HOUSE OF COMMONS

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Labour in the food supply chain, HC 292

Tuesday 7 July 2020

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Ian Byrne; Geraint Davies; Dave Doogan; Barry Gardiner; Dr Neil Hudson; Robbie Moore; Mrs Sheryll Murray; Julian Sturdy.

Questions 1 - 49

Witnesses

I: Tom Bradshaw, Vice President, National Farmers' Union; David Camp, Chief Executive, Association of Labour Providers.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– Association of Labour Providers

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Tom Bradshaw and David Camp.

Chair: Welcome to our inquiry into labour in the food supply chain. Thank you both very much for coming as our witnesses this afternoon. Would you like to introduce yourselves for the record? Bev Clarkson from the Unite union is not able to make it this afternoon.

Tom Bradshaw: I am Tom Bradshaw, NFU vice-president, responsible for the labour portfolio.

David Camp: I am David Camp, chief executive of the Association of Labour Providers. Our members are the GLAA-licensed labour providers who source and supply the workforce to the food supply chain.

Q1 **Chair:** Thank you very much. David, you have offered to field some of the questions that may well have gone to Bev Clarkson, so we look forward to putting those questions to you in a minute.

The first question I am going to field is mainly to you, David. Your written evidence said, "There is still no commonly developed and agreed analysis of UK agriculture's or the wider food supply chain's labour needs". What practical problems does this cause?

David Camp: The ALP supports the conclusion and the recommendation that the EFRA Committee put in its 2017 inquiry on feeding the nation. Our position has been very much in line with the EFRA Committee. A number of key parties work together in this space: the Defra access to labour team, the NFU, NFU Scotland, the British Growers Association, the Fresh Produce Consortium and us at the Association of Labour Providers. Our view is that that group collaborates, under the facilitation of Defra and with the input of Defra economists, to develop a common and agreed position on the labour needs in the food supply chain, from growing through to food manufacture and packaging through to food distribution.

That data informs policy decision-making, such as the number of seasonal workers we might need under a seasonal workers tier 5 visa, and informs whether there are indeed shortages in other sectors, fish processing, meat processing, poultry catching, et cetera, so that a united and strong argument can be put forward to the Migration Advisory Committee and to the Home Office regarding labour and skills needs within the food supply chain.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you for that answer. Is there a problem too, perhaps, that some of the smaller producers, which may be producing vegetables, keeping poultry or whatever, are not being added into the numbers? Do you think that is the case?

David Camp: I would love to be able to give you an answer on that, but as there has not been any information shared I do not know what mechanism Defra used to calculate that information. It is challenging for

me to be able to answer what is included and what is excluded, when we do not know how figures are calculated.

Q3 **Chair:** Your argument is basically, without putting too many words in your mouth, that Defra is not transparent enough about it. You do not quite know how it gets to the figures, so you are not necessarily sure whether the figures are right. Is that the case?

David Camp: We work very closely with the access to labour team. We would like to work collaboratively with them towards a commonly held view on the numbers of workers needed in the food supply chain. We continue to ask and to say that, yes, it would be helpful to have common definitions of "churn", common definitions of "turnover", understanding of labour flows as the season progresses throughout the UK and the needs for different regions.

Rather than Defra having one particular view, NFU having a different view and ALP having a different view, let us have common definitions and a common, agreed approach to gathering that information, so we can work collaboratively to address the challenges that arise from that. We would very much like to support and work together to make that happen.

Q4 **Chair:** Your answer is duly noted and we will endeavour to talk to Defra and the Secretary of State regarding this. Before we leave this question, Tom, from the NFU's perspective, you can gather quite a lot of data, but not every farmer or grower is a member of the NFU. How many more workers are needed than you are able to collate? It is probably a difficult question, but I will throw it at you anyway.

Tom Bradshaw: There is a widely accepted view that the number, if you go cross-sector, is just under 80,000. We have pretty good evidence to justify that number. The challenge is that, when we work cross-industry—and obviously we work very closely with Defra and the team in Defra—the independence and accuracy of that number always gets challenged.

The data that is probably lacking is the statistical evidence from within Defra, so that they believe the figure as much as we believe the figure. We are very happy to, and we do, work with them closely. We will continue to work with them closely, but it is very important that they own that number, so that when they are fighting the corner with other Government Departments they have absolute belief that that is the correct number that they are asking for.

Q5 **Chair:** You are probably worried that, when they are looking with other Ministers at migration and people coming into the country, they need to be able to defend that figure. You are not sure that they necessarily have strong enough evidence to defend it. Is that just a feeling, or have you knowledge of this matter?

Tom Bradshaw: Like David said, we have not seen enough detail to say that they do have the evidence behind it. It is critical that we have the evidence behind that number to really make the case to the Home Office

when we are looking for seasonal worker schemes and things like that. We have to have absolute belief in the data we are putting forward.

Q6 **Chair:** I have long been of the view that, if we do not have enough labour to pick and process our food, vegetables and meat supplies, we are not going to be able to grow it in the same way. It is absolutely essential that we have that labour supply. I suppose it is whether Defra has the means to do it. Is there the desire to do it? Where do you think the blockage is?

Tom Bradshaw: Part of what we are led to believe is that, when the Government figures are presented by the Office for National Statistics, they do not break down the permanent and seasonal workforce. There is no differentiation between the two. It is critical that we know where the separation is between the permanent and the seasonal, for the different aspects of the migration policy.

Chair: Thank you both very much for those good answers.

Q7 **Barry Gardiner:** I wanted to pick up with you first, Tom. You said from the NFU that, while labour needs exist across all subsectors of agriculture and horticulture, there are particular concerns about access to permanent labour in the dairy, horticulture and poultry sectors. This is a picture that we tend to lump together and politicians often simply think about seasonal workers in the industry. Actually, there are various sectors, which have differing needs. Could you perhaps tease out for us which sectors are going to be most affected by our reduced ability to recruit from abroad?

Tom Bradshaw: It is a two-part question there. Thanks for the question. If we are looking at the ability to recruit from abroad, we have to split that into permanent and seasonal. You have hit the nail on the head with the sectors: it is poultry, dairy and horticulture—the fresh produce sector. We cannot forget processing, which is also so important. If we are going to produce the produce in the first place, we have to be able to process and pack that produce. There is a critical demand within the processing sector as well.

It is the fresh produce sector, the fresh horticultural sector, where there is a real seasonal demand. The poultry seasonal demand is different. There is a real seasonal peak pre-Christmas, with Christmas turkeys, so there is a seasonal demand there. As for the permanent workforce, in a recent survey the NFU did, 46% of respondents said that they had either no applicants or no skilled applicants for permanent jobs that had been advertised.

That is a huge concern for a sector that has ambitious growth targets. The horticultural industry in particular is a real success story. If you look at the productivity gains over the past 20 years, it is an area we really think is a huge success story and can continue to grow. If we do not have

access to the labour, we are not going to live up to the opportunity that exists within that sector.

Q8 **Barry Gardiner:** Turning to David, your association has said, "Many migrants come to the UK to perform key lower-skilled roles […] for which there are not enough local workers or which UK nationals and residents choose not to perform". I wanted to explore with you the way you have broken that statement down into two parts. There are "not enough local workers". Why is that? Is it because of a lack of skills, training or opportunities? The "choose not to perform" has implications, perhaps, for the remuneration being paid for those jobs.

Given that the Government have said they want to shift away from a reliance on cheap labour from Europe, how do you see that following through for the industry? If we can no longer tap into that cheap labour supply, how is that going to impact on the willingness of UK workers to get involved in those lower-skilled and perhaps less well-paid jobs?

David Camp: I have a number of points to bring out in response to that. I will not linger too long on the pejorative nature of the way that "cheap labour" has been categorised there. The virus has shown us the importance and social value of many jobs that are paid at or around minimum wage. We have seen over many years a rise in the floor of the minimum wage above RPI, a rise in the threshold of national insurance, and we support that approach. It is the nature of our industry, and many industries where the work is classified as lower skilled, that pay hovers around the national living wage. In a number of horticultural roles, there is the ability to earn productivity performance bonuses on top of that.

