

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Oral evidence: Feeding the nation: labour constraints, HC 1009.

Wednesday 22 February 2017

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Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Chris Davies; Jim Fitzpatrick; Simon Hart; Kerry McCarthy; Dr Paul Monaghan; Rebecca Pow; Ms Margaret Ritchie; David Simpson; Angela Smith; Rishi Sunak

Questions 100-211

Witnesses

I. Julia Long, National Officer for Food, Drink and Agriculture, Unite the union; Bridget Henderson, Unite the union

II. Tim Breitmeyer, Deputy President, CLA, Minette Batters, Deputy President, National Farmers Union, George Dunn, Chief Executive, Tenant Farmers Association

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Julia Long and Bridget Henderson.

Q100 **Chair:** Good afternoon. Thank you very much for attending our inquiry. We are looking into feeding the nation and labour constraints, and it is good to have you along this afternoon. Bridget, if you would like to introduce yourself, then we will fire away.

Bridget Henderson: I am Bridget Henderson. I am the researcher for food, drink and agriculture for Unite the union, and also in the 1990s I was editor of the union's paper for agricultural workers, the *Landworker*, so I have some information from that period to give some historical perspective.

Chair: Thank you very much. Julia?

Julia Long: I am Julia Long. I am the national officer for food, drink and agricultural workers within Unite, and I have been in that position for the



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last three years. Before that I worked for the docks. I am representing over 100,000 workers within the food industry and supply chain.

Q101 Chair: Lovely. Thank you very much. I will open up with the first question. Some of the evidence that we have taken recently from witnesses has been telling us that a lot of our UK resident workers are not that keen on agricultural work. Do you think that is the case? Why do you think that is the case?

Julia Long: I do not think it really is the case. We have lots of potential out there, and if the industry itself had done more about promoting agricultural work then a lot more people would be in it. Obviously, there is not a great deal of training done to train our people, and also you have to look at the pay rates. We used to have an Agricultural Wages Board, which encompassed a lot of the training, college work and pay, and also health and safety within the industry.

If more had been done to promote agricultural work, then there would be more people interested in doing it. We have a lot of young people who are out of work. We need to address that and convince them that agriculture is a career that they can progress through. We have not done that, and since the Agricultural Wages Board was stopped, we have not done any of that in England at all.

Q102 Chair: I think it would be fair to say that there had probably been a decline in the British workforce in agriculture before the wages board went. It is not only just because the wages board went. You would probably recognise that. Do you think it is perhaps due to schools, colleges and others? Is agriculture not sexy enough? Is it not paid enough? What is it?

Julia Long: It is not paid enough. That is one of the biggest things.

Chair: We have detailed questions on that in a minute, so I had better not probe that too hard.

Julia Long: It is not promoted enough. I have grandchildren and they go to farms with their school. They love it and they love to see how it works and everything. That is lacking; we do not do it in all the schools, and we do not do it when they are older. When you do it when they are younger, they love to go and see the animals and see how the industry works, and then we stop it at a certain age and they do not see it any more. What the industry needs to do is look at how we can do that. I know we are going to talk about seasonal workers and how we are bringing seasonal workers in, but we need a bit of both.

We do need to continue with the seasonal workers. We also need to set out a training programme for young people—and for anybody—that has a career path so people can see there is a career path for them to go through, and also that the pay is there that they can live on. When you are looking at jobs now, the jobs that you are looking at are all for the minimum wage. In some areas, and especially in rural areas, that is



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difficult, because if they live in rural areas they have high rents and higher travel, so therefore they live out of the areas and it costs them more to come in and travel in to do the job.

Q103 Chair: Sometimes we are not necessarily looking for the labour force in the part of the country where we need to look for it. The difficulty there is whether there is enough money there for people to come out from the city to work on the farms. Do you see what I mean? Very often, in most of the rural constituencies, the unemployment is very low, and that may not be the same in the city area. Do you think we can encourage more from the city to come out and work on the farms?

Julia Long: I do, and that is why I say it should be a two-pronged attack. We should be bringing in seasonal workers. We have two years before we Brexit, so we have two years—

Chair: We will talk a bit more about seasonal workers in a minute.

Julia Long: That is fine, but it is about saying that we should have the two running together. We should not concentrate on bringing in seasonal workers and forget about the training for UK workers. I come from an area in Nottinghamshire that is a very rural area, but also you have Lincoln and Boston, which have a high level of seasonal workers coming into them. That is where you had a high level of Brexit leave voters, because people were seeing more migrant workers coming in, and some of their own people not getting jobs. It is about how we encourage them, and we have to work together to do that.

If you do a two-pronged attack then the industry will benefit from both sides, having seasonal workers and UK-trained workforces. I forget where it was now, but I know there was an agency that sent UK workers to apply for jobs in a horticultural company, and what happened was they did not get the jobs. They then went and followed up and said, "Why did they not get the jobs?" and they said, "Because the seasonal workers who come in come in every year and are fully trained up to do the jobs." They therefore then trained some of the UK workers. The UK workers went to apply for the next lot, and they got the jobs, because they were trained.

It is about making sure, as well, that if we are having seasonal workers, they are protected as well. We hear such horrendous stories. I have given you a copy of our "Plough to Plate" document, which was written by our shop stewards and the people who work in our food, drink and agricultural businesses. Everything in there was written by them. When we talk about people abused at work, or who are frightened and dare not join a union because of the fear factor, then that is from the shop stewards themselves; it is not from us as a union.

It does beg the question of how we organise, because it is bigger than seasonal workers. The whole supply chain needs to be looked at, especially with Brexit.



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Q104 **Rebecca Pow:** I have a very quick question: you suggested that we needed more PR, and then more young people would do the work. I am declaring an interest here, as my family, including my parents, ran a very big dairy farm. One of the big key issues, or one of the nails in the coffin that led to them having to give up in the end was that they simply could not find people that wanted to work on a dairy farm. This is a common practice. People advertise, and in fairness they are very well paid jobs and you get a house. They simply cannot find people who want to do these jobs, which is why they then go abroad.

I would be the first to encourage our young people to go into it. I do not know what you put that down to. That is not your example, if you are saying it is simply about PR. I do not think it is as simple as that.

Julia Long: I do not think it is as simple as PR. How do you do it when you go abroad to bring people in? You send out agencies. They go out and recruit the people and the people come in.

Q105 **Rebecca Pow:** The people from abroad just saw the adverts in the *Farmers Weekly* and applied. That is how most people are getting their dairy managers now, Mr Chairman, are they not?

Chair: I think so.

Julia Long: Even so, we do not have many agencies around the UK that are promoting and pushing for UK workers. We do not have that, and a lot of people do not have the *Farmers Weekly* or any magazines to do with farming, so they do not see the adverts. It is about starting a proper training programme that ensures everybody is encompassed in it. You cannot just say, "We can send an agency out to Latvia and they will bring in a load of people". Yes, they will—or they could have done, because the pound was all right then, but since the pound has gone down they will not come over, because it is not worth their while. That will be a big problem in the future. It is the way that we advertise; it is the way that we look round.

Q106 **Chair:** Your argument in a nutshell, then, is that the agency does not put as much effort into trying to get a home-grown workforce as they do in some of the other countries that they go to. There is a lack of will sometimes to engage with our own people. Is that right?

Julia Long: Yes. I am not saying that we should not have seasonal workers. There should be both sides of it. We have to do that, and we have two years in which to do it.

Q107 **Chair:** I am conscious, Bridget, that you said you had quite a lot to do with writing a newspaper and doing various things. What do you think about trying to publicise it more and get these people into agricultural work?

Bridget Henderson: We cannot square this particular circle of short term and long term. These are long-term structural issues about labour shortages that the horticultural and agricultural press have been writing



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about for years, saying that there is a crisis coming. Now it is acute, and I do not think we can square the circle or solve that problem, in the short or long term, without looking at pay levels. They are simply not high enough, where there is competition for other people to do it. If they have come on a temporary basis, they are quickly looking for work elsewhere that is perhaps more conducive or a better environment to be working in.

In the long term, the pay levels in food and agriculture have been historically low for a long time. We know that from the experience of the *Landworker*. It has always been an issue that farm workers' pay has been considerably lower than average manual earnings, for example. The situation has got worse in England because of the abolition of the wages board. You have lost the rates of overtime, holiday and sick pay. They were all part of a package that made agriculture more of an attractive prospect in the first place. If you have those skills and there are other industries that are going to be more attractive because the package or the pay is better, then that is part of the reason why there is this acute crisis now, and a long-term problem more generally.

Q108 Kerry McCarthy: Just to follow up on that question of pay and conditions, when we took evidence in our first session in this inquiry, as you have probably seen, we were told that they were well paid jobs. We were told that pay was not the reason; it was more the flexibility required of workers. You are very clear that pay is one of the issues.

Bridget Henderson: To return, unfortunately, to the seasonal issue, if you are coming over as a seasonal worker to work on a particular harvest, and you are being paid national minimum wage, you are there because that particular crop needs human dexterity but robotic speed and pace of work. You can only really live on that money and keep going at that pace for a short period of time. You cannot keep up without there being either better remuneration or more control over what you are doing. I have read the evidence of the witnesses so far, and there seems to be a reluctance to accept the fact that pay might be an issue. We would believe it is, in the same way as where there are labour shortages in other industries, you have to look at pay levels. Otherwise, especially where there are choices, people are not going to make that choice. It is not rational to make that choice to do that.

Q109 Kerry McCarthy: What about conditions? Obviously, in "Plough to Plate" there are accounts of that, but you get this issue, going back to what Julia was saying, about cost of accommodation, particularly for seasonal workers coming in. What sort of conditions would seasonal workers live in and would that be off-putting to British seasonal workers?

