leaves the atmosphere, so that means, once you stop producing more cows, you do not add to global warming any more than you already have. That is good news.

Yes, we should definitely take the lead. Our farming system produces 13% of our greenhouse gases. Our food system produces 20% to 30%. A sustainable diet should be front and centre of our offer at COP because are we absolutely brilliant at this stuff. We are world leading and we should wave the flag violently.

Q69 **Chair:** We have to make sure we lead by example, but it very difficult to dictate to developing countries because we have dictated to many of them in the past, and ruled, and all sorts of things. It is very difficult to do, Geraint, but I understand your take.

This is the final question. Henry, you have been very generous with your time, and we have had a very good session. First of all, how would you assess the public's and stakeholders' response to the publication of your strategy in the first place? Was it a good response? How do you gauge it, really?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** In the lead-up, we tried to reach out and talk to as many people as possible beforehand. I am very optimistic about the response that it has received in the sense that people seem to be reading it, drinking deeply of it and talking about the ideas. We are at a point now

where everyone takes these ideas seriously, and so the question is what we do about it. Part of my job over the next six months is to come here, or go wherever, to make the case and explain the arguments both to civil society and to people who are making the decisions, and to try to make sure we get them over the line and get some policy enacted as a result of this work.

Q70 **Chair:** That leads me into the second part. You were asked by the Government to produce this report. It is fair to say there was a mixed reaction from some Ministers to your report, so what recommendations do you expect the Government to agree to and take forward in the White Paper? It has all gone rather quiet from the Government side, has it not?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** You say "a mixed reaction". Boris was caught on the hop and asked by a journalist the morning after we published a 280-page report what he thought about the tax, and he said he was not in favour of additional taxes on hard-working people. Who could disagree with that? People get bumped into trying to say things all the time, so I was not demoralised by that.

If I look at the recommendations, there are things that will take political courage, and therefore require continuing to make the argument and spread them in civil society. One is the tax. The question for that is, "If you agree that there needs to be a structured intervention and it is not that, what is it?" Education is really difficult because it is so critical, and yet it is always way down the list of the Education Secretary's to-do list, particularly now, catching up from Covid. I am looking forward to writing to the new Secretary of State and talking to him about that.

Trade is really interesting. We talked about it. It is all about the US, Brazil and the new Secretary of State now, and I am relatively optimistic about that. There is then the boring, structural stuff in Government: a good food Bill, an independent assessment or a statutory obligation to produce a plan. That is where, if there is anything that this Committee can do in joining with the other Select Committees in this area to continue to make the case for more joined-up thinking around food across Departments, that could be enormously powerful.

Q71 **Chair:** Have you been given any indication from Government of when a White Paper response might happen?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** No. A team has been set up to do it. They are working on it, and they said they would do it after six months. Rightly, I am not involved with that team.

Q72 **Dr Hudson:** When Geraint asked you about whether you could change your response or do something, you said your role was over. You have done your report, but you still have a big role to play in articulating what you want the Government to do. How do you square that? You said to Geraint, "My role is over", but it is not, is it?

***Henry Dimbleby*:** He was asking if I could change a recommendation, and I cannot. When I took this job, I did not know it would be two years because I did not expect Covid to intervene, but I knew it would be a lot of work and the chances of creating change with these things are massively increased if you are prepared to make the argument to socialise them. Therefore, having done this work, it will definitely be part of my life for the next six months to two years. I will make the case, spread the word and try to change minds about it. But I was saying that I do not have a formal platform to do that.

Chair: I would really encourage you to keep going because, as Select Committees, we spend our time just gnawing away at Government and their policies. We keep putting down reports and keep going. In the end, some of that, although not all, is adopted by Government. I would suggest to you that, having written your report, which is a good report, you should keep on. The Government do not necessarily take things on board straight away and we need to press it really hard.

We appreciate what you are doing on getting food out to schoolchildren and the poorest in society, the food supply, the food we eat, and the carbon that we sequester into the soil. On many aspects of your report, we are in agreement. I can promise you that we as a Select Committee will work with you and your report, but we need to see Government put a lot of this into action. Sometimes the educationalists do not see food, cooking and producing food as that important, but food itself is a fundamental of life.

We really appreciate the time, the effort and the detail you have gone into to produce this report. We will endeavour to help you with it. Thank you very much for being very open with us today, and saying at the end there exactly where Government should be and where they are going on it as far as you know. We look forward to continuing to work with you. Thank you very much.

***Henry Dimbleby*:** Thank you.