The fact is that, up until the virus hit, we had seen a significant tightening of labour supply in the UK and throughout Europe, as we were in a period of continued near full employment in the UK, excepting some challenges in some regions. Sourcing labour, particularly at the lower-skilled level, had become a real challenge. Much of the focus of our work in the ALP had switched to supporting members and the industry to be more expert at resourcing and retaining a workforce.

Despite all the activity that the industry had put in, in our survey in April this year about three-quarters of businesses—and it was very similar in food processing and food growing businesses—expressed that they were struggling or were in crisis to source those lower-skilled roles. That is a much higher percentage than those who expressed challenges around semi-skilled and higher-skilled roles.

Q9 **Barry Gardiner:** That is an extremely disturbing finding, but I feel that at the moment you are hovering around the issue. I have simply quoted to you what your association has said. It said, "Many migrants come to the UK to perform key lower-skilled roles […] for which there are not enough local workers or which UK nationals and residents choose not to perform".

I have asked you, in effect, to explain both halves of the "not enough

local workers". Why are there not? Is there a skills shortage? Is there a training need? Is there some other element that we are lacking or does it fall down to the "choose not to perform"? It is not that there is a lack of skill or training; it is that people are not prepared to do it, and—the question that you have posed here—does it then come down to finance? Would we get more people in the industry if we were paying them £30,000 a year instead of £15,000 or £16,000?

David Camp: The first point that I took a long time to make is that there was an overall significant labour shortage. The second point is on the challenges that exist particularly around seasonal work. First, it is in rural locations. Secondly, it requires living near or on the farm, which puts many off. Thirdly, there is an irregular nature to the work, in that the crops ripen when they ripen, and the weather is as the weather is. Some days you are working many, many hours or longer hours; other days there is less work. It does not stop at weekends. By the nature of the work—being outdoors, being irregular, being across seven days a week—that dissuades many as well.

There are other options to earn the same amount of money, such as working in a coffee shop. When people make that choice, they make it for a wide variety of reasons.

Q10 **Barry Gardiner:** Give us some solutions, then. You have said, "If you want to be an agricultural worker, you cannot do it in a city". Well, that is blindingly obvious. If you want to pick crops, you have to do it when the crops are there. That is blindingly obvious. Other countries are managing to do it. Why is that? Is that because the structure of their labour market means that, if you are working in a coffee shop you are not getting a better wage; you are perhaps getting a worse wage than if you were doing this work in another country? What is attracting people in other countries in a way that we are not attracting people?

David Camp: I can see that Tom is going to come in on this point. All countries, certainly in western Europe, even moving into eastern Europe, use migrant workers to work in their fields. You see patterns in Italy and Spain. In the media reports, you will have seen a number of the challenges they have experienced during the coronavirus.

Our pattern of employing migrant seasonal workers in agriculture was recognised by the Migration Advisory Committee as being almost unique in the UK, in that 99% of workers were migrant seasonal workers. The pattern that we see in the UK matches those patterns we see throughout western Europe, America, Australia and New Zealand.

Q11 **Barry Gardiner:** David, you are giving me analysis; you are not giving me solutions. Is there something we can be doing which will stop the problem?

Chair: David, have one more go, please.

David Camp: If we are taking about seasonal agricultural workers, there are longer-term issues. We talk about mechanisation and we will see that come in many years' time. There are a number of factors that employers have already employed. They have looked at their wage structures. They have addressed those issues where they can. They have addressed the working environment, the accommodation standards, the regularity of work, the style of management and supervision where they can.

All those aspects make up what you can do. They can become better at sourcing, but that only takes you so far. Each year, we have to decide what labour flows we can meet from the UK's supply and what we will need to deliver through temporary migration routes.

Tom Bradshaw: There are some key points there. The first one that David had tried to clarify is that just about all developed economies around the world rely on a migrant workforce to provide this seasonal labour. The UK is not unique there and it is important that we remember that.

Another thing we have to look at is the productivity per unit of labour. If you look at horticultural businesses, the labour costs can be up to 70% of their overall costs, but they do everything they can to maximise the productivity per unit of labour. We have examples of businesses that have improved the productivity eight to tenfold over the past two decades, but they are still receiving the same price for a punnet of strawberries as they were 20 years ago.

Q12 **Barry Gardiner:** Thank you, Tom. This is where I wanted to get to. Should we be paying more for our punnet of strawberries? Should the supermarkets not be beating down the prices they give you for the punnet of strawberries, so you can pay enough for somebody to think, "Actually, it is worth my giving up my job in a coffee shop to come and work picking your strawberries"?

Tom Bradshaw: That is definitely one solution, but we are going to be living in an economy under huge, huge pressure. Food price inflation is not going to be acceptable for the Government, I do not believe. That is when we have to start looking at the very difficult decisions. Do we allow the migrant labour in, who will all earn at least the national living wage, many a lot higher than the national living wage, to keep food as affordable as possible? Do we have a huge change in mentality and increase wages significantly on farm, in line with the price we are paid for that product?

Q13 **Chair:** Tom, there is another issue: to make sure the large retailers share the profit of the end product, what the consumer pays, with those who produce. They do not always do that.

Tom Bradshaw: It is another big challenge. The strength of retail in the UK economy is relatively unique within Europe. Generally, they will try to support seasonality or seasonal produce as much as possible. As another

example from this season, a strawberry grower growing under glass houses—so very early season, very high cost—received a 9% lower strawberry price this year than they did last year. That is not sustainable moving forward.

Chair: Especially if the price in the shop is still just as high, if not higher. We need to keep our eyes on that.

Q14 **Mrs Murray:** Turning to the Government's immigration proposals and agriculture labour, perhaps you could answer first, Tom, and if there is anything that David would like to add afterwards that may help. Did the Government consult with you on their new policy statement, published in February?

Tom Bradshaw: I believe there was a very short consultation ahead of that. We have seen the salary threshold reduced to £25,600. The feeling is that that is still too high for the agricultural sector, and £20,000 to £21,000 would be far more appropriate. It is more important to reflect on where we are at this time, than on whether we were consulted as to whether there was development in the policy.

As we see the current immigration policy, unless we end up with a dramatically increased seasonal workers scheme, or some very big changes in the youth mobility scheme or the shortage occupation list, we have a proposed immigration policy that is simply not fit for the future of agriculture.

Q15 **Mrs Murray:** Following on from that, given the short timeframe plus the burden of dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, do you think the sector will be ready for the changes coming in 2021? If not, could you give us your reasons why and where improvements could be made?

Tom Bradshaw: We have a sector of very astute businesses. Generally, a lot of the horticultural businesses are large in size and scale, and are very business-focused. They are lacking confidence at the moment; they really are. A lot of them have seen cost increases of up to 15% due to coronavirus. Their competitors across the water have often had bailout packages. Particularly if you look at the Dutch economy, horticultural businesses there have had significant bailout packages because of the pandemic.

We have a sector that is normally very confident about the future, but at the moment is sitting there thinking, "What does the future look like for us?" That sector desperately needs confidence. The way we can give them confidence is to give them assurances around next year's seasonal workers scheme and what that looks like, and assurances around developing the youth mobility scheme so it brings in the whole of Europe, because at the moment Europe is not included. That would be a big change, which hopefully gives a bigger pool of people to recruit from.

What we are sure about is that, at the moment, there are no plans to delay beyond the end of December. There may be many shrewd people

who would say, "We should look for a delay", but I do not think that is going to happen, so now we have to try to make sure the policy is as ready and fit for purpose as it can be. There are two significant changes there that can help give confidence and give people the reassurance to reinvest in their businesses here in the UK.

David Camp: The ALP has great concerns about certain aspects of the immigration policy as it is currently. First, there is the current lack of knowledge about whether the seasonal workers pilot will continue, when we will hear about that, how many workers we will be able to bring in from next year and how the evidence will be gathered in light of increased unemployment figures. The fact that there will be no lower-skilled route for food processing, food packaging and food distribution will bring significant challenges.

