HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment

Corrected oral evidence: Food, poverty, health and the environment

Tuesday 3 September 2019

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Members present: Lord Krebs (The Chairman); Baroness Boycott; The Earl of Caithness; Lord Empey; Baroness Janke; Baroness Osamor; Baroness Parminter; Baroness Redfern; Lord Rooker; Baroness Sater; Lord Whitty.

Evidence Session No. 1 Heard in Public Questions 1 - 8

Witnesses

I: Anna Taylor, Executive Director, Food Foundation; Professor Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy, Centre for Food Policy, City, University of London.

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Examination of witnesses

Anna Taylor and Professor Tim Lang.

Q1 **The Chairman:** I welcome our two witnesses for the first evidence session of our inquiry into food, poverty, health and the environment. Thank you very much for joining us. We have a list of interests that have been declared by members of the Committee. Members of the Committee will declare their interests for the public record the first time they speak during this session. The session is being broadcast live on television on the parliamentary website, so any sotto voce comments could be picked up by the microphones and spread to the nation at large.

I invite the witnesses to introduce themselves very briefly for the record. Then we will go into the questions and your answers.

Anna Taylor: Good morning, everyone. I head the Food Foundation, which is an independent think tank working on food policy.

Professor Tim Lang: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for inviting us. I am professor of food policy at the Centre for Food Policy at City, University of London, up the road.

Q2 **The Chairman:** Thank you very much. I will kick off with a very general question to help us to understand your view of the picture at large. What do you think are the most significant challenges facing our food system? What impact are those challenges having on the population, particularly with reference to diet, health and inequalities? This is an inquiry primarily about England, but it could also be about the rest of the United Kingdom. Professor Lang, would you like to kick off on that?

Professor Tim Lang: I would. I will try to do it briefly, but it is a big topic.

The problem is lack of vision. We do not have a national food policy. Scotland and Wales are beginning them. England does not have one. The problem in much of British food politics is England. We do not have political will. It is dissipated across different ministries. I am a policy man. I think there is a fundamental flaw within the Whitehall system, which is a lack of institutional link-ups. For two years precisely, we had a Cabinet sub-committee on food. It was abolished in 2010 by the coalition, for whatever reasons. I think that was a mistake, because it was beginning to deliver that sort of institutional link-up.

There is also a fundamental political—small "p"—problem of lack of understanding of the multilevel world, that food is something that operates at the global level, the regional level, the national level and the subnational level, down to the micro and domestic level. We do not have levers and understandings of how those dynamics work.

Those are the institutional and framework issues. I hope very much that the Committee will report on and make recommendations about those. If I were asked what three or four issues are the big fault lines in English, and indeed UK, food policy and the food system, I would say that they

are inequalities, inequalities and inequalities. We have a highly unequal food system, whether we are looking at consumption or whether we are looking at power in food manufacturing or land ownership. Wherever one looks, it is always about inequalities.

We have a problem of health externalities. We have very cheap food, relatively, but the costs are dumped elsewhere, on health and on the environment. John Krebs, of all people on this Committee, you know only too well that the food system is the major driver of ecosystem damage. That is not currently being wrapped in. I am not making a political point, but if you look at the present Government's agriculture committee, food does not feature. There is a very welcome return of interest in thinking about land as being about ecosystems, but they are not thinking about land as food as well. That is the multifunctionality, multilevel problem I am getting at.

Finally, we have a real problem of British food culture. We have inherited empire, power and a great sucking sound of being fed by the rest of the world. The default position is that we assume that others will feed us. That has engendered a deracinated food culture. When British consumers are flooded with vast amounts of unnecessary foods and food products, we cannot expect them not to indulge in them. We have a mess, basically, but it is sortable.

The Chairman: We will come to that. I am sure that you will help us with some thoughts on that.

Professor Tim Lang: That is a short version, by the way.

The Chairman: I should declare my interests. I am an adviser to Marks & Spencer and to a Japanese food company called Ajinomoto. I invite Anna Taylor to comment on the same question.

Anna Taylor: Tim has certainly laid out the territory. I want to add a little on the point about vision and why it is so important. Particularly when it comes to diet, we have a situation now where the lack of collective vision for the food system across government, citizens and business gets in the way of our developing good and coherent policy.

In some ways, government and citizens have been pitted against one another with the use of the term "nanny state", that we do not want the state to intervene and tell us what we want to eat. Rightly, there is a very strong view from parts of the media that we want to protect citizens from that kind of state intervention, but it has moved us very much into a them-and-us situation, rather than the sense that we need a common vision for a food system that is going to help everybody to eat a bit more sustainably and a bit more healthily. The state has a duty to try to help to get us there, without telling us what we need to eat. The nanny-state narrative has got in the way of thinking a bit more, in a joined-up fashion, across different stakeholders, about what kind of food environment and food system we want.