Bridget Henderson: Some combination, provided by some responsible employers who want to attract workers over, and also want them to come back again in the next season, would provide quite decent-quality accommodation. However, it is in a remote area and you are a bit stuck there. An indication of how poor some of the accommodation has been could be seen by the fact by the fact that the Agricultural Wages Board



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order included in it a statutory description of what was acceptable accommodation. That was included at a fairly late stage; it was not always in there and the AWB order did not always contain this.

For example, it specified a bed for the sole use of an individual worker, in order to outlaw the practice of hot-bedding, adequate sanitation, and so on and so forth. When the wages board went, that statutory underpinning and baseline on accommodation had gone. The fact that it was there in the first place was an indication of how poor some of the accommodation standards were for some of the provision for workers working on that seasonal wage.

Q110 **Chair:** Surely it is contained within employment law anyway, is it not? It is illegal for people to have hot-bedding and what-have-you. It is not just within the Agricultural Wages Board. That is general employment law as it stands now.

Bridget Henderson: We are talking about agriculture and horticulture. The fact that that had to be written in specifically to that order as a statutory underpinning of the industry was an indication of—

Q111 **Chair:** I do not necessarily argue with what you are saying. The point I am trying to make to you is that surely, within general employment law as it stands, whether you have an agricultural board or not, employers should not be providing such accommodation.

Bridget Henderson: They should not be, but there are plenty of—

Julia Long: It is not in legislation. What is in legislation is health and safety, and a responsibility to make sure they have adequate facilities and are working in a healthy and safe environment. It is not specifically stated that you cannot hot-bed, or anything like that.

Q112 **Rebecca Pow:** It is interesting to hear about the low wages and all of that. Out of interest, I wondered—particularly from Bridget—what do you think is the impact of the fact that we have a low-cost food policy in this country? That keeps the price of food down, which of course affects the whole agricultural industry. We all know, and I am sure you do, that margins are incredibly tight in agriculture and the food industry. Surely this is a much wider discussion and we do not want to just nail the farmers, saying, “You do not pay enough.” It is a real shame, is it not?

Bridget Henderson: Absolutely.

Q113 **Rebecca Pow:** How can you change it? What is your view?

Bridget Henderson: We would like to see a much bigger, deeper investigation into this problem, in the context of what is going on in supply chains, the role of retailers and the prices that they are paying. One of the fascinating things about the consultation on the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board was that employers wrote in in favour of scrapping it, but also commented on what abolition would mean.



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Some of them wrote to say the reason why they had so much pressure on costs was because the retailers were not paying them any more for their produce than they had done 10 years previously. Because they are sewn into those contracts, they have to deliver and so the only way they can then make a profit is by pushing the pressure down the supply chain to the workers who do the work.

Q114 **Rebecca Pow:** As Unite, do you go and meet with the supermarkets? We have had them before our inquiries, have we not? They are one of the key areas that one ought to be talking to.

Bridget Henderson: Absolutely.

Julia Long: We do.

Q115 **Rebecca Pow:** With Brexit coming up, and being in control and everything, does an opportunity present itself there?

Julia Long: We do speak to supermarkets, because we have long held the view that the supermarkets are driving the prices so low that people cannot cope. Some small farm owners are going bankrupt and losing their farms, and this is all because supermarkets and retailers are just hammering the price so low that they cannot afford to do it. Yes, we have concerns ourselves about that, and we have raised campaigns on that, along with the AWB. We were campaigning to the supermarkets, to tell them they have to pay a fair price.

Q116 **Chris Davies:** It is very interesting to hear the evidence being given, as somebody who has been around the agricultural world ever since I can remember. One has always listened to those who have said that conditions and wages in farming have always been low. They have never been at the top of the scale. You spent a lot of time in your evidence slating the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board. What would you say to those out there who say, "It has not made any difference at all; it has just got rid of another level of administrative burden, and really those workers are better off now than they have ever been"?

Bridget Henderson: As far as we are aware we are the only organisation that did any research on the impact of abolition on workers. We surveyed our members in England, because obviously this is the wages board abolition for England and Wales, and Wales has made its own arrangements. In the responses we got from our members, that was not the view they were giving. Had the wages board continued, all workers covered by the wages board would have had a pay rise—

Q117 **Chris Davies:** Sorry, you have just put a caveat on that. You surveyed your members, you said?

Bridget Henderson: Yes, who are the workers in the sector that covers rural membership and agricultural membership. We surveyed all of them in England, and what they were telling us was, had the wages board continued, they would have got a pay rise on 1 October 2013. Actually,



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52% got some form of pay rise while the others did not. They were instantly going to be worse off, and when the pay rises came they were lower than industry averages. There had also been a view, certainly promoted by the Government and the employers' side, that without the wages board, workers and employers would be free to negotiate individually. That simply did not happen. Where there were pay rises, 80% of them were imposed by the employer.

Q118 Chair: We now have the living wage coming in, so surely that has an impact as well, does it not? To the point that Rebecca made, on the one side we have got the industry saying "If we drive the wages up too fast the retailers will not pay for it," or "They will not charge enough in order to give that back to the farmers, because they want to have a war between themselves." I can understand where you are coming from: you are saying the wages are not high enough. I would suggest that the wages would not be any higher now with a wages board than they would be with the living wage. Talking to the industry, it is the living wage that is coming through—a lot of them would say it is difficult for them to pay it.

Bridget Henderson: You had a whole package with the wages board, because you had a number of different rates according to skills and experience, but you also had overtime, and that was a big sticking point for the industry. That was behind a lot of the responses in favour of abolition: to be able to get rid of the guaranteed overtime in agriculture, and also holiday pay and a more generous sick pay scheme, reflecting the fact that it is a more dangerous industry.

Q119 Ms Margaret Ritchie: My question is about the levels of unionisation and workers' rights in farming. The academic research and evidence that has been given to us has said that there has been a rise in the incidence of low-paid, irregular and non-unionised work in the agriculture and meat processing sectors. Secondly, related to this, employment in these sectors has become less attractive to the UK workforce, leading to labour shortages. In your opinion, what is the level of unionisation among agricultural workers?

Bridget Henderson: It has stayed pretty steady over the years. The level of unionisation amongst the agricultural workforce has remained fairly steady. Unite has always aimed to recruit workers wherever they are from, regardless of whether they are migrant workers or not, and has been quite successful at doing so. In something like meat processing, we have a very well organised structure there.

Q120 Ms Margaret Ritchie: When you say "steady", what do you mean in percentage terms of the overall workforce?

Julia Long: I would say 30% to 40% of the workers are members of the union.

Q121 Ms Margaret Ritchie: In what roles and areas within the agricultural sector is unionisation at the highest and at the lowest level?



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Julia Long: The highest level is within the meat industry—meat processing. We have lots of individual farm workers, all through the grades and different job roles. In horticultural, we have quite a huge membership. It is difficult to organise within all those areas, because it is a wide breadth of jobs and different things they do. The dairy industry is all part of it as well. We have a big membership in the dairy industry. We have a wide breadth of membership.

Q122 **Chair:** When you say the dairy industry, again, you mean dairy processors more than the dairy farms, I expect.

Julia Long: We have farm workers from the dairies, yes. We do have farm workers from the dairies. We also have the milk and cheese companies, and everything like that. They are all part of that. We do have a wide breadth of the membership across the whole of the industry and agriculture.

Q123 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** Do you do continuous campaigning to recruit members to Unite?

Julia Long: Yes, we do, and our stewards do as well. We have a national committee and regional committees. They all meet and discuss things, as we say, and they all developed this booklet so we could make that role easier for them to go out to recruit. We are continually recruiting; obviously there has been a decline in workers in the agricultural sector over the years as well. As that decline comes, so does the decline in the union as well. It is always a battle to continue to organise our members.

Q124 **Chair:** I expect some of that decline is through mechanisation, is it, sometimes?

Julia Long: Some might be, yes.

Q125 **Chris Davies:** On Margaret's point, if I may, I am interested in how you recruit people. If I was going to work in the local dairy farm, for example—they pay the PAYE etc.—how would I get in touch with you through my employer, and more importantly, how would you get in touch with me?

Julia Long: We have got shop stewards all over, in every region and area of the country, and in the whole of the UK. If there are jobs going in the area and we see them advertised, we make sure that we send a shop steward to speak to the people. We speak to them in their local areas all the time, and that is how we are doing it. We send out the *Landworker*, and all the information is in there about how to join the union. We have a website and we leaflet quite a lot, as well. We do loads of different things, and different areas do different things, as well.

Q126 **Chris Davies:** What about money? How much do you charge the dairy worker to be a member of Unite?



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Julia Long: It depends. If they are on low pay, then it is £8 per month. We class most of them as low pay, so probably £8 per month.

Q127 **Chris Davies:** How much would you charge MPs?

Julia Long: I would charge you £14 per month.

Chair: Quite right too; you asked a cheeky question and you got a cheeky answer. Would you ask your question, please, that you are down to ask?

Q128 **Chris Davies:** Don't put a membership form in the post to me too soon. Thank you very much. Is there a link between levels of unionisation and the use of migrant labour in the agricultural sector?

Julia Long: Yes, because we do have a big intake of seasonal workers who come and join our union. In the areas up in Boston and Lincoln, when the seasonal workers come in, they join our union, and we do go along to the farms in the seasons when we know there is going to be a big influx of migrant workers. We have nothing against organising migrant workers; we do that every day, and we always will.

Q129 **Chris Davies:** Is that foreign labour?

Julia Long: Yes.

Bridget Henderson: Unite is organising a migrant workers' conference this afternoon; we would have been at it if we were not here. That is members who are migrant workers, working in different sectors, all coming together to discuss things of mutual concern.

Chair: When Chris gets his membership form, he will be able to go along to your conference. I am just being facetious here.

Julia Long: We might not have him.

Chris Davies: Oh, you are being selective now. That is very unfair.

Julia Long: You never know.