We have made the case for the Migration Advisory Committee to act like the Low Pay Commission, for there to be some select additions to the tier 5 temporary visa, as there are for agricultural workers, for sectors that we have seen as essential during the coronavirus, particularly focused on the care industry, but also the food production industry. The Migration Advisory Committee would take evidence and make an assessment on the numbers of workers our industry needs to be able to thrive and grow, feed the nation and grow our export business. I have significant concerns around future immigration policy, and hope there will be a last minute—

Q16 **Mrs Murray:** Do you have any suggestions of what can be done to give confidence? Tom has made a suggestion there. Rather than just hearing about the problems, do you have any suggestions, in a couple of sentences, as to what can be done to restore or improve confidence?

David Camp: Additional sectors need to be added to the tier 5 temporary visa for agricultural workers. I would extend that to certain sectors within food processing and food packaging, for jobs where there is a significant shortage in the UK, but they come in at RQF1 and RQF2 levels.

Q17 **Chair:** I have one last question on this. When the Government say, "You have to be earning £21,000 to be able to come in", can you add in benefits in kind, like accommodation and all these things? It is quite a high figure in some ways, if that is direct wages. Where are we on that one?

Tom Bradshaw: Have you just let something slip there? Has it been lowered to £21,000 rather than £25,600?

Chair: I think that was the figure that you quoted to me, wasn't it? I am quoting you back your figure. It is £25,600.

Mrs Murray: I think it is £25,600, but Tom said that he could do with having it reduced to £21,000.

Chair: You nearly caught me out, Tom, but not quite.

Tom Bradshaw: I thought you had given us a little promise there, Chair, so something we could take away. At the moment, with benefits like accommodation, there is a limit to what can be charged. As David alluded to earlier on, in these villages that now exist in some of the large businesses, the facilities are quite incredible. I do not know if you have been to any of these large horticultural businesses, but they really are very impressive now.

The feeling is that, if you get access to a gym, to leisure facilities, the benefits are greater than is being charged for the accommodation. For some of that element to be reflected in the earnings would be fair, because if you were looking to rent a room in the villages surrounding those businesses it would be far, far higher than is being charged for the use of those facilities.

David Camp: There is a 20% reduction on that figure of £25,000 for jobs on the shortage occupation list. Remember that it is only for jobs at RQF level 3, so the semi-skilled, the skilled and above. My understanding is that that figure only counts for the base salary. You cannot include other allowances or benefits in kind within that figure.

Chair: My mental arithmetic shows me that 20% of £25,000 is knocking off £4,000, so we are back at £21,000. Tom, you might get your way after all, but I cannot say that is Government policy, so please do not take that away. You are both making the point that, if we are going to have good labour in the future, we need to allow enough in and we have to get the figures right. We will make sure we make this point to the Government from this session.

Q18 **Dave Doogan:** Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, gentlemen. On the Government's points-based system, what needs to change to ensure that agriculture can access the number and the type of workers it needs from 2021?

Tom Bradshaw: We have talked about the pay threshold and that is one of the elements that could be changed. For us, the shortage occupation list is going to be the absolutely critical area, because we have just responded to the MAC consultation on that. From our survey across the membership, we had over 650 responses, and it was a very short consultation window. That shows you just how important this is to the agricultural industry, to see that level of response.

Unless there are some agricultural and horticultural jobs reflected on that shortage occupation list, which at the moment there are not, it is going to be very difficult or impossible to achieve the points that are required. It really is important that that shortage occupation list reflects the information we have submitted in that response.

Chair: That comes out loud and clear.

David Camp: To reiterate Tom's point, it is essential that the Migration Advisory Committee does a thorough and complete job of getting the appropriate jobs on to the shortage occupation list. That is the first point.

There is a challenge for all those businesses that have shortages. Let us talk about the smaller farms that take on maybe one herdsperson a year or every couple of years, need someone really experienced and cannot source that person from the UK. It will not be able to go outside of the UK, or it will if that job comes in at RQF level 3, but it is not going to go through the whole process of registering as a sponsor and paying all that money for one job every few years.

There is not the capacity within the scheme, as it is designed at the moment, for a recruitment company, a labour provider, to source workers for a number of farms and provide those workers into them. I am sure there needs to be an adaptation to the points-based system in that way.

Of course, I would say that the points-based system needs to be extended to lower-skilled roles where there is a shortage in essential roles that we need in this country. Points should be awarded where we have a definite shortage, where we rely on those people, but those jobs do not meet this so-called skilled requirement that we need. I would strongly argue for those two adaptions to the points-based system.

Q19 **Dave Doogan:** Excellent, thank you. I also take issue with the habitual reference to "skilled" and "unskilled" in this discussion. To describe a lot of these jobs as "unskilled", nothing could be further from the truth. They are simply low waged.

Developing your last point a little further, on the one hand is it not naïve to suggest that technology and/or domestic labour can satisfy the wholesale removal of foreign migrant seasonal workers? On the other, paint a picture: what are the implications of more occupations not being added to the shortage occupation list or any other drag on availability of labour?

David Camp: At worst, businesses will not be able to continue. They will not have the key staff that they need to continue. The lack of access to either the skills or the workers they need will be enough for them to make a decision to move away from certain crops, certain operations, into other processes. That puts a significant risk on our food resilience and our food security. Never in our lifetimes have we seen empty shelves like we saw. Nothing hits home to you how fragile our supply chains are until you see something like that. That is the first point.

Secondly, for businesses that have operations in or source from other countries than the UK—import businesses, not growers—that is an easier decision to take. We are good at making food in this country. We are very good at producing and growing efficiently. This should form a significant part of our economic growth and exports for the future. Rather than looking at how future policy is going to damage our industry, we should

be asking, "How can future access to labour policy support our food, drinks and agricultural industry to grow and increase exports?"

It should be flipped around to ask what we can do. How can we support this industry? How can we grow our economy again in the food supply chain? The fact that we are having to answer the question of how Government policy is going to damage our food industry—

Chair: Sorry to interrupt you, David, but that is question 9. We will deal with it then. Tom, would you like to add anything?

Tom Bradshaw: I am reflecting on what you said at the start of that second question, Dave, about low-skilled and skilled workers. It is a tragedy that we talk about them in that way. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that academic skills do not mean you are going to be valued.

The pandemic has shown us that those people who have been invisible to society, whether they are key workers in the NHS or in our food supply chain, have been incredibly valuable over the past 12 weeks. That has highlighted the role of those workers and the significant part they play for the economy and society. The immigration policy at the moment does not reflect that. One opportunity is to grasp what we have learned over the last few months and turn that into something that can fit within the future immigration policy. That is a great opportunity.

When you look at future climate change models, the UK is going to be an incredible place for growing food. We should not take that for granted. We should make sure we look at not just producing the food we can for our country and our population, but our role within the world, producing sustainable food for the future. Our climate is going to be very, very conducive to doing that, yet if we do not have the tools to enable us to do that, and labour is one of those critical elements, we are not going to achieve what the future could hold for us. It could be very, very exciting.

Ultimately, if we do not manage to change the shortage occupation list, as David highlighted, some businesses only recruit one or two people a year, and their viability is going to be significantly threatened. It is the permanent workforce that we are really looking at for the shortage occupation list. It could be a dairy herdsperson; it could be somebody managing a poultry farm. If you cannot get the resource for those businesses, there is no future. There really is a risk of business failure if we do not get that shortage occupation list right.

Q20 **Dave Doogan:** Tom, when we talk about specifically seasonal agricultural labour, that surge demand for harvest that comes in from abroad, do you and your members find it frustrating, to hear talk of that surge demand being replaced by domestic capacity and technology?

Tom Bradshaw: Technology is actually really exciting. Within 10 years, there will be a number of those jobs that can be done by technology.

That does not mean we will not need the seasonal workers. If you have a massive seasonal peak and you are growing that sector, you may well need those seasonal workers but doing very different jobs. They may be managing the robots that are picking those crops; the pack houses will be bigger, et cetera. Just because we are going to have technology, it does not automatically mean a lowering of the total numbers, because it is the total productivity that we are looking at. It should not be capped by the number of people.