The other challenges we face, in addition to those that Tim mentioned, are that in achieving health goals, environment goals and national food security goals there will inevitably be trade-offs, where we have to weigh some priorities against others, whether those are economic goals against health goals, or tackling inequality goals versus building externalities into costs and in other areas. There are trade-offs and they require citizens to get involved in the conversation about the sort of food system that we want, because they are values based; they are about what sort of society we want to be. That is a challenge going forward. It is thinking about reshaping the food system in a way that delivers those outcomes more effectively. The national food strategy is a real opportunity for us to create and engender that conversation, to discuss those trade-offs with a wide variety of citizens and to get their views.

The Chairman: Tim, at the beginning you mentioned that maybe things were being done differently in devolved parts of the United Kingdom. Would you like to expand a little on that and tell us whether there are lessons that could be learned for England from other parts of the United Kingdom?

Professor Tim Lang: I am going to be a very boring academic and say that I have just written a book about this, but I cannot give it to you, because it is not out yet. The short answer is that some interesting things are going on at the Wales and Scotland level. Unfortunately, Northern Ireland, for various reasons that your Lordships know, is not participating in that particularly.

In Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act has had a fundamental impact on getting the Wales Government to think about their rural policy in relation to their health policy in relation to their schools policy. In Scotland, the good food nation process, very ably pushed and promoted by an extremely articulate and well-organised civil society movement that goes from public health professions to straight NGOs, has been trying to think about what a small country can do when it has inherited an export business of, basically, meat, biscuits and whisky.

That is a very interesting political reality check, both for Wales, whose exports are lamb and a bit of beef, and for Scotland, which I have mentioned. They are now having to address the health and environmental consequences of what I set out. They have processes that are doing exactly what Anna referred to. I personally very much welcome the Dimbleby process—the national strategy review—to which Anna is an adviser at the moment, through Defra.

We have to get out and engage with people in their locality. We must stop having preaching from above by experts who are not connecting with people. That is why I stress the subnational level. I did not mean "sub" in any derogatory sense. It is actually the missing link in food policy thinking over the last 30 years in Britain. We have to get a grip on that.

When you apply that to England, you find that we do not have regions. They were abolished. The RDAs were abolished. Very weak LEPs were put in place—local economic partnerships. They are pathetic. They have no democratic legitimacy. They do not have budgets. They do not have accountability. They do not have fingers in local pies. Somehow we have to create a bridge to national thinking on the big strategic stuff—the food security stuff and the big health and environmental data. We are now very clear that food is a major driver of major problems. We must have something that connects to ordinary people when they are at the point of deciding whether or not to drink water out of a plastic cup. We are not doing that.

That regional level, connecting to the local level, is the major structural deficiency in British food politics, particularly English food politics. Wales and Scotland are doing interesting things, but I do not want to romanticise them. I know too much about them. They have deficiencies of money. They have barriers that they hit as well. In Scotland, that happens the moment you talk about health. I declare an interest. I reviewed Scotland's nutrition strategy over 10 years. It hits the major export commitment of whisky, biscuits and beef. That clash has to be addressed somehow. It needs to be addressed multilevel, not just at national level, but regionally and locally. Did that answer your question, John?

The Chairman: Yes, in part.

Professor Tim Lang: I can give you more detail on things, if you want.

The Chairman: I do not necessarily want more at the moment, but I would like to press you on whether the developments in Wales through the future generations Act and the Scottish good food nation have specific elements that address health and food inequalities. That is part of our focus.

Professor Tim Lang: Yes, they do. I would not have mentioned them if they were not addressing exactly the agenda of this Committee. Both are addressing health, environment and inequalities, because both those countries—they are countries—have major problems on those fronts. The classic epidemiological evidence that came out 20 years ago on inequalities in Scotland showed that in Glasgow there is a gap of 10 to 15 years in life expectancy between west Glasgow and Easterhouse, where I was doing work. This is highly institutionalised in Scottish eating culture, manifesting as major problems for NHS Scotland. These are really specific data. There are great people working in Scotland who could be much more useful to you.

Baroness Janke: I want to follow up on your idea about devolved engagement at local level. Although we do not have the regions, we have cities in the UK where some important work has been done. Do you feel that they are a basis for building better interventions? I agree that the whole devolved structure in the UK is a bit confusing at the moment, but do you feel that there is some future in building on what is there?

Anna Taylor: Absolutely. It applies both to cities—the mayoral structure in London and the metro mayors around the country—and to local authorities. Some local authorities are really grabbing the agenda.