Q130 **Chair:** What sort of numbers would you have as members? Do you have any idea?

Julia Long: Across the sectors, in the food industry as a whole?

Chair: I mean migrant workers.

Julia Long: Yes, we do. We have a lot.

Bridget Henderson: I do not know if I have the figures.

Julia Long: As far as we are concerned we organise migrant workers; that is why we are having a migrant workers' conference today. It is to bring migrant workers from all different sectors, because we are saying that seasonal workers are not just agricultural. The hotel industry brings in seasonal workers all the time, and they are migrant workers. It is



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saying, "We need to address this issue, and how to encourage people who are not working in this country to take these jobs."

Unfortunately, it always does come down to pay, and when you talk to people they will say, "They do not pay enough for the job." It is the same in the hotel industry as well, because we look after them. They do not pay enough for the job, and the workers seem as if they are not being treated properly and fairly. It is about addressing that, addressing the training needs, and making sure that we can get our people into work. At the same time, you cannot discourage bringing in seasonal workers, because if we do not have the seasonal workers in we will not be able to run the industries that we have, in food. I accept that, and Unite accepts that.

Q131 **Chris Davies:** Following on, Chairman, can I just ask the question: are migrant workers easier to recruit than British workers?

Bridget Henderson: You have to bear in mind, particularly in rural areas and in certain industries, that some migrant workers will be working in a climate of fear, and so joining the union will be something that they might actually be fearful of. They fear that the employer will somehow find out about this and will somehow use this against them in some way. This is a genuine fear that workers have, and actually not just migrant workers. Sometimes it has been difficult to recruit in rural areas because workers have been fearful of reprisals from employers, and that has been a long historical issue.

Q132 **Chris Davies:** That was a great answer, but not really to the question I asked. Are migrant workers easier to recruit than British workers?

Bridget Henderson: Easier to recruit? It is the same.

Julia Long: I would not say they are easier. They are the same. We have got 250 migrant workers who are shop stewards meeting in Unite House today, so that is 250 Unite stewards from across the country who are migrant workers. If you are going to recruit migrant workers, you use migrant workers to recruit them. That is how we work and how we do it.

Bridget Henderson: It depends on the industry as well, as to whether they are easy to recruit into the union. It depends on the industry. If you have migrant workers working in the health service, the employment climate in the health service is different from the environment if you are working in a meat processing factory. Does that help answer the question?

Julia Long: Migrant workers in the health industry are easy to recruit. Agricultural workers, if you can talk to them and have the opportunity to talk to them, yes, you can recruit them.

Q133 **Chair:** Further to Chris's question, of the number of migrant workers in the country, have you got a rough idea of what percentage of those would be a member of a union?



Julia Long: We have not, no. I can get that for you.

Q134 **Chair:** Would it be 10%, 20%, or more than that?

Bridget Henderson: I don't think it would be fair to speculate really, would it?

Julia Long: No, because it is not just our union that organises migrant workers. We could get the figures for our union and send them to you.

Chair: We would be quite interested in some of those figures, please, if you could let us have them.

Julia Long: We will try to get them.

Chair: If you have any across the other unions, that would be useful as well, please.

Q135 **David Simpson:** Chairman, can I declare again an interest in the agricultural industry, just for the record? It was interesting to hear about recruitment and promoting it, and all the rest of it. In Northern Ireland, we have foreign nationals who are employed, from anywhere from 25% to 65% in some of the factories. What factories and farmers are telling me is that the indigenous people simply do not want to do the work. That is why they have to bring others in. They will not work the hours that foreign nationals will come in and work.¹

Foreign nationals will work weekends; they will work all of the hours that God sends them to earn money. That is what the industry is telling me. I have listened carefully to what you have said, but I cannot say I agree with everything you have said, because that is not the message I am getting from agriculture and from the processing sector. Anyhow, we will move on to the next question.

Julia Long: Can I just answer that one for you? I quite agree with you that people will not work those long hours and in all the weathers they have to go out and work in. That is true. We agree with that. What we are saying is that it is because they are not told the other side of it as well, and if the pay was right people would work. That is what we are saying.

Q136 **Chair:** So you are saying that, first, it is not explained to them what the work is about, and secondly, they are not paid enough. Is that your line of argument?

Julia Long: Yes, and it is about temporary work all the time. They need to be encouraged, and we have to find a way.

David Simpson: We could go off on a rant here.

Chair: Yes. I am going to have to pull you back as well. I am having trouble this afternoon with my Members.



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Q137 **David Simpson:** I have seen the wage; what they are being paid is not too bad.

Anyhow, in 2015 Unite alleged that employers in the food and agricultural sector are some of the worst exploiters of workers. How widespread is the bad practice within the food and agricultural sector, in your opinion?

Bridget Henderson: It is widespread enough for there to be a Gangmasters Licensing Authority set up to try to control poor practice, and until this spring it will have been focusing only on temporary work in food and farming. In terms of “widespread”, what do you mean?

Q138 **Chair:** It is perhaps difficult to put in percentage terms, but is it 5% or 10% of employers involved in bad practice?

Julia Long: If it is 5%, 10%, 15% or 20%, it is too much.

Chair: It is still too high. I would accept that.

Julia Long: We talk to our stewards every day and we know of some industries where our workers are treated disgracefully. That is why we go in and defend our workers on that, because it is not right and it is widespread. We see every day in the news somewhere that some seasonal workers are treated appallingly. We see that in the press, day in, day out. I am not saying it is all, because it is not all; some come, get on, work hard and earn their money, but others cannot.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: David, you just finish off your question, please, and then we will move on to Paul for the last few questions.

David Simpson: I was on a roll before that bell.

Chair: That is right. Stick with the question.

Q139 **David Simpson:** The last part of the question was: in what ways do you think the bad practices of employers contribute to the labour shortages?

Bridget Henderson: I want to go back to something you said previously.

David Simpson: Something I said?

Bridget Henderson: Yes.

David Simpson: Are you going to pull me up on something?

Bridget Henderson: Not quite. It was this question about how widespread the poor practice is. You would need to talk to the Gangmasters Licensing Authority.

David Simpson: That ties into this question.

Bridget Henderson: Some indicators are, for example, that in 2013 19% of all forced labour victims came from food and farming, and most



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of those came from farming. There was a report from *Horticulture Week* in September 2014 about the Stronger Together campaign, which was a joint initiative between the GLA and the ALP, the labour providers. It was sponsored by retailers and supported by the British Retail Consortium, amongst others. There were quotes from that story saying that 29% of reported trafficking for forced labour—the extreme end—was in food processing and agriculture.

Q140 David Simpson: In answer to my question, then, do you think the bad practices that are reported are affecting recruitment?

Bridget Henderson: It cannot but give the industry a reputation for poor practice to some degree, first of all when the scale of that and the extreme practices and extreme bad practices are reported locally in the UK, but also because those stories will be reported in countries where UK employers would hope to recruit people.

Q141 Dr Paul Monaghan: Good afternoon. The Committee has taken evidence previously that suggested with an absence of skilled and unskilled migrant labour, the agricultural sector will make greater use of automated processes. What impact do you think this would have on the jobs that are currently available in this sector?

Julia Long: It is a fact of life in a lot of sectors now that automation has come in. At the end of the day, there are still jobs that that does create. Especially within the food industry, it will not be total automation. You need skilled workers, you need to train new workers in how to use the automation, and so to me it is not something that should be a fear factor if the industry starts to use it more. Lots of industries are already using automation, and workers are already organising around that. It is not a fear factor for them to use it. In the farming industry, as I said, you would not be able to use it on every job. There would still be jobs that were available, and probably then more UK workers would come and get involved with the high-tech jobs of the automation.

Q142 Dr Paul Monaghan: That is helpful. The question is really about the impact on the availability of jobs. Do you think further automation is going to have a negative or positive impact on skilled jobs or unskilled jobs, the use of migrant labour or the use of domestic labour?

Julia Long: It will have an impact on skilled jobs, because you will need more skilled jobs in the industry, to look after the automated machinery. It would give people more of a career path than what they have at the moment. I do not think it will be a negative impact. Some parts could be negative, but mostly it would be positive.

Q143 Dr Paul Monaghan: You are in favour of further automation in the agricultural sector?

Julia Long: I am not afraid of automation.

Dr Paul Monaghan: You are in favour of it.



Julia Long: Yes.

Dr Paul Monaghan: Bridget?

Bridget Henderson: As Julia said, automation is a fact of life, so whether we were in favour of it or not, it is going to happen anyway. That is also the same in a lot of different industrial sectors, and so we have to adjust to that and adapt to it as a union and a workforce, as we have over the years. There would probably be less demand for unskilled labour, but there would still be some crops that require manual dexterity. It is difficult to imagine there being an automated process that could satisfactorily harvest soft fruit, for example. It is probably being developed at this very moment, but it is not here yet. The other thing about increased automation is that it will need a huge amount of capital expenditure, and there is no sign of that being available yet.

Chair: It is balancing the costs—

Bridget Henderson: Yes. A very high degree of automation, to the extent that we do not currently have now, is a bit of a long way down the track. Unions all over the world and throughout history have always had to adapt to increased mechanisation. It is just what we have to do.

Q144 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** Indeed. The question is not really about the unions, but about the availability of labour and the impact automation would have on that. You are suggesting, I think, that we might see a situation where the number of skilled jobs perhaps starts to increase, because they are required to manage and maintain the automated equipment. There might be a reduction in the availability of unskilled jobs. Is that the point you are making?

Bridget Henderson: Yes.

Q145 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** Is that going to impact negatively more on migrant labour that is currently being used, or on domestic labour? What would be your view? Or will it be a bit of both?

Bridget Henderson: I think a bit of both.

Julia Long: Yes, absolutely.