I do not think there is any way to recruit those people from the UK. We have seen a great push this year. Is Pick For Britain coming up later or not, Chair?

Chair: We will deal with that in a minute,

Tom Bradshaw: I will not go into that now, but we can answer that question later.

Chair: I can assure both witnesses that you do not have to persuade this particular Committee of the desire to produce more food and good food—not only for this country, but to export as well. We have to persuade the rest of Government that that is the case, which we will do our very best to do.

Q21 **Geraint Davies:** In simple terms, what will be the impact of a shortage of seasonal workers? It strikes me that either we will have a proper trade agreement with Europe in December, in which case we will have lots more imports and less production here, or we will have constraints on that trade and we will have to have higher prices and obviously higher wages. What, in simple terms, will be the impact of a shortage of temporary labour?

Tom Bradshaw: It is relatively simple. Assume that the crops have already been planted and are in the field. Some of these crops are permanent crops; if you look at apples and things like that, they are not annuals, but they are in the ground for a relatively long time. If you do not have the labour to harvest those crops, they do not get picked, and those fruit and vegetables are wasted and do not make their way through to the supply chain. Then you have shortages on the shelves and price spikes.

It is very, very unpredictable in its nature. That is the real challenge. Suddenly you see empty supermarket shelves, because you cannot predict the shortage in advance. None of the wholesalers have looked at importing it, because they do not know when the shortage is going to be there. You see these real peaks and troughs in supply as and when you can get the staff to pick those crops. The continuity of supply completely drops off. It would be very, very challenging and, ultimately, there would be price rises as well.

The secondary point is that, once you have done that for one season, you then lose those businesses, because they will not reinvest and will not be able to afford to reinvest. Then you have lost the productive capacity of UK agriculture.

Geraint Davies: David, what is the impact of a lack of temporary workers?

David Camp: Tom has covered the key points. As a supplementary point to that, if you have a lack of seasonal workers, you get that incredible flurry of activity that we had in the UK trying to source a UK resident workforce. The growers will look at the productivity levels of that, the cost basis of picking their product, and make a decision on whether it is cost viable. That is the supplementary point I would add to Tom's.

Q22 **Geraint Davies:** What about trafficking? Do you think it will increase trafficking if we cannot get enough workers?

David Camp: I can talk at some length about this. Are we going to talk about this later on?

Geraint Davies: Briefly say what you think.

David Camp: Under the future immigration system, there is no access route for lower-skilled workers. The only way to access those, if there are no resident workers, is from undocumented workers or from unrecognised sources. Businesses that are prepared to accept those kinds of workers are unlikely to apply the due diligence on that workforce. Therefore, the risk of using trafficked or extremely exploited workers is much higher.

Q23 **Geraint Davies:** Tom, there is likely to be a shortage of seasonal workers. In the event that we go into next year with Covid still moving forward, with a recession, a slump and maybe a bad Brexit deal, do you think unemployment might drive people on to the fields to pick our crops in desperation?

Tom Bradshaw: If you go back a decade or more, we had over 8% unemployment and we were still reliant on the seasonal migratory workforce from eastern Europe at that point. We have been reliant on the migrant workforce for 20 or 30 years.

Even if you go back 55 years, there was an element of a migrant workforce coming in. It is a long while that that workforce has been coming in. Ultimately, they are jobs that developed society does not want to do. It is hard work; it is repetitive. However attractive you make the employment conditions, you cannot change the nature of the work. Even if we end up with unemployment in double digits, it is highly unlikely that we will successfully source a large number from the UK workforce.

We have seen that this year. It is fantastic the interest that has been shown, but ultimately it has not resulted in a number of workers who are

still doing those jobs today, or as Prince Charles said "pickers who stick", because it is just very hard work. That is always going to be the case.

Q24 **Geraint Davies:** You are saying to the Committee that, even if there is very high unemployment following a difficult Brexit and the Covid epidemic, if we do not have seasonal workers, we will not be able to pick our crops. Either the price will go up or we will have to have more imports. Is that basically it?

Tom Bradshaw: That is exactly what I am saying, yes. Regardless of what happens to unemployment, we understand there will be pressure on UK growers to recruit more from the UK workforce. Everyone will expect that and they will do everything they can, but ultimately I am being told by our members that that migrant workforce is critical to next year and beyond, to secure the future of our horticultural industry.

Q25 **Geraint Davies:** In a nutshell, you are saying that, unless the Government relax the rules on the amount of money people have to earn and allow seasonal workers to come and pick our crops, our agricultural industry is at risk, as is our export industry in agriculture. Is that right?

Tom Bradshaw: Yes, but the points-based system can be changed. We could change the shortage occupation list. We could change the salary threshold. We could increase the seasonal workers scheme. The youth mobility scheme could be dramatically expanded to include the EU. It is not just one element. There are several things that can be done to give our production base the confidence to invest for next year and beyond.

Q26 **Geraint Davies:** David, do you agree basically that, if we do not change the rules and allow seasonal workers in, we will see price rises and/or food shortages?

David Camp: We should continue to invite UK resident workers to apply for our jobs. There will be higher unemployment. We should continue to enable an access route for UK resident workers to work, if they choose to. Those selection criteria must be clearly laid down, but, yes, we will continue to need a seasonal workers scheme into the future. What number should there be? I go back to my answer to the very first question about collaborating on labour supply and demand in different sectors of our food supply chain.

Q27 **Geraint Davies:** In a word, would you agree that, unless we change the rules and allow seasonal workers to come in, the consumer is going to face food shortages and/or higher prices, and a lot of our crops will not be picked? That is true, isn't it?

David Camp: That is our view, yes. I will go back to saying, "Let us have an evidence base". Rather than that being based on our experience and knowledge over many years, we have to persuade different Government Departments that we need a workforce for the food industry. We need to provide an evidence base for what we believe is the number of workers that we need for next season and for each season after that. I go back to

saying, "Let us have a consistent evidence base to support our recommendations".

Q28 **Geraint Davies:** Tom, we literally do not have much time left until next year, so we do not have much time to gather loads of evidence. It seems to me blindingly obvious that, if we do not have the seasonal workers we rely on to pick the crops, the prices are going to go up, or we have to have more imports, or we are going to have shortages. Is that true?

Tom Bradshaw: Breaking that down, more imports would absolutely be true. Less grown and less harvested in this country would be true. The price one is very difficult, because you have to look at whether we are comparing the same production systems overseas. Do they have the same living wage? Do they have the same employment benefits, environmental protection and all those sorts of things? I could not guarantee that it would be at a higher price, but it might not be produced to the same standard.

That is where the difficulty lies. We may shrink production over here; we may bring it in from Spain but produced in a very, very different way. We have all seen those pictures of Spain where it is covered in plastic. That is not what the UK looks like in vast areas at the moment. You take your choice, don't you?

Q29 **Julian Sturdy:** Moving on from that, we talked about an evidence-based system. David and Tom talked a lot about that. Looking at the seasonal workers pilots, how effective has that pilot scheme been? What lessons should the Government learn from the pilot as they move forward regarding future policy? Tom, you start, because you have set out a few key points, calling for the scheme to be expanded and widened to include other sectors. Maybe touch on that as well.

Tom Bradshaw: Touching on that point first, we would like to see it expanded to include the ornamental sector, whereas at the moment it is just edible horticulture. There is evidence that the ornamental sector needs those workers.

The reason we had the campaign for this year was based on food security and food resilience. That is why the Government, right the way across, recognised the importance of seasonal workers from the start of the Covid pandemic. It was really around the food security element and that is where the ornamental argument needed a bit of traction. For people's mental health and wellbeing, having access to those ornamental plants, to go out gardening and everything else, was a fantastic story. It is just part of society, so we should be encouraged to expand it.