Of course, there are two caveats. One is money. Obviously, local authorities have large areas of food work within their responsibility—school food being a good example—yet they cannot plug gaps on entitlement to free school meals, for example. They can improve work around the quality of free school meals, but they are working in the context of a national framework that is not particularly supportive of their doing that well.

The other thing is that many of the food environments in cities are shaped by companies that are actually global companies, or that at least have a national presence and would not typically change their business in a particular location. If they were going to change anything, they would need pressure at national level, and legislative, often regulatory, structures to create the conditions for them to do that. Although local authorities have quite a number of levers, they are not enough in the absence of a decent national framework with regulatory instruments, where they are needed and useful.

Professor Tim Lang: I agree with what Anna said, but I shall be harder than her. She is being very genteel. I shall not be. The powers given to British cities are different. I declare an interest. I am on the London Food Board, as Baroness Boycott was. I came to London initially as an adviser to the old GLC, so I have watched this development, where the inequalities of British cities are now being translated into and institutionalised as different powers.

As Anna mentioned, there has been a really powerful, interesting and, I think, fabulous citizens' movement to try to engender some action on food. The Sustainable Food Cities Network is one of the most imaginative things that has happened in British food policy in the last 40 or 50 years, but they hit the brick wall that Anna referred to. It is about money, but it is also about powers. They do not have powers.

In the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s, local authorities were given powers to do things. I have been hitting the table for the 10 years that I have been on the London Food Board, under both right-wing and supposedly left-wing Mayors, saying, "There aren't powers. We don't have legal powers. Where are our responsibilities? Where are our duties? Where are our targets? Where are our funds?" It is very stark. We cannot expect a culture shift to take the table in the middle of this room and move it over there, which is what we have to do with the food system, if we obey the evidence. We do not have powers at the city level.

The Chairman: We need to keep moving along.

Baroness Janke: It is not just a question of national policy for England. Greater powers for the different parts of England could make a difference. I wanted to make that point.

Professor Tim Lang: Yes. I hope that the review Anna is involved in will come up with those powers. Certainly, I have been saying to Henry Dimbleby, "That is what you have to be arguing for". We need laws that put this in writing, and give powers.

The Chairman: Baroness Boycott and Baroness Redfern would like to come in. Could you keep the questions and responses brief, because we have other questions to get to?

Baroness Boycott: I want to pick up on something that you said in your opening remarks, Anna. You said that the state has a duty to help us get there on food vision; I assume that also means affordable food, yet I know from the Food Foundation's work on the affordability of the eatwell plate that we have a very big gap. Do you see making healthy food cheaper, by subsidising it and by tax, as part of the solution? How far should the state go? When you say that the state has a duty, what exactly do you mean?

Anna Taylor: It goes back to the point about vision. You are all familiar with the *Eatwell Guide*, which is the Government's guidance on how we should be eating. It has no power at all. It does not drive anything.

Professor Tim Lang: It is not used.

Anna Taylor: No. If we are really serious about reforming the governance arrangements around food and enshrining in law in some way our ambitions for how we want the food system to shift, through a set of metrics around greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity and diet-related disease, for example, at the heart of that we must have a notion of what a healthy and sustainable diet is and what it costs. That, in turn, should feed through to other areas of government intervention.

You would then ensure that the budget that you are allocating to school meals makes reference to the fact that you have that in place. You would make sure that your public procurement of food across the piece made reference to that. You would think about it in respect of minimum wage levels and, therefore, the cost of diet in relation to the cost of living. In other words, you create a reference point against which it feeds through to other areas of policy. Similarly, of course, you would make sure that benefit levels were sufficient to cover the cost of eating a healthy diet. At the moment, we have gross discrepancies, particularly for the poorest 20% of the population, where it becomes extremely difficult to afford a healthy diet. We need something in place to protect those households, in particular.

To go back to the point about Scotland, there has been quite a live conversation in Scotland about the right to food and whether or not you should enshrine that in law in some way. That is probably an interesting conversation for the Committee to follow up, to see where Scotland has got to. The conversation in England is some way behind that. In some ways, whether or not you badge it as rights does not matter too much. The point is that you need to be able to enshrine something around your

aspirations for a healthy and affordable diet that creates a reference point for other areas of government intervention.

Baroness Redfern: Tim, in your opening remarks, you mentioned two things. You said that there is a need to grow more, because it is easier to import. Are you saying that we should have incentives or specific carrots and sticks to do that? You also mentioned unnecessary food products. Could you elaborate on that?

Professor Tim Lang: I am glad you were listening. That is what my book is about. What is food security in the 21st century for the fifth richest economy in the world? Basically, Britain is producing less. It is slipping down. The food trade gap is going up. For 40 years, British ministries, Ministers and Secretaries of State have gone into moral panics at times and said, "We've got to export more whisky, biscuits and stuff that is not so great for health in order to pay for the vastly increased amounts of fruit and vegetables that we are importing, which are good for health". There has been an assumption that we can trade our way out of a health problem through a food security strategy. Anna was referring to that.