Q146 **Angela Smith:** Apologies for being late. I will make a very quick point. Just on this issue of mechanisation and automation, you point out, Bridget and Julia, that it will lead to possibly a higher demand for skilled workers. Are you aware of any research being undertaken by the Government on the extent to which such progress will lead to a demand for more training and qualifications, and the cost of that? Has any assessment at all been done on the potential cost in terms of upskilling?

Julia Long: No.

Bridget Henderson: I am not aware.

Julia Long: Nor am I. I would like to be aware.



Q147 **Angela Smith:** Do you think there should be an assessment of what the potential skills need may be, and how much it may cost?

Bridget Henderson: Yes. It should be as part of what we would like to see, which is this long-term, deep-questioning strategy for this industry. It is not just about short-term sticking plasters for acute labour crises, but looking at a whole lot of other things—food security, food sustainability, and so on and so forth. Looking at the shortage of skills, people will need fantastic—

Chair: And the availability of training.

Bridget Henderson: Yes, and high-tech skills. Where are they going to come from? We want a bigger, more complex response to these questions, and automation is one of them. At the moment, I am not aware of any deep research that is going on on that basis.

Q148 **Angela Smith:** It is happening at the moment, is it not? I know that, for instance, workers now have to be qualified to do crop-spraying. There is no reason to think that the Government could not do a fairly good analysis of what the potential costs are, based on historical experience.

Bridget Henderson: Yes. Of course, that certification for operating a crop sprayer or other pieces of relatively high-tech machinery used to be linked to a pay raise, so you got higher pay for certificates in using chainsaws, crop sprayers, pesticide application and all of those things. There is no reason to say that that should not be done, in a much more structured and less haphazard payment system than we currently have.

Q149 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** Ladies, do you think that there is an alternative to the use of unskilled and skilled migrant labour in the agricultural sector?

Julia Long: No. I said earlier on that I think that the food industry as a whole, and the agricultural industry, still need EU workers and migrant workers, and I think they always will. We have no problem with that as long as we see that there is training in place for UK workers as well. As we said at the beginning, we believe that it should be two-pronged, so we have UK workers trained up and EU workers coming in seasonally as well, and continuing to do that. There will not be as many as there are now, because in 1980 it was 5% migrant workers; in 2014, it was 14% migrant workers.

It is about getting a balance, and getting the balance right, and I do not think we should be opening the doors for all migrant workers to be in agriculture and the food supply chain. It should be a good balance of UK workers and EU workers as well.

Q150 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** To a greater or lesser extent, in your view, there will always be a reliance on migrant workers, skilled and unskilled, seasonal and permanent?

Julia Long: Yes. I think so, and it is good for the economy and good for the country as well.



Q151 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** Bridget, do you have anything to add?

Bridget Henderson: Yes, I would agree with that. Given the scale of the industry that we have now, the speed that is demanded and the size of the workforce, it is difficult to see how that could be completely filled with UK workers alone. There will be a continued need, definitely in the short term and probably in the long term, for a range of different skill levels coming in via migrant workers to meet that.

Q152 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** If the availability or opportunity to employ EU workers was stopped completely, what would be the outcome?

Julia Long: Disaster, I think; you could not just do that. It would be a disaster to the economy. That is why we talk about the whole food supply chain and a lot of different sectors that bring in migrant workers. Because of the Brexit vote, and everybody getting excited and using immigrant workers as an argument against staying in Europe, a lot of untruths were told. We need to get the truth out there that we do rely on migrant workers in the health industry and the food industry. We do rely on them, and it would be totally irresponsible of any Government to fully stop migrant workers coming into this country.

We think it is right, but at the same time, we have to make sure that where we have a surplus of people who are not working within the UK, that we give them the opportunities and training to make sure they are working as well.

Dr Paul Monaghan: I think I understand that point. Thank you very much.

Bridget Henderson: Could I just add to that? One of the concerns we would have is if we are discussing the acute labour shortage for this season going ahead. If we take the example of horticulture, growers have contracts to supply supermarkets. They do not have enough labour to harvest those crops. The supermarkets will look elsewhere to have those contracts filled. That has consequences not just for the seasonal workers for that particular grower, but also the permanent people, both migrant workers and UK workers, who work there all year round on preparing the plants for the season ahead.

The concern would be the destabilising effect that that has at that end of the supply chain and all the way up. If you are starting to look for suppliers or contracts outside the UK, that has a knock-on effect on a whole range of jobs—permanent, temporary, skilled, unskilled, UK and not UK. We have concerns on that.

Q153 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** Bridget, you would probably agree with evidence that the Committee has received earlier that it is not just an acute problem but it needs to be monitored and a sustainable solution needs to be developed and implemented.

Bridget Henderson: It is acute and chronic.



Dr Paul Monaghan: Indeed.

Q154 **Chair:** Thank you for that point. Basically, if you cannot get the labour to pick your crop, you then export the whole crop, and of course then export the processing industry with it as well, if you are not careful. It is a knock-on effect.

Julia Long: That has just been proven, has it not, with the iceberg lettuces? The supermarkets have gone to California to bring them in, at a cost to themselves. That shows where they are wasting their money, in a sense, but it is about saying, "They will do this, no matter what". It is about also saying, "Yes, if we are going to have migrant workers in, we have to make sure they are looked after properly, paid properly, and have good working conditions. We have to make sure the GLA is working properly in there, and the Modern Slavery Bill is being looked at properly, to ensure that we are policing all these things as well." We need to do that.

Q155 **Chair:** Thank you very much for giving us some very good evidence this afternoon. That will very much make part of our report. We appreciate you coming; I hope we did not give you too hard a time, and thank you very much for coming to see us.

Julia Long: I think our members give us a harder time.

Bridget Henderson: That is true.

Q156 **Chair:** That is all right then. Perhaps we did not give you a hard enough time. We will bring Chris back in. Send him an application form if you will, please. Thank you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tim Breitmeyer, Minette Batters and George Dunn.

Q157 **Chair:** Thank you very much for joining us; it is good to see you all this afternoon to give us evidence on the availability of labour for food processing and agriculture. It is good to see you all here. Because Minette is sitting on one side, and she is a lady, we will ask her to introduce herself first, and we will go across the panel.

Minette Batters: Chairman, I am Minette Batters, Deputy President of the National Farmers Union.

George Dunn: George Dunn, Chief Executive of the Tenant Farmers Association.

Tim Breitmeyer: Tim Breitmeyer, Deputy President of the Country Land and Business Association.

Q158 **Chair:** Welcome; it is good to have you. I am going to start off with a



fairly blunt question. Why is agriculture so reliant on foreign labour?

Tim Breitmeyer: At the moment, we find that in many of the horticultural and vegetable areas, in particular, we are in areas of significantly good employment. The statistics are out there, and the fact of the matter is that farmers have found that there are not very many unemployed local people to come and fill the jobs. In one particular case, in Cambridgeshire, there are 250 people in that farmer's area on the register for unemployment, and apparently only 50 of those people are really available to hire. That farm needs 1,500 people. The fact of the matter is that there simply is not the supply of labour locally to come forward for that farm. Now that may not be the case in every single farm, but that is certainly one example.

Q159 **Chair:** Just playing devil's advocate, if we spent the same effort as we do on going to Latvia in going to Leeds—that is only one place I would look—or Sheffield, Manchester or Birmingham, would we find that labour?

George Dunn: Adverts go out all over the UK and internationally, and it is about the extent to which individuals present themselves for those jobs in the first instance. Obviously, we are talking about seasonal labour on the one hand, permanent labour on farms, and also labour in the processing sector. I agree entirely with Tim; there is a real dearth of good-quality candidates who present themselves from domestic resources to fill those positions.

Q160 **Chair:** You do not necessarily answer my question when I say that quite a lot of effort goes in from various companies to go to other countries to get labour. I am not saying they are wrong to do that, but are we making that much effort in this country?

George Dunn: Yes, there is plenty of effort that goes in in the UK, trying to recruit people through schools, colleges and educational establishments. It is unfortunate that the extent to which individuals from domestic resources present themselves for work is low, in comparison to what we get from overseas.

Q161 **Chair:** Minette, is that because it is not well paid enough, or because it is not seen as sexy enough? What is the reason why we do not get more home-bred labour?

Minette Batters: There is a raft of reasons. Tim is absolutely right to point out the challenges. Herefordshire is a very good example. Currently 3,000 seasonal workers are needed in Herefordshire and only 400 are currently unemployed. That is picked up right across the country.

It is also a cultural problem. I was visiting a grower in Cornwall last year, who said, "Historically we had no problem sourcing UK workers; we always advertise for UK workers." However, he pointed to a business park adjacent to the farm and said, "People now would rather go and work 9 to 5; they know the hours, it is warm and dry, and they have seen a massive cultural change."



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There is that problem; there is also an educational problem, in that we have one in eight people working in the food and farming sector who absolutely get there by default, and they do not know the jobs that are on offer. It is a whole raft of things that need to be taken into consideration to look at why British people are not engaging in seasonal and permanent jobs.

Q162 **Chair:** You were listening to the evidence we took just now, and some of the points made were that conditions are not good, perhaps, on some farms for the labour. How much do you think that is a deterrent? How widespread is that? Would you refute that and say that most employers are reasonably good at accommodation and looking after their employees?

Tim Breitmeyer: I would say that it is a vicious circle. If they do not look after their employees well enough, they will not keep their employees. Interestingly, the national minimum wage from 1 April, £7.50, is 23p more than the Agricultural Wages Board would have been if you had had 1.75% inflation. I am not sure that is the reason. When you add in the fact that they get accommodation and food in many cases, there is a perfectly attractive package there for people to buy into.

Q163 **Chair:** Do you think the combination is good enough? I know you cannot provide five-star accommodation, but you need to have reasonable accommodation, do you not, in order to attract workers? Do you think on the whole that is the case?