Our understanding from Defra is that, for last year's seasonal workers pilot, the feedback is very good, with very good returnee rates in terms of leaving the country at the end of the pilot. That is how it will be judged as being successful: if everybody goes home. Ultimately, our original seasonal agricultural workers scheme was very successful in that, with

over 98% leaving the country. We are hearing from Defra—although the review of the first-year pilot has not officially been released yet—that it was very successful.

We have to be careful not to judge things on this year's pilot, because Covid has hampered the ability to recruit the 10,000 workers for this year. Having said that, it was very refreshing that Defra was able to work with the Home Office and others to re-open the visa offices in Belarus and the Ukraine. That has worked very well.

We are now starting to see some of those seasonal workers arriving over here. Those 10,000 seasonal workers for this year, or however many of them actually end up getting here, will be absolutely critical to the tail end of the season. Growers are very concerned about having enough recruits for the end of the season, particularly with the high turnover rates that have been seen. The seasonal workers scheme will be able to fill that gap, so there is a level of confidence that this year is covered by the seasonal workers scheme.

David has alluded to it a couple of times. Ultimately, when it comes to expanding the pilot for next year, we need everyone in Government to believe the number that is on that piece of paper. We need Defra to be able to fight our corner. We want to work jointly and collaboratively with them to get to the number, but they have to believe that that number is the right number so that they can really fight our corner.

It is an exception that many in society may not agree with. Even though it is something as fundamental as food production, which they probably do not understand, it is a fairly contentious issue. I understand the delicacies around the politics, but ultimately it is critical for the future of the industry, and for the continuity and resilience of the food supply chain, that we see that workforce expanded next year.

David Camp: Last year was a success. In 2017, ALP wrote a paper on developing a successful seasonal worker scheme, and a number of the elements of that were included in the design. The feedback we had from the growers, scheme operators and workers, as well as the results of how the numbers were delivered and the returnees, indicates that last year was successful. To be successful, it has to work for the growers, the scheme operators, the labour providers and the workers, of course, and it has to meet the political requirements. It has to meet all those four requirements.

We have written two reports since. *Achieving a Successful Seasonal Workers Scheme* looks at some aspects around scheme design. Today we have submitted to this inquiry the output of a multi-stakeholder working group looking at the experience from the workers' perspective and some of the areas that still need to be addressed in the design of the scheme for the workers. It is really crucial and essential that the scheme has a good reputation and is perceived as a model of good practice in how we

run such a programme, such that it has longevity, is trusted and is supported by lots of different stakeholders.

There are lessons to be learned. I am not going to trot through all 18 recommendations now but we have submitted them. There are still improvements that can be made but, by working together, talking together and looking at how, each year, the experiences can work to improve it for next year, we can have a scheme that is highly regarded and is regarded by all the stakeholders as a successful scheme.

Q30 **Chair:** Is either of you in a position yet to say the number of seasonal workers under a scheme that we are likely to need for next year, or is it too early to ask that question? Tom, I am going to bowl that ball at you.

Tom Bradshaw: We think we annually require around 70,000 seasonal workers to fill around 80,000 vacancies, but with some of them working more than one job, so they will work at the beginning of the season in one job and then move on to another job.

We anticipate that around 20,000 could well return under settled or pre-settled status. That then leaves you with 50,000 who need to be recruited. If you accept that some of them will be coming from the UK workforce, you could end up with a number somewhere lower than 50,000 but I would hope over 40,000. Ultimately, we need to agree that number. We want to agree that with Defra, so that it believes that that is the correct number.

The Secretary of State earlier in the year, at the start of the pandemic, said that you need 70,000 to 80,000 seasonal workers. He accepts that the number is 70,000 to 80,000 and we have to work out how we are going to provide that. I have just run through those figures. That would seem to be the number that we need. Ultimately, it is a huge increase from where we are, but we saw it go up four times last year so we could see it go up four times again.

Q31 **Chair:** The Secretary of State and Defra know the number of actual seasonal workers, but do you think they are on the same page as you are as far as the numbers for next year? I am being quite blunt with you.

Tom Bradshaw: I do not think we have got far enough yet. They know our numbers and what our thoughts are, but they have to have a number. They also have to play the politics of this. They have to pitch for a number that they think they can achieve and that is going to land. The job, hopefully, of this Committee is to help nudge them and others in Government in the right direction to support that when the number is forthcoming.

Q32 **Chair:** We will definitely talk to the Secretary of State about it. Do not worry. Is there any last point that you want to make on the situation, David?

David Camp: I am not going to chip in with a number. There are differences. I do not think Defra has come out and accepted the 70,000 figure or the 70,000 to 80,000 figure. I can give you a load of numbers, but I am not going to. We should all come together and agree on an evidence-based figure.

Chair: You have parked that clearly where you want it to be. Thank you for those answers.

Q33 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you, Tom and David, for being with us today and for your answers. It is really great. I want to move on to specific lessons from the coronavirus pandemic. I am aware that we have covered some of this ground in earlier questions, but I am specifically focusing on lessons from the pandemic. What specific lessons do you feel the Government need to learn or can take home from the pandemic as they develops their new immigration policy? I know you have touched on some concerns before, but I am focusing specifically on lessons from this crisis as it develops the policy moving forward.

David Camp: I was impressed with how swiftly the food industry could move people around, out of food service roles into food manufacturing and retail roles. There was a blip when we had that panic buying, but it was quite quickly able to re-establish that supply. That was the first point.

Secondly, the way that different sectors were able to collaborate was good. It was helpful to have a single channel through the Defra access to labour team to direct challenges around public health, employment law, the job retention scheme and arrangements for the seasonal worker scheme. Having a single channel was helpful.

The speed of the public sector response is usually slower than the private sector needs. There were lots of times where we were working on incomplete information and having to make a best estimate.

We have live issues at the moment. We have seen outbreaks in certain meat and poultry processing factories. It would be helpful to have more technical advice and to collate technical advice on good practice that factories can put in place to protect workers. You would collate good practice from a number of sites and bring it together into a more advanced technical manual. That is one aspect.

Secondly, we have seen the local outbreaks in Leicester and the local lockdown. Given the nature of our workforces, with some coming from migrant communities, living in houses of multiple occupation with multigenerational families living together, we need to provide advice to those sectors on how they can remain safe outside of work so they do not bring the virus into work. There are still areas that we need advice on.

We managed to collaborate to keep the food supply chain going, and we collaborated well to do that. That is the positive that I would take out of it.

Tom Bradshaw: You are right at the end there, David. The industry actually pulled together very well. Our job as farmers and food producers is to keep people fed. There would be no one more disappointed than us if society had not had access to the food it required. Ultimately, it was job done from that point of view. Everyone deserves the credit there for pulling together and looking at flexing those supply chains.

It very clear early on that the risk in the supply chain is being carried by the primary producer. One of the lessons we have to learn from this is that, to have a resilient food supply chain for the future, there needs to be more shared risk through the supply chain.

I am particularly looking at the out-of-home sector and things like that at the moment. This is not necessarily relevant on the labour issue but, out of the lessons that can be learned, we had contracts more or less shut down overnight and they were not worth the paper they were written on. In the future, contracts have to be meaningful and of real significance for primary producers to give them some security for the future.

We may also look at more producing organisations and co-operatives as we move forward, to bring a bit more power into the primary producers' hands in negotiations. We are seeing costs increase by maybe 15% in some supply chains without any reflection of it in the price being received on farm. In any functioning supply chain, you would see those increases in costs reflected, so I would suggest that it is not a fully functioning supply chain if that is all being borne by the primary producer.

Everyone in the food supply chain was recognised as a keyworker but, as I have already highlighted, the value of the unseen workers and the seasonal workers across society has been recognised. That is one lesson that we have to make sure we do not forget when we come out the other side of this. Those who really give value to society need to be made to feel worthwhile for what they are doing. They are not always the highest-paid jobs and they never will be, but they are of critical value to society. As an industry and as a country, we need to work out how we reflect that and make sure that that message is right at the centre of our thinking for the future.