First, it is not working. Secondly, it is risky in itself. Thirdly, it is Britain doing what it will not be able to do in the 21st century, because our climate is going to be relatively unscathed compared with that of southern Europe and almost all the places we import our good-quality foods for health from. There is a very big strategic issue. I could talk with you for hours, but I will not. That is what my book is about.

The question about health is interesting. Basically, land use is our problem. Probably one of the only useful things that I did in the six years I served as a government commissioner on sustainable development was constantly to go on about what land is for. Is it for environment? Is it for food? Is it for the view? Is it for housing? Is it for tarmac? Multifunctionality is the only answer you can come up with if you listen to all the evidence.

The Chairman: Tim, we need to accelerate. I am sorry.

Professor Tim Lang: You have to include all of that in some form of legislation framework. That is not being done. I am someone who thinks that the review led by Henry Dimbleby should come up with a new national food security and sustainability Act. We need to have that setting the targets.

Baroness Redfern: Within different timescales.

Professor Tim Lang: Within different timescales for different levels of government and governance, including all the actors. At the moment, companies big or small do not have a clue. I am not someone who thinks that the state is the answer to everything. It is not. We have to include all the actors in the food system in shifting the system from where it is at the moment to where we know it has to be.

The Chairman: I would like to move on to Baroness Janke, with question 2. I hope that our witnesses can keep their answers sufficiently succinct, so that we can get through all our questions.

Q3 **Baroness Janke:** This might be difficult. What barriers affect people's ability to consume a healthy diet? It is very broad.

Professor Tim Lang: I can do that in 30 seconds or less: income, price, product placing, all the marketing brilliance of the food industry and cultural class. That is what the data say.

Anna Taylor: The question also included different income and geographic groups. The variations in dietary patterns across the UK are not particularly profound. There are some small differences, but not many. As Tim said, you see big differences between socioeconomic groups. We know that household composition is a factor. For example, people living on their own are more likely to eat ready meals. There are some patterns that are affected by household composition.

You would not pick this up through an epidemiological study, but I would argue that one of the barriers that is a backdrop to the food system as we as citizens experience it today is that we have big information asymmetries across the system. We have a situation where it is pretty hard for a customer in a shop to work out what they are eating, where it has come from and how it was made, and to know that they are buying what they really want to buy. It is quite hard to do that.

Similarly, it is often hard for the Government to regulate areas of the food industry, because they do not have the information they need to be able to put in place the right sort of legislation to control areas of food safety and so forth, yet the knowledge and the data reside very squarely within different parts of the food industry. There is an opportunity. It is not about improving labelling. It is about dramatically opening up the system and making it more transparent, in a way that enables us as citizens to understand the food system much more comprehensively than the average person understands it now. There is an issue around data, freeing the data about the food system to make it more of a public good, and trying to think about how government can stimulate that.

Baroness Janke: I was wondering about accessibility. You talk about poorer people having less access. Is there not also an issue of small and poor communities not having access to fresh food, for example? I have certainly felt in my city that the dominance of the supermarkets and their distribution systems often denies access, certainly in geographical or income terms. Is there something we can do to end the domination of the main supermarkets?

Professor Tim Lang: I completely agree with what Anna said. You are right, Baroness Janke, but as an example, if you were to listen to Lidl or Tesco, small to big supermarket operators, they would say, "You can put out avocados and asparagus in poor working-class areas, or low-income or high welfare-dependency areas. If they don't sell, what are we to do?

We throw it away". They are very sophisticated at producing what a locality will buy. I do not think we can overdemonise the power of the supermarket, not that Anna was. There is a dance of death going on, but shaped and framed by class and income systems.

I would be slightly harder even than Anna. There is a very important development that your Lordships need to note: the new rules on universal credit. We are already picking up hearsay. It is not yet in the data, but I think it is true. In my book I have a lot of interviews with people who say this. There is the new two-child rule. For a third child, immediately you are not getting benefits now compared with two years ago. If that is the case, where is the money for the food for the third child coming from? There is immediately pressure downwards.

It is a very complicated mix of factors and dynamics, but I do not want you to fudge the issue of culture. We are dealing with a long legacy of British eating culture. It has been transformed in lots of ways to the good in the last 40 years, with Europeanisation, globalisation and immigrant cultures bringing in different foods. It has been a remarkable renaissance in some respects, but it is also wedged into a very distorted and divided social system.

Baroness Janke: Other cities and places have found ways of dealing with this.

Professor Tim Lang: Up to a point.