George Dunn: Absolutely. *Farmers Weekly* did a survey a couple of years ago, with 1,300 farm workers with De Lacy. The vast majority said they were happy with their working environment and would recommend it as a career for anybody. The average level of wage rates was very similar to what you would get in other parts of the economy. I am not here to condone bad practice in any working environment, and if it exists in agriculture, it should not exist, but I do not think it is as widespread as your previous witnesses have suggested.

Minette Batters: We certainly know that many growers are paying well above the national living wage, and many workers are receiving £12-plus per hour, particularly with the dip in the exchange rate, in order to get workers to come here. We absolutely would not want to hear about bad accommodation. At the growers I have visited, the accommodation has been excellent, and in fact there has been a sort of community: there was a shop and social facilities available, pool tables and all sorts of things going on to build a community. Of course, many people will have their families with them as well, and they are in very rural locations, so they cannot necessarily just pop into the nearest town. I have been incredibly impressed with the growers I have visited and the facilities I have seen.

Q164 **Chair:** I suppose it can be argued that with a tightening of the labour situation, those that do not provide adequate accommodation and



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conditions are not going to get the workforce.

Minette Batters: No, absolutely.

Q165 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** From what you are all saying, we should be trying to dispel the myth that foreign labour is cheap labour. Is that right?

George Dunn: Absolutely. Yes.

Q166 **Chair:** Naturally, all sorts of arguments were made during the great debate on whether we should be in or out of Europe. That is probably one of the great myths, but it is seen by some sectors that migrant labour keeps wages down. Of course, with the minimum wage that is not the case, and as Minette said, some places are paying well above that in order to get the labour. It is something that needs to be dispelled.

Tim Breitmeyer: Interestingly, one grower said to me this morning that the national minimum wage is helping them to still bring in some of the other eastern Europeans who otherwise would not come—

Chair: Because the exchange rate has dropped so much?

Tim Breitmeyer: Yes, it is countering the drop in the exchange rate.

Chair: That is very relevant.

Q167 **Angela Smith:** 40 years ago, the village I lived in would see local women getting into their Land Rovers in the morning. I can still remember the name of what you would call the “ganglady”, I suppose, who was responsible for making sure the farmers got the labour supply from within the local village for working in the fields in Lincolnshire. That has all changed, so how has it changed over the last 20, 30 or 40 years and why? Why do you think it has changed? I suppose some of the reasons may be cultural, but it would be interesting to get your view on how it has changed over the years.

Tim Breitmeyer: If I could start, one of the problems is that our culture has changed and we do not necessarily see children understanding the countryside and rural matters right from school time, and that feeds right through into later life. They do not see that having a rural job, which might include going out into the fields and being part of that gang, is something they want to do any longer. I have an example of a local gang who used to weed my sugar beet. It was run by a group of about 12 to 15 ladies. They were absolutely fantastic at doing the job. She had to stop, because she cannot get any young people to come forward to do it. I take that back to the fact that we have not got the young engaging in rural life and rural matters as much as they used to.

George Dunn: We need to look at demographics and the macro scale of changes that have taken place in our economy. Certainly, 30 or 40 years ago, villages were much more communal and people did muck in together. We have an increasing number of people who live in rural areas but work elsewhere, or treat it as a dormitory town. The extent to which there is engagement in the local community is lower than we have had in



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30 or 40 years. Obviously, if you look at the employment data that we have, the claimant data for people seeking jobseeker's allowance is about 750,000 people. The number of vacancies in the economy is slightly higher than that at the moment. In terms of the ability, at a macro level, for the industry to secure labour against other types of vacancies that are available, in that frictional economy, it is quite difficult. We are in a different place from where we were 30 or 40 years ago.

Minette Batters: It is something that has been a cultural shift. I visited a pack-house in Kent last year, and they were currently employing 400 workers to pick and pack fruit and veg. They said that 20 years ago every single one of them would have been a UK worker, and now there are only two UK workers there. This is despite the fact that what I do pick up is, "We are continually advertising in the UK. It is not the fact that we are not trying to get UK workers."

When I asked them about that they said, "Those people are not living in that area any more." He said, "They used to drop the children off at school, go to work in the pack-house, finish work, go to pick the children up and go home. That whole community, as it was then, is not there now." It has just changed, but it is certainly not because people are not trying to employ UK workers. The offer is still there, and in many cases the offer is still being taken up, but not in the numbers that it used to be.

Q168 **Angela Smith:** My first school was an old Land Army building, so I know what you mean. I just wonder whether part of this is also gender-related, because the changes in the employment of women over the last 30 to 40 years have been very dramatic. Women have entered the mainstream workforce in much greater numbers now, thank goodness, as compared with, say, the 1960s. I just wonder whether one of the reasons why what is still seen as relatively casualised work is now being abandoned by women is because they have moved into full-time, permanent employment.

Minette Batters: Very much so, which has actually fit with Government policy now for quite a few years, has it not? They have a high achievers education policy.

Q169 **Angela Smith:** Then my instinct, which was that largely women did fulfil this role in the past, was right.

Minette Batters: They were predominantly women.

Angela Smith: In large numbers. Yes.

Q170 **David Simpson:** Does the size of farm change the level of demand for migrant workers?

George Dunn: Obviously, the smaller you are, the fewer people you are going to employ. If you are employing one additional cowman, or cowlady, if that person disappears then the impact on your business is huge in comparison to someone who might employ 10 and lose half a



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dozen. On an absolute level the numbers are lower, but the impact on your business could be quite substantial.

Minette Batters: The point was made to me the other day by our dairy board chairman not to think that this is specific to horticulture. He made the point that if he did not have access to a foreign herdsman, it would be catastrophic to him, because to his business, one man or one woman was just as important as an army. I thought it was a very good point. I am also minded that we have just finished the NFU conference and I had many, certainly poultry producers, coming up to me and saying that they are incredibly worried about the permanent situation in the supply chain. They were talking about figures of 80%, so I am minded of that in this conversation.

Tim Breitmeyer: I would only add that, certainly in the small businesses, when it comes to the present situation we have at the moment, firms are finding it difficult to find labour for this coming summer. The bigger firms, as the Chairman has already said, are going to Romania and Bulgaria; they have got their HR departments on the job and there is social media interaction. They are doing all of that, but the owner of a small business of 10 people does not have the resource to do that. He turns to the gangmaster, and the gangmasters at the moment have a 40% to 50% no-show rate as far as eastern Europeans coming into the country are concerned.

Q171 **David Simpson:** The last part of the question, George, is specifically to you. What proportion of tenant farmers employ labour from the other EU countries?

George Dunn: I would not have a figure on that, to be perfectly frank.

David Simpson: Could you guess?

George Dunn: The amount of labour on farms on tenanted units has decreased massively. In the dairy sector it would be much higher; I would say you are looking probably at a third of tenanted dairy farmers in the dairy sector would be employing someone from eastern Europe. In pig and poultry, 40% to 50% of those farms in the tenanted sector would be employing them. It is less so in livestock and upland areas.

Q172 **Chair:** Can I just ask, as a previous dairy farmer, are we doing enough through the colleges and everything else to get somebody, either man or woman, who can be a herdsman? Being a good herdsman or herdsman is very difficult. Through the colleges, we are teaching agriculture in certain ways, but are we actually bringing enough people through with those skills?

George Dunn: There is an issue, Mr Chairman, in the debate about new entrants to our sector. There are plenty of people who are aspiring to be new entrants to the agricultural industry. We are inundated with people who want to come into the industry, but they want to be principals. They want to be business owners in their own right. We need to turn that



enthusiasm for working in our industry around to saying, "There are lots of jobs to be done in the industry, and you can be well paid and looked after within the industry, rather than being your own boss." It might be in time to come you can become your own boss, but certainly there is a job of work to do to convince that great groundswell of enthusiasm to think about employment as opposed to self-employment.

Q173 **Chair:** I know in New Zealand the situation is not exactly the same, because there are more farms and a greater, more rural area, but there are a lot of younger people who will go in as herdsmen and herdswomen, and then come through to manage those farms. Perhaps there is something there. Somehow or other, we have to have more of an incentive to bring people in, have we not? Do you think so?

George Dunn: Yes, and even in jobs at the moment, where people have been in vegetable-cutting operations or on poultry farms as labour, they have risen to managerial positions and supervisory levels in those businesses. There are career structures available, and yes, we need to be doing more to promote those within schools and colleges.

Q174 **Rishi Sunak:** What are your thoughts on the prospects for automation substituting for manual labour in the agricultural sector in the years ahead?

Minette Batters: The ability is there. We have a machine that can pick a strawberry. In order to understand the cost involved, you have to look at the current cost. You have the national living wage, auto-enrolment, the apprenticeship levy and ethical trading. You already have these huge costs on that supply chain. You have had no price movement over the last 10 years on fruit and vegetables. You have new imposed costs, you have had little price alteration over a long period of time, and mechanisation will be incredibly expensive. Currently, a lettuce-picker alone costs over £1 million, and that still requires five people to operate it.

The technology to pick a strawberry is absolutely there, but rolling it out and getting the investment needed will take time. When people are talking about 10 years, I think they are talking about 10 years to develop the machine. The machine is there, but it will be the massive cost of getting this technology rolled out.

Tim Breitmeyer: Chairman, I would not disagree with that. There is technology. Much of it is already being used, as we have heard already. It is already expensive. It is not as though farmers are not innovative. They have taken it to the boundaries of where they can already, and there is more coming along, but there is a huge expense involved.

George Dunn: It is the law of diminishing returns. We have worked hard over decades to mechanise agriculture and reduce the labour requirement on farms and in processing plants. We have taken all of that low-hanging fruit. We are now on the most difficult part of the curve, to



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try to get those jobs like picking and people on the killing line within an abattoir. Those are the most difficult to mechanise, and will be the most difficult to mechanise for many years to come, so we are at the most difficult part of the curve.