Q34 **Dr Hudson:** That is really helpful for our thinking in developing the immigration policy moving forward. That is coming out loud and clear from today's session and previous sessions, and you have both highlighted that today. If we can get some good out of this dreadful crisis, there are two big things. It sharpened our focus on the importance of food security and, as you rightly said, Tom, the value of every single person in that food supply chain from food production, through delivery and wholesale, into retail. We need to value that in society. Those two important take-home messages are coming out loud and clear from this inquiry.

I specifically want to ask you how successful the efforts like Pick For Britain were. Tom, I know you have been quoted as saying that there

was a lot of interest, but it was sometimes difficult to turn that in to "pickers who stick"; I think those were the words you used. What are your thoughts on that? How successful was Pick For Britain?

Tom Bradshaw: As a starting point, the Secretary of State and the team in Defra recognised very quickly that the seasonal workers were going to be under huge pressure and something needed to be done to secure that workforce from home rather than abroad, where possible, because of the limitations on people coming into the country.

Again, it was a very collaborative approach to developing the Pick For Britain campaign. You have probably heard loud and clear that the industry likes this collaborative approach and feeling included rather than excluded. We get nervous when we do not know what is going on, whereas, when we feel like we are part of the solution and building the answers together, we are a lot more confident that we will get the outcome we need.

Pick For Britain was developed collaboratively, but it was always important that the Government owned Pick For Britain. We wanted it to be a Government initiative to really drive the interest, the significance and the importance of those roles. We have seen a real sense of national pride through coronavirus, which probably had disappeared for a while. When people were doing something to help the country, they were feeling a sense of pride in that.

Pick For Britain raised the profile of the jobs that existed and the roles that were going to be available, and it drove a huge amount of people to the Pick For Britain site. There was one three-hour period after the Secretary of State mentioned it on the 5 o'clock telly appearance when we had over 300,000 hits on the website. It drove a significant amount of traffic to the Pick For Britain site and that generated the interest in the roles.

What you cannot ever do is change the skillset of the people who are available to do those roles. Because of the nature of working from home and the way in which the country has been turned upside down, a lot of people wanted very flexible terms, two or three days a week at hours that suited, because they were doing childcare here and bits and pieces there. They did not recognise the way that the industry has developed over the last 30 years. Maybe people had the image of "The Darling Buds of May" when these are very commercial businesses that have delivery targets to meet for the supermarkets. There is huge pressure right the way through the supply chain.

It has been difficult to turn the interest into pickers who have been on farm for months. A lot of the businesses were looking for people to commit for three-month periods for the picking season, whereas many people were interested in going for a week or two to feel that they had done their bit rather than committing for the whole season. It has identified a lot of what we already knew, but you would never have had

the opportunity to recruit from the UK public like we have this year. That has been a huge test in itself of any future success of recruiting from UK society.

It has proven that there are some great success stories. There was one business at the start that had recruited nearly a third of its workforce from the UK. That number has now significantly fallen from that level and is below 20%. They are saying that there are higher turnover levels and they are not as productive as their eastern European counterparts. We cannot change the make-up or the fabric of the people who are applying for those jobs and it is not fit for everybody. It is a challenging work environment and that is the reality of the situation that we have to try to balance.

Q35 **Dr Hudson:** I take on board what you were saying. It is challenging and difficult, and there was a lot of interest, but I would push you on the final point. Do you feel it was successful in converting that interest into jobs and local folk working on farms, et cetera, in certain cases or across the board?

Tom Bradshaw: There are certain cases where there are great examples, but then there are asparagus farms that shut up shop because they could not get enough recruits. We need to make sure we focus on the truth rather than the ideology. The ideology says that we have a third of the workforce from the UK. The reality is that it is below 20%, but it could well be below 15%, and there are high turnover rates.

The success is if we get the crop harvested and, at the end of the season, having gone through what we have gone through this year, every grower will be relieved that they have got their crop harvested. Unfortunately, as I said, there are asparagus growers who have not been able to do that already.

David Camp: It was an exercise in managing expectations. The industry was able to respond very quickly. A number of individual businesses set up Feed the Nation websites and Feed the Nation campaigns. We had a spare worker availability portal, or SWAP for short, where businesses with surplus workers could provide them to other businesses that needed workers. We were able to do that very quickly. It took a while to develop the Pick For Britain website, as you would imagine. It was essential that it was collaborative.

Managing the number of workers you need at a particular time with the number of applications you get is a huge challenge. When the Secretary of State appeared on the daily briefing and when Prince Charles launched his video, we saw a massive inflow of applications, at a time when the sounds coming back from our members were: "We think we are okay. We think we are going to be able to meet the needs". The supply came in at a time when the demand had pretty much been met. That is one point.

There are positives. Raising awareness of these people who work to bring our food to our table is absolutely essential. The work to collaborate on this and to ensure that we had enough workers to pick the crop is essential. We could ensure that we make it really clear, through whatever process we have, what the prequalifying conditions are. Farms were saying, "We need people to stay for the whole season. We do not want people every week because of the coronavirus risk, the isolation requirements and the time it takes workers to get up to speed".

Tom called it the "Darling Buds of May" syndrome. I was calling it the "I can come for two hours on a Tuesday afternoon and bring my wicker basket" mentality. There are a lot of people who are going to come out of this saying, "I applied but I did not get a chance". It has really been an object lesson in how we manage expectations and how we balance labour supply and labour demand.

Tom Bradshaw: We have gone from less than 1% of the seasonal workforce being from the UK to potentially double digits. That is a success and is something that none of us would have expected back in February. That in itself is a success. Thousands of UK workers will have worked on farm and will now have a much better understanding of what is involved in producing their food. That in itself is a success.

Q36 **Chair:** If Pick For Britain starts off at the beginning of next year, do you think we can get many more people involved, now that they know exactly what it entails and the length of time? Unfortunately, there will be more unemployment about. What is your opinion for next year?

Tom Bradshaw: The recruitment structure would probably be much more structured than it was this year. It was laissez-faire. It just developed ad hoc. That was the way the system developed. There were people looking for jobs before the jobs were available whereas, if you set out to recruit from the UK workforce, you would probably do it in a different, much more structured way with pre-set conditions for the job. There will probably not be the sense of national pride next year that there was this year, so there will not be the people doing it because, "If I go and do a few hours here, it is something I have been able to contribute".

We will be in a very different position, but I am sure some of the workers will return next year, and it is the returnees who are always the most productive. Any of those people who can return next year will be welcomed with open arms. The true test will be how many of them want to come back to this industry having experienced what it has to offer. We do not know that yet, but it is going to be a real challenge. To rest our hope on the fact that we are going to recruit significant numbers from the UK workforce would be naïve and would expose our businesses to a huge amount of risk.

Q37 **Dr Hudson:** Chair, you read my mind with your follow-up question there. One thing we can do with our report from this Committee is draw on the evidence to make recommendations. If something like Pick For Britain

has to be rolled out again in a regular way—hopefully not with a pandemic as the background—what guidelines can be taken from this inquiry to make it user-friendly, so that, as both of you said, you are managing expectations and the folk know exactly what is involved, which can lead to a more resilient workforce going forward? We can get some good lessons to take forward from that.

Tom Bradshaw: Initially, there were something like 50,000 applicants to some of the labour providers that collaborated and fewer than 1,000 people came forward for interview. If there had been a checklist that you had to go through before you could hit the "apply" button, a lot of those 50,000 would never have got to the application point because they would have realised it was not for them. That is what we would need to achieve.

Chair: I think there are some lessons to be learned and there could be some really positive parts of it if we learn the lessons from this year. We have taken that on board very much.

Q38 **Julian Sturdy:** This follows on from what we have been talking about. Given the high turnover we have been discussing, and trying to get more people from the UK to return to the horticultural sector, how can we make the horticultural sector more attractive so that those agricultural and horticultural roles are potentially more available to UK people?

Tom Bradshaw: We recognise that we have to try to do this. Under the Food and Drink Sector Council sits the skills liaison group or senior skills group. A proposition is currently being put forward for an agricultural and horticultural institute training board, where you could source the training on that website and everybody would know exactly what skills are required for which roles in which sectors.