Baroness Janke: In places such as Toronto.

Professor Tim Lang: You mean outside Britain.

Baroness Janke: Yes.

Professor Tim Lang: Toronto has greater powers, which is exactly the point I made. I was a first adviser to Toronto, where they borrowed the food council work I was leading in London when I came here 35 years ago. We had the London Food Commission that was trying to advise the regional government of London and it was stopped. Meanwhile, other cities have picked it up. All across northern America there are developments of the kind of subnational and regional dynamism that started here. Toronto is an extremely interesting city, but there are lots around the world. There is the Milan urban food policy pact that Rosie and I were heavily involved in launching, under Boris Johnson's mayoralty, as it happens, and which is now under C40, a worldwide network of cities. There are some remarkable lessons you can draw on, but they need powers. If you do not give cities powers, you cannot expect them to do anything. They can talk, but they cannot do anything.

Q4 **Baroness Boycott:** I am a trustee of the Food Foundation, chair of Veg Power, a patron of Sustain and co-chair of Feeding Britain, which is my food interest at the moment. I have a big but general question for both of you. What role does the food industry play in influencing our diet?

Anna Taylor: I will not labour the point. It has a huge impact. You need only look at whole categories of food that have been created over the last 60 to 70 years. Before I came here, I was looking at the work ODI has done on tracking the national food survey and different products, and how many changes there have been with ready meals and their upward trend from the 1940s. We are doing some work in India at the moment. Pot noodle is exploding on to the market. We track the stories of those products. They are created, and there are huge investments in marketing and advertising. They create a market, and then habits and norms are formed around them. That is a pretty familiar story for a range of products. The food industry undoubtedly shapes what we eat.

The debate has become a bit crude in separating supply and demand. I would argue that we can deliver the biggest changes by trying to work with the food system to make it easier for us to eat well, but we still need to want to eat well, so demand is an important part. It interacts. As Tim says, generations of children have been brought up and gone into adulthood eating highly processed diets. They do not necessarily develop their taste preferences in their early years, so they enjoy a range of fruit and vegetables and a more diverse diet. We have a situation where people want to eat like that to some extent.

We have a job of work in shaping a new food environment that takes people with us, so that we do not force supermarkets to put a product on a shelf that never sells and then you stop the conversation. You have to go on that journey together. Investing in early years and setting in place the foundations of a new generation of children who want to eat a variety of food is a really important part of that.

The short answer to the question is that the food industry has had a big role in shaping how we eat. At the moment, 60% of our calories come from ultra-processed foods. Those are foods that are highly manufactured and have gone through multiple processes to get them there. We are heavily dependent on those foods.

Baroness Boycott: Anna, for the record, can you briefly set out how food industry advertising works out as regards healthy and unhealthy food?

Anna Taylor: In the stats for the UK, about 2% of food and drink advertising spend goes on fruit and vegetables. I would have to check the exact numbers for the record. I think a further 20% or so is spent on sugary drinks and another big chunk is spent on sugary and salty snacks. The advertising industry is oriented towards selling us fast-food brands combined with manufactured confectionery and things that tend to be less good for us.

Baroness Boycott: Could we only sort that out through legislation? Will responsibility deals ever work?

Anna Taylor: The only way you can control advertising is to put in place regulations to do it.

The Chairman: Could you send us the stats on that?

Anna Taylor: I do not have them at my fingertips, but I certainly can do so.

Professor Tim Lang: Anna is quite right. It is a walkover by the advertising industry. I put the latest figures I could get hold of for Britain in my book. About two-thirds of £1 billion is spent on food advertising in Britain, and about £5 million goes on something one can call health promotion. David and Goliath are not even in it.

To answer the question more specifically than Anna in some respects, your Lordships in your final report must not use the phrase "the food industry". There are different industries and sectors. It is important to tease out the duties, responsibilities and possibilities of processors as opposed to farming, retailing and catering. They are all doing different things.

The processors are locked into dependency on retailers. The retailers are hugely capitalised but have very low profits. Their return on capital is very low indeed. You can make huge amounts of money from catering, but you go out of business much quicker. We are seeing some very interesting dynamics within the industries. It is very important to get a sense of the different functions of the different sectors that shape our diet.

It is not just the industries. Farming is churning out ever-cheaper commodities to be turned into high fat, sugar and salt products and the ultra-processed foods to which Anna referred. What would it take to get agriculture to do more for ecosystems and more for horticulture? If I have 10 seconds on the radio, I always say that England has to have less agriculture and more horticulture.