Q175 Angela Smith: Very quickly, on that point, in my constituency, what I suppose is rather a specialised crop is bilberries. I cannot imagine a situation in which bilberry-picking will ever be mechanised, frankly, given the nature of the terrain on which you tend to find bilberries. What do you think are the limits of mechanisation?

Tim Breitmeyer: On that particular example, you have hit the problem. There comes a point where the quality of the produce going to the supermarket shelf limits the amount of mechanisation you can do. We have mechanised sugar beet harvesters, but it does not matter what the sugar beet looks like when it gets to the factory. You want your lettuce and your carrot to be perfect on the supermarket shelf, and only a pair of human hands can ensure that it is the quality you need, at the moment.

Angela Smith: Presumably Minette and George agree with that.

Minette Batters: A lot of it will be down to investment in the supply chain, in the processing and manufacturing sector, particularly within livestock production. There is a real opportunity for mechanisation to do a lot of that work, but again, where is the investment going to come from? Many would already feel frustrated at the lack of investment in our processing sector. The point was made earlier about the cheap food policy, which has led to a lack of investment in that supply chain. Mechanisation to help out with permanent workers within the processing and manufacturing sector will help, but it is all a challenge of investment.

George Dunn: I would say again that for each labour unit you displace, the costs of that, in terms of the investment required, are now considerably higher than they have been in years gone by.

Chair: It is more technical and costly.

Q176 Dr Paul Monaghan: Minette, if I were to go out this afternoon and place an order for a machine that picked strawberries, what would the delivery time be? How long would it take to be manufactured and delivered to my farm?

Minette Batters: It is in too early a stage to even get to that stage. It exists, and we have seen it in operation. I do not think it is even available to buy on a scale basis in any shape or form yet.

Q177 Dr Paul Monaghan: It is fair to say, then, that automation is not a quick-fix solution to an acute labour problem?

Minette Batters: Absolutely. That is the point I made when I said 10 years. The technology there, but it is probably 10 years away.

Q178 Dr Paul Monaghan: And you obviously all agree with that?



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George Dunn: Absolutely.

Tim Breitmeyer: I am afraid so, yes.

Q179 **Chair:** Good point. Minette, as you know, I was at the NFU conference yesterday. In one of the break-outs, I was watching a machine that had a laser and was going along taking out the weeds. It had a computer inside it, identifying the weeds. For specific, organic farming I would imagine this would be a godsend, but how long will it be before we have those in the mainstream? Its link to my question really is about how much Government should be supporting this. Should they be supporting it by grant, or supporting mechanisation by tax relief? What is the best way for the Government to promote automation more than it is at the moment? Is it research and development? What is it?

Minette Batters: You have, effectively, the three White Papers that are due for consultation: the food and farming one, the environment one and the industrial one. There is very clear evidence now, as we build a bespoke policy for the UK, that all three should be intrinsically linked. All three can then answer those questions. I see the industrial strategy as being particularly helpful, especially working with the current agritech strategy. R&D will be a lot of our future. We want to continue to be a world leader in farming, supported by the UK's world-leading science. We are making great strides in precision farming, and technical advances with that. That, Chairman, is far more on track and far easier to get out and functioning in the field than the automation and mechanisation for harvesting.

Q180 **Chair:** I am in danger of leading you all as witnesses, but I think probably the argument is that we can get more automation in, but it will take a while, so we have to have a supply of labour in the meantime. Machines are never going to take over entirely from labour, are they? All this takes a certain amount of time. Tim, you wanted to come in.

Tim Breitmeyer: I would just say on the method, as far as Government policy is concerned, that I think capital allowances are already there for machinery. Buildings would go a long way to helping a lot of these projects, and then grant funding is there. Grant funding needs to be reasonably simple to access.

Q181 **Chair:** Are you saying it is sometimes complicated?

Tim Breitmeyer: Reasonably simple; I am aware of the fact that some of these projects are hugely expensive pieces of equipment, and people should have to justify why they need that investment. But we heard yesterday of a particular poultry farmer who had frankly decided the process was too complicated, and just got on with it and done it himself. That is not a good way of producing productive agriculture in the future.

George Dunn: It is important that we view this discussion through the lens of productivity. Productivity has quite a number of aspects that play upon that. Automation is one of them; skill set, research and



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development, etc. are all very important. So long as we have a good strategy for how we improve our productivity, which as a nation we have to do more of more generally across the economy, then I think tax grants, near-market research and development all have a role to play in that.

Q182 Chair: This could be very important in a brave new world and a brave new agricultural policy, could it not?

Minette Batters: Absolutely.

George Dunn: If the Government were minded to begin to spend more of the scarce public resources on investing in things like near-market research and development for agricultural innovation, which it could not have done previously in the context of a European Union settlement, that would certainly be a good thing. It would be good for our industry and for ensuring that productivity within our sector was improved.

Q183 Ms Margaret Ritchie: My question relates to the whole area of agriculture being seen as a career choice. What role do your organisations play in increasing the desirability of careers in agriculture, both within schools, colleges and external to that, within the wider job recruiting market?

Minette Batters: We are members of the agrifood workforce strategy, which is actually chaired by the Food and Drink Federation. We do a lot of work through FACE with schools. We work very closely with the land-based colleges, and we are very proactive right the way through. We also are actively engaging with the apprenticeship and trailblazer process. Currently we only have 900 apprenticeships on farms, so it is a very small part. That is not to say that it cannot grow, and it can. What we have said for a long time is that there is a real need for a roadmap through primary and into secondary, into the colleges and universities, and then into the workplace.

First, people do not understand what jobs are on offer, as I said earlier. They are not necessarily finding the right colleges to go to, and then when they are in the colleges, it is all about the jobs at the end of that, which are not always linked to land tenure or land ownership. There are many, many other jobs within the whole supply chain. We are—and I am sure everybody else is—actively engaged at all levels. I still think there is a very big role for Government in all of this, to provide a leadership role and the massive cultural change that will need to happen.

George Dunn: I agree entirely with Minette. We are locked into all sorts of strategies and initiatives and plans and programmes to try to encourage people to consider it. As I said earlier in my remarks, we are inundated with people who are looking to come into the sector as businesspeople in their own right. Trying to encourage them to consider employment as an alternative to being businesspeople in their own right is quite difficult, but we continue to pursue that. I was a member of



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David Fursdon's Future of Farming review group, which considered the role of employment and how we could raise the extent to which employment was something that people aspired to.

I absolutely agree with Minette: the industry is up for a discussion with Government. If we are not going to have access to the level of migrant labour that we have had to date, if automation is not going to be our saviour in the medium term, then we need to have a new arrangement with Government where we work together at raising the ability to secure labour from domestic resources. That will take five to 10 years to achieve.

Q184 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** George, as a result of those discussions you have with schools and colleges and externally, about the desirability of agriculture and work within either agriculture on the farm or agrifood processing, what has been the success of that?

George Dunn: It has been pretty small, and we do not attract the numbers into employment that we would like. Again, as Minette would say, in other parts of the agricultural industry, if we look at the supply sector, vets, agronomists, consultants and processing and abattoirs etc., the take-up, I am afraid, is low. That tends to be because of cultural issues, which we do need the Government to work with us to try to break.

Tim Breitmeyer: From the point of view of what our organisation can do, we certainly have to try to persuade Government that this whole education process is critical, going forward, to getting the young into agriculture. Interestingly, I am very taken by the fact that we have to get the food industry involved in this as well. We are seeing some of the most successful examples of the food industry bringing young people on in partnerships. I cite Sainsbury's and Nestlé as a couple of examples. That seems to be a very good way of bringing young people into agriculture.

With our members themselves, we have got to try to make our membership understand that they have an ambassadorial role. We have to try to get them to go out into schools and have Open Farm Sunday etc., and equally be prepared to take on apprentices and mentor those young people through to a successful career.

George Dunn: It is also difficult for schools. I am a school governor in a school in Theale, in Reading, and the extent to which you can find the time to engage in all sorts of industries like agriculture is very limited for schools. We get the point that schools that are strapped for time and resource in doing this as well.

Tim Breitmeyer: I regret to say I have to add that they also come up against health and safety, which they find is a reason for not doing it.

Q185 **Simon Hart:** I was struck by something Minette said earlier about all



these smart-sounding initiatives, projects and campaigns you are involved in. Who measures the effectiveness of them? Have you been able to compare where you are now to where you were five years ago, to be able to define whether your involvement in those initiatives has been worth it?

Minette Batters: Certainly our involvement with apprenticeships and trailblazers is following the Government initiative and the drive to get many more apprentices out into the work area. I do not think they will ever really fit apprenticeships for many farming and growing businesses. Certainly, for the seasonal workforce, apprenticeships are not a fit. There is potential, maybe, for more of them in the supply chain, but that still would be quite challenging in places. Are we measuring it enough? Probably not. At the moment it is quite difficult to measure, and as I think George would say, not enough is probably happening. Until there is clearer signposting and understanding, that is probably going to continue to happen.

George Dunn: I would share that, but I would also say that when I started my role at the TFA back in 1997, you could not even get anybody to consider agriculture as a career. It was an industry that was on its knees and was in decline at that point. We had sons and daughters walking away from farms because it was not something they aspired to. At least today we have an excited, exhilarated bunch of young people, who see agriculture as an exciting place to be involved economically. The trick now is to get them to think about being employed, as opposed to having their own businesses.

We have done a remarkably good job, and campaigns like Why Farming Matters, which the NFU ran a few years ago, have raised the bar. If you look at the extent to which we see farming now on national TV, with *Countryfile*, *First Time Farmers*, *The Farmers' Country Showdown*, we are seeing farming being portrayed in the good light that we all know it should be. It is about making sure that those people are nudged to think about employment as opposed to being employers.