Skills and training is an area that we will have to look at if we are looking to recruit from the UK for the longer term. Ultimately, a lot of these people have no experience whatsoever of being on a UK farm. It just starts from the health and safety and food safety elements. There are so many parts of it that have to be correct to make sure that the food supply chain is kept safe. I would start at the training element. AHDB has a role to play and has done quite a bit on that as well, looking at the skills provision. As an industry, we have to accept that we need to do this.

Q39 **Julian Sturdy:** As you mentioned, if you could get people to return, it would make a big difference, wouldn't it?

Tom Bradshaw: It definitely would. That applies to the UK recruits or to those with settled or pre-settled status who may be looking to come back. They are always the most productive workers. The challenge is the environment that you work in and that is not going to change. Whether it be in a polytunnel, in a cold store or out in the field, that is the reality of the situation. If you are working on a Cornish vegetable farm, the weather down there is not always playing ball. These are the very real challenges that have to be faced. We need to do everything we can to

promote it, but we also have to be realistic about what the job is and who it is suitable for.

David Camp: This is an area we have been working on for many years in many ways. There is work around how you make the environment somewhere that someone wants to stay for a few months. There is the living accommodation and all the aspects around that. The industry collaborated to develop standards for accommodation and it is about the application of those. That is one area.

The second area is how people feel about working there. Is it a good place to work? Do they feel valued? Do they feel respected? Is it a friendly place? Do they want to come back? Is there a good environment? The best farms will get a returner rate of 70% to 80%. That will have been impacted by the virus this year and it will be impacted by changes to the immigration system. But good farms will want three-quarters of the workers to come back. That is at the peak end of what you get. All businesses will seek to maximise their returners because they provide the core stability to the organisation, they are trusted, they know the ropes and they act as the trainers and supervisors in some cases.

How do you maximise returners? We have done a lot of work on retaining workers and the practices to put in place. I agree with Tom; let us work together with the AHDB, share that knowledge, collaborate across different organisations, bring our experiences together, bring our knowledge together and provide this training out to businesses on how to make themselves a good place to work.

Of course, people come here to work to earn money and they need to be assured that they can earn a reasonable amount over the season. There are issues around the cost of travelling to the UK, the cost of obtaining a visa and the visa processing fees, which all go into a decision that a worker needs to make. "It is going to cost me this amount of money to get to the UK to get into this job. Am I going to earn that amount back?" That is another factor that needs to be considered.

It is not one thing. There are lots of different things that you can bring together into a programme of activity to help our growers and our agribusinesses be attractive places. We are working on a video around UK food heroes at the moment to celebrate the work they do and to act as a "come and work in the UK" video that all recruiters and farms can use to share the experience of working in the UK. I look at other countries. I compare them—Tom talked about Spain—and I think that this is a good place to come and work. How do we promote our country and our sector above others as a good place for individuals to come and work in our food and agricultural businesses?

Q40 **Ian Byrne:** Thanks, Tom and David. This is a very instructional afternoon, listening to the excellent answers. As an ex-Unite trade union organiser industrially, I have worked in the food sector and it has sometimes been an extremely hostile environment. There are lots of

issues regarding that sector. I am struck and pleased by the tone of the answers and the questions regarding valuing workers and how we can upskill and move standards up.

This is what jumps out for me as a trade unionist. I love the thought of collective bargaining and I would like your thoughts on this. Would the re-establishment of the Agricultural Wages Board, to raise terms and conditions and to attract the migrant workers we still want to recruit, enhance the offer we make to the migrant workers? I am really interested in your thoughts on that question.

Tom Bradshaw: The national living wage has really moved things on from the Agricultural Wages Board. Within the NFU, we are very supportive of the national living wage and we fully understand all the reasoning behind it. We have seen some very dramatic wage increases over the last five years. It is 34% over five years when you look at the increases.

Then we have to look at the other things you are talking about, which are the conditions. Any businesses that are serious about their future recognise, and have to recognise, the value of these workers. Unless they are treated fairly, they are not going to be able to access the workers, whether that be seasonal workers, workers from the UK or anything in between. I often feel that this is not recognised. Maybe it is not recognised by others because the environment you work in can still be a wet, grey, cold environment. If you are out there picking cauliflowers, broccoli or whatever and the weather is not playing ball, there is nothing that can really be done about that.

The industry has stepped up over the last decade. Knowing how difficult it is to recruit, they have really improved the facilities that are on offer. The living wage takes care of that one element, the wage, but I am not convinced that bringing back the Agricultural Wages Board would make a significant improvement over and above what is already being done within the industry.

David Camp: We retain Agricultural Wages Boards in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, so it is just England that does not have one. There were limitations and adverse consequences to having the Agricultural Wages Order in place. It meant that workers were mostly limited to working 39 hours a week because, above that, time and a half came in place. We saw our members' clients saying, "Supply us with more workers and we will limit their hours so no one ever moves on to the higher rates". That obviously was not the intention of the scheme, but it was a consequence, whereby moving into time and a half pushed the cost of production above what could be afforded.

I certainly find it hard to justify why a sector should have different terms and conditions compared to work in waste processing, which is a tough old environment to work in, in care or in other sectors. What differentiates one sector from another?

I am for raising national legislation so that all workers benefit from the rights to which they are entitled. I absolutely want workers to get those rights. We are in a sector that is regulated by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority. I want them to apply the compliance rules, to make sure that every single worker in agriculture gets the holiday they deserve, at least the minimum wage and all the other rights and benefits to which they are entitled.

Q41 **Ian Byrne:** So you would not agree with bringing the wage board back in England. You think it would be a detrimental step.

David Camp: Yes. Let me be sure for once. Yes, it would be.

Q42 **Ian Byrne:** That is interesting. David, does the new immigration policy increase the risk of exploitation of workers and what should be done to mitigate the risk of exploitation? We have covered bits of that but I would be keen to drill into this.

David Camp: I will try to be brief. There needs to be a policy to address the many hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers in the UK. We need to really examine what rights they should have. They have none at the moment. That is very different in many other countries. That puts that group at a high risk. That is the first action.

Secondly, the new immigration policy provides no route into the UK for RQF levels 1 and 2: unskilled and lower-skilled workers. If businesses cannot source those types of workers, they may start to use workers from other sources. That is the second risk. The third risk is that there will be a massive increase in the number of businesses that apply for sponsor licences. I cannot see how the Home Office can manage that massive increase. Will those businesses be properly monitored and controlled?

The fourth risk is that this provides a route into the UK from all countries around the world. I can envisage that there will be exploiters, traffickers and profiteers starting up businesses in many countries promising individuals that, if they pay them the equivalent of several thousand pounds, they can get them a job in the UK, putting them and their families into debt bondage. They may have connections to the UK or they may not. I can see collusion between organised crime networks in the UK and in other countries to bring workers in. I will stop there.

Q43 **Ian Byrne:** What you have just described there is pretty terrifying. Would it be advantageous and a progressive step in safeguarding employees' wellbeing if we made it legally binding for all employers to audit and publish their supply chains under the Modern Slavery Act? Would that be worth considering?

David Camp: There are challenges around that, and it is hugely complex, but there is lots more that needs to be done. We certainly agree with the Government's decision to take control of the public register of

modern slavery statements and to improve the requirements of what needs to be put in there.

Ian Byrne: That would only work through a legal avenue, though.

David Camp: Yes. Ultimately, we are moving towards transparency and visibility of supply chains, but, at least for the software providers that I have seen working in that space, it is not quite there in a way that will allow for real interrogation of those routes.

You can publish product supply chains but we are talking about labour supply chains here. There is a strong argument to look at labour supply chains. Where are these workers coming from? What businesses are organisations contracting with to supply their workers? Yes, I believe there is an argument about publishing labour supply chains.

Sorry, I have forgotten the second point I was going to make there. It was going to be a good one.

Ian Byrne: That is fine. You have covered what I asked. Tom, is there anything you would like to add?