Lord Rooker: Baroness Boycott touched on what I was going to ask about, which is the phenomenal amount of food sold on promotion and through advertising. I looked up the top 10 food companies, so-called, which are not the biggest food companies. Unilever spends $7 billion on advertising. Its revenues are only $68 million, so that is more than 10%. PepsiCo is spending 5% of £60 billion-odd on advertising. These are world companies. There is a phenomenal drive to advertise brands.

That promotion probably causes the purchase of food that then gets wasted. We know there is a terrific amount of that. Has anybody ever looked at the real effect of advertising in terms of the waste economy and the unhealthy food economy? Advertising is looked at as a good thing in itself to give people information and explain, yet a phenomenal amount is spent on pushing brands. It seems to be different in other industries. Is there an explanation for that?

Professor Tim Lang: There has been very good research. When John Krebs was chair of the Food Standards Agency, he set up the Hastings review. The evidence, which was overwhelming and sound and has not

been disputed worldwide, was that advertising has a very big impact on behaviour and health. Studies have not been done on your first point about advertising as a driver of waste, other than in very general terms that advertising is about promoting throughput rather than necessarily meeting needs, so in that sense advertising generally is shrouded by the criticism that you are getting at. It would be interesting to do it.

I do not think it would be possible to do a Hastings-type review on advertising and waste. This may sound as though I am defending advertising, but I do not at all; I am a critic of it. The problem with advertising is that its job is to keep the machine churning ever-cheaper food through the system, and do it by scale. That is why Unilever spends that money. That is why Coca-Cola spends $4 billion a year on marketing, which dwarfs the entire World Health Organization's budget by a factor of two, every year. I could give you the figures, because I brought them all out in my book and I can send you the table. Putting them all together, British food companies' spend on advertising is immense compared with anything else your Lordships are interested in.

The Chairman: We would appreciate having those figures in writing.

Q5 **Lord Rooker:** Before I come to my question, I had better follow the rules. I am a former chair of the Food Standards Agency. A long time ago, I was a food Minister in the old Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and my final job in government was at Defra, as farming Minister. Earlier this year, I chaired an egg summit for the largest supermarket in the country. That was about the way they grew eggs.

A central question for us is how we make a healthy diet accessible for everybody. What policy interventions do you think would make the most impact? Is it those that change the behaviour of customers and consumers, or those focused on improving practices in the food industry? Are there nudge factors and things that are easy to do, rather than just telling people, "Our advice is do this, that and the other", or should we be making sure that reformulation of the product itself gets to everybody?

Anna Taylor: In the food industry reformulation agenda the Government have started, great work has been done on salt and now on sugar. Arguably, it needs more teeth to get the industry where it needs to be. That is where the onus has rightly been and should continue to be in delivering healthier diets, for two key reasons.

One is that that is likely to be more sustainable. The evidence on information campaigns suggests that they peak and then fall back again and there is a tail. Similarly, you need to continue to spend loads and loads of money on advertising, because everything has quite a short cycle in people's uptake of information, for longevity but also for reasons of inequality. We know that things that require people to use more personal agency are often harder to do if they are juggling multiple things and are on a low income. Therefore, making it easier for people is a good idea. Working at the food system end rather than the individual behaviour end helps to get people there.

What is missing from the question about whether we focus on people or the food industry is the critical role that the Government have through the non-market route, through government food programmes, whether it is school meals and different versions of those, particularly for low-income children, free school meals, healthy start vouchers and a range of other things, such as school fruit and veg schemes. All of those are non-market interventions. We have just done a year-long inquiry for a cross-party parliamentary committee on that. We would argue that there are huge areas of policy that are being implemented badly and where there are critical gaps.

While we should be focusing on the food industry and pursuing the work that is being done on sugar and making it stronger, we need to pay as much attention to those public programmes. We have a situation now where, for example, about £600 million a year is spent from the government purse on free school meals and universal infant free school meals, and we have no way of monitoring the quality of what is being delivered, in contrast with Scotland, which has a monitoring programme in place.

We have children who are entitled to free school meals and have their cards wiped at the end of the day. If they are sick, they do not get that money; it is absorbed into the coffers. The estimate is that about £70 million a year is taken away from children who are entitled to free school meals just through bad implementation of what on paper is a good programme. We have been calling strongly for a children's food watchdog that would hold policymakers' feet to the fire in all areas of children's food to make sure that those government programmes, which are often good policies on paper, are implemented well and tackle the dietary inequalities that they were set up to help to tackle.

The Chairman: Tim, do you have anything to add, in two or three sentences?

Professor Tim Lang: I have some examples. John, you chaired the Nuffield council on the Nuffield ladder, so you of all people know that very often the problem with English food policy is that we tend to go for the soft or nudge end rather than the fiscal end. I declare an interest. I am on the scientific advisory boards of both Action on Sugar and Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health. Those science lobbies, which is what they are, have argued very strongly for interventions. I think we can learn from that experience.