Tim Breitmeyer: The ultimate measurement must be how many of those apprentices eventually arrive full-time in the workforce. I will be honest; I do not know the figure, but certainly that is a measure of success.

Q186 **Simon Hart:** It is perhaps an area that the Committee can explore in greater detail with other witnesses; we may have a conversation about that. George, I think your comments about where you have come from are quite encouraging, but there must be something you can put your finger on that has been especially successful in that time. That could be a Government activity or indeed union activity. Who has been the driver? To what do you ascribe that success?



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George Dunn: It is like the apostle Paul said, “By all means convince them”. There has been a whole raft of initiatives that have raised the profile. People’s interest in food has become more intense over time.

Q187 **Simon Hart:** That is what I am getting at. Has that been initiatives that the farming unions have been behind and financed and pushed, or has Government played a part? If it has not, should it have played more of a part?

Minette Batters: Without doubt, yes. The GCSE in Food is a classic example. It was going to be linked to primary production—that was always the plan—and then they dropped the link to primary production. The industry is now going above and beyond, and it is brilliant. We have things like Open Farm Sunday; we have all sorts of initiatives where the industry works together and we showcase what we do on our farms. I do not think that is matched by the Government commitment at this stage.

George Dunn: That is why we have the issue with employment, because schools and colleges have driven more towards employment than self-employment, and because the Government have not thought it appropriate to be supporting those vocational qualifications as we have done in the past. We are seeing a big problem.

Q188 **Simon Hart:** With that in mind, what were you actually getting at, in more detail, when you were talking about overcoming cultural issues—if that was the expression you used? They were George’s words.

George Dunn: There is a tendency now for young people to consider employment in terms of sitting in front of a computer screen, in an office, in a town centre where they have access to all sorts of facilities. They do not necessarily see the benefit of working in an outdoor environment, in amongst nature, with flexible hours, with livestock that are quite rewarding and give back as much as you give to them. It is about their lack of appreciation of the opportunities that might be available to them out there.

Tim Breitmeyer: If I could add to that, we also had quite a significant period of time where we were encouraging the young to go to university, to then go on into media and financial services and technology, etc. Agriculture did not feature on the aspirations of a young person, and certainly not on the aspirations of that young person’s parents, either.

Q189 **Chair:** Sometimes we do not realise how technical agriculture and food production is, right from the farm. The average tractor now lights up like a computer or a Christmas tree when you get inside it, does it not? You have to press all the right buttons, and I never press the right ones. Let us face it: young people like to drive machinery, they like to do all these things, but they do not necessarily know it is there. That is perhaps what we can do more of.

Tim Breitmeyer: The young people who come to Open Farm Sunday are absolutely enthralled by what they see, but it is a question of rolling



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that out to the nation, so that they reconnect with the countryside and farming, and understand that there is a career there.

Chair: The point that Minette was making, George, was that we do not have as many vocational qualifications there; that is something we can register from the evidence we have taken. It has been a retrograde step that some of the colleges now do not have the vocational qualifications and they are not allowed to do it. I have been making representations about this, so I think we will take that and add it to the report.

Q190 **Angela Smith:** On your point about science and farms, Chair, in Yorkshire probably some damage was done by documentaries such as the one about Hannah Hauxwell, the Yorkshire Dales farmer. These tended to suggest that farmers wanted to stick very much in the past, rather than move forwards to the future. As heroic as that farmer was, it actually sent some very negative messages out to young people at the time. The image of farming is changing, but probably still needs some attention, perhaps.

Minette Batters: I guess it is fair to say that there is not a problem in the bulk of the farming industry. This is quite specific. It is very much within the supply chain, within the horticultural and poultry sectors, and certainly the dairy sector and livestock to a certain extent. It is very much for permanent workers in the supply chain and seasonal workers in the horticulture and poultry sector. There are many people wanting to do those jobs on farms, and there is a plentiful supply of UK workers. It is not that we are saying it is not an attractive industry, because there is clear proof out there that in many cases it is.

Q191 **Angela Smith:** Is there a particular problem with upland farmers?

Minette Batters: We have seen massive consolidation within the hill farming sector, and many people now are just using family labour alone and that is it. That has been the consolidation that has happened within the industry.

Q192 **Angela Smith:** It is really important to remember that this industry is very, very widely differentiated.

Minette Batters: It is incredibly complex and very different, right across the country.

George Dunn: We should not underestimate the extent to which we have a problem in our processing sectors if we lose access to migrant labour overnight, because the industry will contract to the level of the processing capacity that is available. If we do not fill those positions, we will simply see our production move overseas, and we will have exported our environmental and animal welfare concerns overseas if we do not have adequate processing staff. We are not saying we want to be employing migrant labour forever; we just want to employ good labour in our processing sectors.



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If that means we can work positively with the Government to see a long-term plan to displace migrant labour with UK labour, fine, let us do that, but let us not have a situation where it is no longer available to the processing sector. Otherwise, it will have really damaging effects, not just on the industry but on the wider economy and the environment as well.

Q193 Angela Smith: Finally, on the supply of labour, the question of vocational qualifications is an interesting one. The Sainsbury review will push us more into technical qualifications, rather than vocational. I am not quite aware of agriculture's place in that; I am going to look at it. There is also the issue that I raised with the union, of the investment we will need in further upskilling of the workforce as it automates over the next 10 years or so. I asked the unions whether they felt the Government were doing the necessary research to establish what the skill needs of the industry may be over the next decade or so. Can I have your response to that?

Tim Breitmeyer: I think the Government are aware of the fact that there is a requirement to put significantly more effort into upskilling. Having said that, I do not think we have really tackled the subject yet, but I get the feeling that the Government feel skills in the workforce is a very key point going forward for any future policy. Not only will it be the investment, but also the time it will take when it comes to filling in with migrant labour in the meanwhile.

George Dunn: I think the Government are beginning to understand the size of the task they have ahead of them. The *Times* reported David Davis this morning talking about the extent to which we might continue to need access to migrant labour for years to come, while we upskill and fill the needs from our own domestic resources. If they reported him correctly, then the message is beginning to get home that we need to be focusing more on this area.

Angela Smith: It has had a pretty negative response in some quarters, but yes.

Minette Batters: What we have asked for over many months now is for Government to commission the Migration Advisory Committee to look at what is needed, and the industry would be fully prepared to support that. That work is crucial and wants doing right now. If I may make another point, Chairman, because it is very important, we had the Secretary of State, Andrea Leadsom, speaking at our conference and she talked about still needing more evidence for supply chain and farming. That gift now lies within her grasp. She needs to commission the Migration Advisory Committee to do that work. We have also had a very clear ask in for a long time now that we want Government to trial a seasonal agricultural workers scheme.

Chair: We are going to go on and talk about that.

Minette Batters: You are coming on to that. I did not want you to finish without my having got across my point.



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Q194 **Chair:** You will have your opportunity on that with the next question. Just before we move from this question, I want to talk about the point you made, George. In my area, I have Willand, the poultry factory that processes nearly 1 million poultry per week. Nearly 80% of that workforce is central and eastern European. Not only does it affect that processing plant, but all the farms around it that are producing those poultry. It is not only the farms but the supply chain and everything. If we unravel one part of it, we are going to destroy the whole lot. We will export the whole lot of it, lock, stock and barrel, if we are not careful.

Tim Breitmeyer: It is interesting that the Food and Drink Federation yesterday quoted the figure that 120,000 out of 450,000 workers in their sector are migrant labour.

Chair: It just shows the need for it. That leads us neatly into David's question, which is about the seasonal agricultural workers scheme.

Q195 **David Simpson:** There are two questions, but I will roll them into one because of time. If a new seasonal agricultural workers scheme were to be introduced, approximately how many people should it cover? If it was introduced, what sectors would require permanent or non-seasonal labour?

Minette Batters: I can say it all again. I was ahead of the game.

David Simpson: You were very eager to get at that.

Minette Batters: I was. On the permanent workers, we absolutely need that work to be done by the MAC. That needs to happen. On the seasonal workers, this is very specific. For horticulture we currently need 80,000 seasonal workers. That is to pick and pack; remember that much of the fruit and veg in this country is not only being harvested but also processed on farms. We currently need 80,000, and that is set to rise to 95,000 by 2021. It is worth remembering that even if we had not had the referendum, we would still be going to Government saying, "We would like you to trial a large-scale global scheme for seasonal workers, people who come here and work for a period and then go home again." We were already seeing, and we have evidence through our surveys that we have done, a shortfall in people wanting to come here.

That was massively exacerbated after the referendum, with the exchange rate and people feeling less welcome. That ask has been in for some time now, and we really do need an answer so that we can prepare. We hope it will be a positive answer; the long-term ambition is to bring in 90,000 seasonal workers, but we need some clarity on whether that is achievable this year. It is fairly urgent for this year that we set the process in motion for what will be needed in the post-Brexit era.

Q196 **David Simpson:** When was that request put in to the Government?

Minette Batters: That was put in in November 2016.

Q197 **David Simpson:** Has there been any response yet?



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Minette Batters: We had a very positive meeting with the Immigration Minister, Robert Goodwill. They clearly understand the problems that the sector has, but I believe now it sits with No. 10.

Chair: What we may well do is try to get Robert Goodwill in here to give us evidence, and we will pursue that point for you.

Minette Batters: We would urgently like clarity on the ask.

Tim Breitmeyer: The importance of the seasonal agricultural workers scheme coming in as soon as possible, as indeed was the case in the past, is that this is access for a global workforce. We need to have the brightest and the best people from around the world now, not just the eastern Europeans, which is where we got to over the last five years. The system was 21,000 when it finished in 2013; I would suggest that we possibly need to have a scheme with 21,000 as soon as possible and then grow that to Minette's 95,000 by 2021, if we have not got eastern Europeans coming in.