Tom Bradshaw: If labour is restricted too far, criminal gangs will always look to exploit opportunities that they see in front of them. That is a danger and we cannot hide away from that. On the modern slavery front, we are looking at different initiatives as to how we can make sure that our members are aware of the pitfalls.

There is an app being developed by the Clewer Initiative, which we are discussing at our policy board tomorrow to see whether we can support it. We have to do everything we can to ensure that businesses are not abusing or utilising staff in a way that they should not. As an industry, we have to do everything we can and we want to promote something across the membership to make sure that all of our businesses are doing the right thing.

Q44 **Ian Byrne:** Does that need legislation in your opinion, though, Tom?

Tom Bradshaw: With the GLAA licensing, we are already one of the most regulated sectors in the country anyway. I wonder how far we want to take that. I go back to the point that, if there is a shortage, criminal gangs will look to exploit that, whatever the legislation says. They will just become more advanced to get around the rules if they see an opportunity. That is the danger that we are facing.

Q45 **Ian Byrne:** That follows nicely on to my last question. How effective is the GLA Authority in protecting workers from exploitation?

Tom Bradshaw: You go first, David. You probably know better than I do.

David Camp: I go way back and I was on the board of the GLAA from 2005. I think it is vital. It is supported by 95% of labour providers, which value it to improve the level playing field. I engage with the GLAA all the

time. I am a great supporter of it. It is an institution that is respected in other sectors, not just in the UK but throughout the world.

Can they improve? Yes, they can. They need to redouble their focus back on the food and agricultural sector. Their powers were significantly extended to look at severe exploitation in all sectors back in 2016. I have been working with them this year and I have received a strong indication that they will be looking at the balance between their compliance activities and enforcement activities, and refocusing as the GLAA. We want an active, effective and proportionate GLAA working in our sector, and it is certainly one that we strongly support.

Building on a point Tom made, the food sector generally does more with regard to preventive activities around modern slavery than I see in any other sector. Does it do enough? No. Should it do more? Yes. Does more legislation help? It can do, but enforcement of legislation is what we need. It is what we need in the clothes manufacturers of Leicester. It is what we need in many sectors. We need the laws that we have around minimum wage, holiday pay and prevention of trafficking to be enforced.

Q46 **Ian Byrne:** You need the personnel to do it as well.

David Camp: Yes, absolutely.

Tom Bradshaw: Reflecting on some conversations with our hort board chair, the responsibility still lies with the grower to audit the agency that has the GLAA licence. At the moment, there is a lot of responsibility lying with the employer and it is just whether there should be an annual inspection that covers all that off so the employer knows that every agent has passed its annual inspection and is fully up to speed. That would be the question.

Back to what David said about resource, the remit of the GLAA has been widened and we would just question whether it has enough resource to cover the expanded remit. We would support David in what he said there. It either has to refocus or needs more resource.

Chair: Tom, I very much support the Clewer Initiative and the app, so that workers who are being exploited and trafficked can contact somebody securely. It will be interesting to see what you make of it when you have your discussion tomorrow, because it could have a very good role in stopping so many workers being exploited through unscrupulous people. I look forward to your deliberations on that one.

Q47 **Robbie Moore:** Hello to the witnesses. It is good to see you both. My question is structured around the use of technology. Is investment in productivity, technology and innovation an effective strategy for farms in their current form to reduce their future dependence on migrant workers?

Tom Bradshaw: We have touched a bit on technology so far, but there are some really exciting technological developments taking place at the moment. There is a cross-industry initiative that Lincoln University is

involved with. Robotics is coming, but developing robotics is complex. It is going to be a large investment and the ownership model for the robotics is going to be very interesting. Will it be owned by the grower or by an ancillary business that provides the service? That is quite interesting as to who is going to control the food supply chain, but that is maybe not for today.

As I said earlier, if we have ambitions to boost productivity and boost output from the horticultural sector, robotics does not mean we will require fewer staff for the future. We may just need a very different type of staff and in different roles than they are in today. If we are going to grow the horticultural sector, we need to look at productivity per unit of employment and boost that dramatically, which robotics will allow.

When we look at potential opportunities for export, we do not want to cap ourselves by saying, "We only have access to this number of employees. Do with them what you want". Yes, we are very ambitious for future growth and we believe technology definitely is part of the solution, but that does not necessarily mean that fewer migrant or overseas workers will be required.

David Camp: I do not have much to add to what Tom said. It will depend on crop type, product type, the size of farm, the cost of the robotics or machinery and the return on investment. Each business will make its own decision. Five years ago, I remember it was five or 10 years off, and five years on it still seems about five or 10 years off. I was in New Zealand and saw some impressive stuff down there in the apple industry and the kiwi industry. It will come, but I have no more detail to add than Tom has provided.

Q48 **Robbie Moore:** Tom, you have mentioned the desire and that the way the farming sector, the agri industry and the food production industry are going is a drive to more innovation through increasing technology. Assuming the adaptation for greater technology takes place, what sort of workforce would the sector need? I know we are looking at it in the wider sense but how would that need for training be met, assuming there is that drive for more technology?

Tom Bradshaw: We have recognised that we have to upskill the industry. It is a very rapidly changing industry and technology is really exciting for the future, particularly in driving productivity. Under the Food and Drink Sector Council sits the skills liaison group or the senior skills group. They are developing the institute of agriculture and horticulture, which will be an umbrella organisation to encompass all the training bodies that currently exist in a very fragmented training programme across the UK.

There is currently a proposal sat with Defra, or being looked at with Defra—Victoria Prentis has looked at it and Don Curry is leading on this from the Lords—and the industry is collaborating behind that. It has genuine levels of support from a lot of those current training providers,

recognising that we have to upskill. That can hopefully be a large part of the solution.

David Camp: I agree with Tom. We are seeing consultation on agricultural apprenticeships. That consolidation and collaboration is crucial to this. You see the effects of process mechanisation in food manufacturing plants where I spent the 1980s and 1990s, with jobs that were done by tens or hundreds of people being replaced by pretty sophisticated machinery. Whole plants were operated from process control rooms. Businesses are pretty adept at doing that. I am sure we will see that transition over a number of years in horticulture.

Q49 **Chair:** Tom, the Agriculture Bill contains quite a lot about competitive agriculture and horticulture. Ideally, what would you see as the Government's role and Defra's role in getting more technology into the sector? Is it better for Government to keep out of this? Where do you stand on this?

Tom Bradshaw: We need to look at an enabling policy framework, which is hopefully cheap for Government to deliver but enables industry to thrive. Those are some of the things I would look at. Julian is obviously on the call and I am really excited by the work that the APPG on Science and Technology in Agriculture is putting forward. That enabling policy framework is what we have to look for. Budgets are going to be very restricted as we move forward. Coronavirus is going to cost everyone a pot of money. Ultimately, if we can have that enabling policy, it should not require vast lump sums of investment for the future. There is a role for investment in some of this far-from-market research. It is a long way from reality, but a lot of universities are on that and they see the opportunities with this. It would be the policy that I would really look at.

Chair: You see the Government's role as a sort of enabler and for the universities to back it. Some of it may be owned by the growers and some of it may be contractors, depending on how it works in the future. We look forward to seeing how that works.

Can I thank you both very much for very good evidence? What has come over loud and clear is the value of people working in the food sector, the fact that we need these workers and that we need to produce as much home-grown food as we can. We need more food to export as well because, as climate change comes, we will be in a position with a climate that can produce more food. It comes through loud and clear to us.

We have also taken evidence from you that we need to look at the essential workers list to make sure that we can get more labour into the country if we need it. We will all make the plea to you to look again at whether we can use more home-grown labour. I know you are all working hard to make that happen because that is also an issue.

The one thing that comes over loud and clear—and we will put a short report together for the Secretary of State and Government—is to work across Departments to make sure we get the right figures that go into

Government to decide how many workers we need, looking at the number of seasonal workers out there. We need to not just talk about skilled and unskilled workers, but to look at the workers we actually need and perhaps at the salary levels as well. That all came over loud and clear this afternoon.

We are delighted to have taken your evidence. Thank you to all the members for taking part.