Let me give your Lordships one example of where it is complex. The sugar tax, the soft drinks tax, is currently being monitored by a very good project in Cambridge, which I think you should find out about. It is run by Martin White at CEDAR in Cambridge. I cannot say what it shows because it is very confidential, but you should find out about it. The problem is that, if you just encourage manufacturers to shift from sugar to artificials, say from corn sugar or beet sugar to Aspartame or one of the stevias, you are maintaining the sweetness in diet; you are switching

the source of the sweeteners but not reducing palatability norms. In my first remarks, I said culture was important. That is exactly what I meant.

Lord Whitty: In the face of huge advertising and presumed consumer embedded tastes, what has been the evidence for interventions at consumer level—for example, traffic lights—to change the behaviour of the consumer at the point of purchase?

Professor Tim Lang: As you know, Larry, traffic light labelling took a long time to get. I spent 25 years trying to get nutrient labelling, fighting the food industry all the way. Those things are useful because they get the companies to think more about what they are prepared to be seen to be selling to the public.

Do they make a big difference to consumer behaviour? The jury is out. If you are pregnant or have had a heart attack, you start reading labels and they become very useful. They are useful to get, but do they transform food culture and the norms of eating? Not as much as the neo-liberal rhetoric would imply. That is what the evidence says.

The Chairman: We have only about 10 minutes left and two questions to go.

Q6 **Baroness Parminter:** In response to an earlier question, you highlighted the barriers to getting healthy and sustainable food accessible at local level. You talked about powers and money, but there are good examples out there. Birmingham cut down the number of takeaway outlets. Can I have from each of you two or three concrete examples where there are good examples in local areas?

Professor Tim Lang: That is a very good example. My colleague Martin Caraher spent many years trying to look at the way in which lack of a food interest in planning processes allowed fast-food joints to cluster around schools and in working-class areas. In my book, I have the latest CEDAR data from Cambridge; it very kindly did that for me. Again, I can share that with you as long as I get permission.

Basically, fast-food joints in Britain are located where the lowest incomes are. Blackburn has the highest concentration per population of any town or city in Britain. It is a deindustrialised area, which I know very well. I used to farm just up the road. It is a deindustrialised, very interesting and formerly very proud town, which has now been taken apart not by the food industry but by small entrepreneurial income developments. These are very tricky issues.

I would like to quote Leeds. The Leeds HENRY project is probably the most interesting British example of where childhood obesity has levelled off by massive intervention focusing on at-risk, at-need groups. I approve of that personally, but the problem is that it implies that only certain social groups are the problem in Britain, yet three-quarters of the British population does not eat the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables, for example. To go back to my analogy of the table in the

middle of this room, we have to shift the whole of the table, not just cut a little bit off at the edge.

The Chairman: Anna, do you have any brief comments?

Anna Taylor: One other example worth highlighting is the Alexandra Rose scheme. I am not sure whether you are familiar with it. It is a voucher scheme for fruit and vegetables for people who are entitled to the Government's healthy start vouchers. That is a means-tested entitlement if you are pregnant, have a child under the age of four and are on a very low income. The charitable scheme matches those government vouchers with equal value. You have to spend the voucher in your local market. It is intended to support the local economy and, as Tim said, tackle the area of diet where we have the biggest differences between rich and poor, which is fruit and veg consumption. It is in operation in big chunks of London, and I think it is also now in Liverpool. It might be a good example of a scheme for you to look at.

Professor Tim Lang: But it needs to be national, not just 10% of the population.

Q7 **The Earl of Caithness:** I have no interest to declare currently.

Anna, in reply to question 1 you said that we have to decide what food systems we want. What food systems do we want, and how can they be made environmentally sustainable?

Anna Taylor: There are lots of things we need to do to try to improve the environmental sustainability of our food system in the UK, and in the countries from which we import large amounts of food. At the heart of the issue is our meat consumption, or our consumption of animal products in particular. If we can reduce our consumption of animal products, it would provide a big lever for reducing the greenhouse gas emissions attached to our diet.

It is important to highlight that we are not just talking about moving away from eating red meat to eating white meat, because we know that the white meat we eat is fed largely on soy, which in and of itself has a big land-use footprint, not least in parts of the Amazon. There are lots of things to be done, but meat is a big piece of the picture.

In preparation for this meeting, we looked at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine SHEFS project, part of which reviewed red and processed meat consumption across different socioeconomic groups. We can share all the data with you. Meat consumption tends to be higher among the richer demographics. There is not a huge gradient, but it tends to be higher. In turn, the greenhouse gas emissions attached to diet tend to be a bit lower in the lower sociodemographic groups. It is the opposite of the fruit and veg story in that sense. If we can try to move everybody towards a diet that has more vegetables and pulses in it, we will deliver not only better health impacts but bigger impacts on greenhouse gas emissions. That is one answer to a very big question, but it is probably the most important part of the answer to that question.

Professor Tim Lang: I would add to that and broaden it. The problem of ecosystems is not just climate change. Anna is quite right. Obviously, that is the big one, which has public consciousness, understandably so, but it is about soil management, land use, water, biodiversity generally and so on. The evidence is exactly as Anna said. Meat and dairy is a problem. Fruit and vegetable consumption is low and we have to increase horticulture in Britain in order to spare land to plant trees and rebuild ecosystems.

Grain use is a critical issue. By the end of your inquiry, you will have to try to flesh out, and I will happily do it with you on another occasion, how to translate the Committee on Climate Change's latest report and the Government's acceptance of zero carbon emissions by 2050. It could be done by totally importing food, but that would not be a responsible position for Britain to take. I just pose that. We come back to the issue of food security and Britain's land use.

The Earl of Caithness: Will you write to us, please, because we do not have time to do it now, and let us know what research has been done into how many more vegetables we can grow in the UK, given our land structure and water systems?

Professor Tim Lang: I am sure Anna and I can do that.

The Earl of Caithness: How do you propose to use the land that is now used for beef and lamb? What is that going to be used for in a sustainable way, and what are the implications for rural policy as a result?

Professor Tim Lang: Absolutely. This is a small issue. I will send you my book.

The Chairman: We look forward to that written supplement.

Lord Empey: I am a vice-president of the Institute of Export and International Trade. You mentioned the Scottish situation earlier in your presentation, and the export potential of its products. Of course, in rural areas farming has a big political lobby, in the United States and other countries, so you are up against a very tough thing. Is there not a fundamental hypocrisy in our position in the UK? You mentioned the Amazon a minute or two ago. We are all horrified at watching those forests being burnt down, but we have chopped down ours.

Professor Tim Lang: Absolutely. We are hypocrites.

Lord Empey: Other people are saying, "You're telling us we shouldn't eat red meat, but you guys have been living high on the hog for decades". In countries round the world, prosperity is almost measured by the rate of growth in eating red meat, so there is huge hypocrisy at the centre of all of this. You have mentioned many times during your presentation the structures of government and so on. To address some of the inequalities you referred to, what do you suggest, structure-wise, that we recommend?

Professor Tim Lang: Which aspect of that enormous hypocrisy?

Lord Empey: In terms of the UK developing a holistic policy, how would you see Whitehall looking at the end of that? You said the responsibility is spread around. I get that, but what would it look like?

The Chairman: Very briefly, please.

Professor Tim Lang: Wow. I will do it very briefly. It depends on whether, to meet the Committee on Climate Change by 2050, Britain sees itself as being an Atlanticist economy, a globalist economy, a neo-European economy or a bio-regional economy. The data suggest that it becomes a bio-regional economy; in other words, we try to produce as much food as we can in localities yet to be defined, to meet multi-criteria objectives, not just carbon but health, biodiversity and so on. That is very complex indeed.

It will require the restructuring of the entire food economy, not just the industries. Above all, it will be about the connection of towns to the country. At the moment, British policy on the country is that it is something to be looked at, watching a few farmers produce things to export. That is basically what it is. There are very few farmers. There are 3.9 million people in Britain employed in the food industry. Farming accounts for only 450,000 of them, and of those about 180,000 are full-time. That is a tiny labour force. We have to rethink work in the countryside. Tourism is bigger than food.

The Chairman: Anna, do you have anything to add in response?

Anna Taylor: No, I am happy to move on.

Q8 **The Chairman:** I would like to draw this session to a close, but in doing so I ask each of you to say in one sentence what you want us to include in our report as a recommendation to stimulate food system change to ensure that people have healthy and sustainable food that is accessible to all. Just one sentence.

Professor Tim Lang: Sustainable dietary guidelines to reshape not just the public sector but the private sector. What we need to have as national policy are sustainable diets from sustainable food systems.

Anna Taylor: There are three things. One is a set of metrics in law against which we track national progress that embed the *Eatwell Guide* within them; a children's food watchdog properly to take care of policy on children's food; and a comprehensive strategy for driving up fruit and veg consumption right the way from production, the horticultural end, to consumption and advertising. There are about six or seven pieces to that, which I will not talk about now because there is not enough time. Those are three things that it would be brilliant to have in your report.

The Chairman: Thank you both very much indeed. You will receive a transcript of the evidence session in draft. You will have an opportunity to make any minor corrections. You have very kindly agreed to send us

some follow-up material in written form, which will be part of the evidence we report on and included in our public documents. Thank you both very much indeed.