George Dunn: I do not have anything to add to the numbers but would say that we are really up against it this year because of what we have referred to before. The exchange rate change means that the supply of labour is going to be much lower, because these people will take the money back home with them; and also, sadly, people are feeling less welcome in certain parts of the country than they had been previously. That is causing people to consider whether or not it is the right thing to come. We are up against it in terms of securing that supply. We need to work hard with Government to get that done.

Q198 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** The Committee has taken some evidence in the past that suggests the UK Government are, in fact, listening closely to the concerns of the agricultural sector and its labour demands. How receptive would each of you say the UK Government have been, to date, in recognising the concerns of the agricultural sector? Perhaps I will start with Tim.

Tim Breitmeyer: They have always recognised that there is a requirement, and we have always had from Defra the recognition that the requirement is there for that seasonal labour force to continue. It has finally been acknowledged by all of Government, possibly yesterday, in the statement made in Estonia. There is quite clearly a recognition now that it is going to be a huge requirement for quite a long time.

Q199 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** Just for the record, would you like to give an outline of what that announcement in Estonia was?

Tim Breitmeyer: It was that there would need to be a UK requirement for seasonal workers going forward, for the foreseeable future, to plug the gap where there was no UK labour force to do the seasonal work.

Q200 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** Who made that announcement?

Tim Breitmeyer: David Davis, the Brexit Secretary.



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George Dunn: As Tim said, as David Davis has said, there is a need, and that is beginning to be understood by Government. I would characterise the current situation as a lot of activity, but not much impact yet. My diary is full of meetings with civil servants, Ministers and others about Brexit, and we are talking lots about it, and the messages appear to be being received. But as Minette said, we are yet to see some real action in getting some serious traction to get these things moving.

Q201 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** How concerned are you about that lack of action?

George Dunn: Obviously, there is a lot to be done in the interim period, before the Government trigger Article 50 with parliamentary approval, assuming that comes, and set out the White Paper and the negotiating strands etc. We think that we now need to be putting in place at least the framework and strategy for what we are going to do beyond the point that we leave the European Union, and, as Minette has said, there are things that we need to be doing today to resolve some of those issues, so we are getting more and more concerned as time goes by.

Q202 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** It is increasingly urgent, then?

George Dunn: Absolutely.

Q203 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** Minette, do you have anything to add? The Government are receptive.

Minette Batters: The clear message we get back is, "We understand the problem but do not know what to do about it." That would be my shortcut language for how it is being addressed at the moment. To us, it is far more about the movement of labour and how we move labour here, rather than the movement of people. The movement of labour is absolutely key. I cannot stress how important it is that we provide some clarity over this in the short term. We have already probably seen far too much consolidation in the processing sector. We will shrink the sector to the size of the workforces; it is as plain and simple as that.

Our British strawberry has been a massive success story; we have been talking here about what farmers want, but we have actually not talked about what consumers want. The fact that we are now 50% self-sufficient in British strawberries has been a massive success story. It is the consumer who is going to lose out just as much as the producer, if we do not sort out both the seasonal and the permanent.

Q204 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** We have had some evidence in the past from your colleagues in the sector, which has suggested that if the UK Government do not get sorted out, food will literally rot in the fields.

Minette Batters: Meurig Raymond, our president, made this statement in his opening speech yesterday. We need to make sure that we have the workforce, people who have been coming here to pick and pack fruit and veg, or, as has happened before, it will rot in the fields. Look at the crisis with broccoli and the climatic conditions in the rest of Europe. There is



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clear emphasis—Iain Wright was very bold in his thinking—that food security is of national security to the nation. There is nothing more important than the food you eat, and we should be prioritising it and looking at it very differently from how we have done in the past.

Tim Breitmeyer: I can possibly add to that an example of the rotting vegetables in the field was when the SAW scheme was stopped in 2013 because, with the new countries coming on board, they did not feel they would need an SAW scheme any longer. Those new countries did not produce the labour force that they thought they were going to. Certainly, I know one farmer in the Fens who ploughed in £200,000-worth of lettuces because he had nobody to pick them.

What happens is that that then moves on to the fact that a lot of these big vegetable businesses are pan-European, and I absolutely know for a fact that they are strategically looking at the “What happens if?” scenario. That, I am afraid, includes the possibility of exporting some of the business itself into Europe.

Dr Paul Monaghan: Interesting. I think what you are suggesting there, in respect of—

Tim Breitmeyer: I am not saying it is happening yet, but strategically they will be looking at that.

Q205 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** In relation to the example that you gave about the SAW scheme and when it ended previously, there were obvious lessons attached to that, in terms of farmers ploughing crops into the field and the rest of it.

Tim Breitmeyer: Yes. There was a lack of labour, and that individual had planted his crop and was assuming he would deliver it to the supermarket shelf, but the lack of labour meant that he had made a significant loss.

Q206 **Dr Paul Monaghan:** My suggestion that I was putting to you was that the UK Government do not seem to have learned the lessons from that.

Tim Breitmeyer: Sorry. It is a long time ago, and we do need to just bear in mind that it is affecting productivity and people.

Dr Paul Monaghan: George, do you want to say something?

George Dunn: No, I would just say that we will wait and see. As Minette has said, the ask has gone in; we have yet to see a proper response.

Q207 **Chair:** One of the problems we have politically is that you all see, and we see in this Committee, the need to have migrant labour in order to keep our businesses going. The problem we have out there politically is we have quite a lot of people who say, “We do not want people to come in; we have too many people here now.” Therefore, that is partly why, when labour came in from central and eastern Europe, when it was allowed in freely, people said too much came in.



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That is partly why the scheme was stopped by the Government in 2013. I accept very much what you were saying, Tim, but the political problem we have is that we have to try to explain to people that if we do not have the labour in, we will not have the business here. The point you made, Tim, about the export of a lettuce or cauliflower business is that any amount of vegetables can be grown across the whole of Europe, or elsewhere in the world, and they can be exported just like that.

George Dunn: On this side of the table, we get that there is a political issue but, as Minette said, we should be talking about movement of labour, not movement of people. We are talking about people who are economically active in our country, providing services to our industry, to enable food to reach shelves, to provide what consumers want. We need to understand how we ensure that that supply of good-quality, environmentally friendly, high animal welfare product arrives on our shelves in a way that consumers can access.

The Government have talked a lot about wanting to control immigration, not stop it, and we understand that, but in order to control something you have to understand what it is you need to bring in to fulfil the requirements of the economy at that time. That is what we are not getting.

Q208 **Chair:** What we will try to do is get the Home Office Minister here, and we will try to put to him very much the fact that we need this labour. I think he has to put to us exactly how we are going to control that labour to make sure that they do come in, particularly for the jobs that we need, and they do not come in here and just slip into the rest of the economy. We have to live in the real world, because whichever side we were on in the argument about in or out of Europe, we have had that vote. Therefore, a lot of people out there are concerned.

George, you made a very good point. It is about the ability for people to come here and work, and create work not only for themselves but for the betterment of our economy. This is the challenge for us, really.

George Dunn: If the political objective is to, at some point in the future, ensure that we are securing a greater proportion of our employed labour from domestic resources, we are up for that discussion about how we achieve that over a period of time. All we are saying is that we cannot do it immediately; we cannot do it in the short or medium term. It is going to be a long-term ask, but we are up for that discussion. However, let us not cut off our industry at its knees by not allowing it to have access to the labour it needs today.

Tim Breitmeyer: Chairman, there is also a very important point here about language. We need to get away from talking about skilled and unskilled labour. There is a defined need for every part of the sector as to what they need to come. Some of them are seasonal, and they should come, work and go, and others are more permanent.

Q209 **Angela Smith:** There is a developing debate, not a left-right debate but



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one that is happening within the left as well as on the right of the spectrum, about whether or not to support quotas on the basis of skilled and unskilled. My own view is that quotas are unworkable, but I would be interested to hear your views on that, in terms of agriculture.

George Dunn: As Tim said, rather than skilled and unskilled we need to understand what the level of need is. Can that need be supplied from domestic resources, or to what extent? If there is need that cannot be supplied from domestic resources, where do we get that from internationally, and how do we attract the best people internationally for that need?

Q210 **Angela Smith:** Do you think it is the role of the state to determine what those needs are, year on year, and to place limits?

George Dunn: It is certainly the role of the Government to ensure that our economy can function and that we are developing as a nation, so there is definitely a role for them there. You talked about setting limits.

Angela Smith: Quotas.

George Dunn: We need to understand what the size of the need is, how much of that need can be resourced domestically and how we acquire the difference. That is the discussion in which the Government legitimately have a place at the table.

Tim Breitmeyer: I believe there are enough industry bodies who can provide that information as to exactly how much their sector needs.

Minette Batters: Quite honestly, until they commission this work through the MAC, we do not know. They must do this work first before we have that conversation. It is very clear on the evidence; the seasonal workers issue is absolutely as clear as crystal, and the Government need to commission this work through the MAC before they can get to deciding whether quotas is the way to handle it, or not.

Q211 **Chair:** Thank you. That was a very good evidence session. It is about making sure, too, that we do not just talk about skilled labour versus seasonal labour; there is a lot of semi-skilled labour, and an awful lot of labour that we need, and that is the great challenge. As I said, I am not sure that the Home Office Minister is too keen on coming before us, but we are working on it.

George Dunn: I am sure you will persist.

Chair: Yes. We will make it abundantly clear that we want him here. I think we can almost drag them here, but I do not know whether it quite works that way. We will get them here and, as I said, we will put these questions to them. I thank you very much, because what you have given us quite clearly today is the evidence of what we need to do: to keep a flow of labour in order to keep our industry going and flourishing. We want to move forward; we want greater production and not less production. Margaret, did you want to make a point?



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Ms Margaret Ritchie: In parallel to the issue to do with the Home Office Minister is the one in the fishing industry. Fishing fleets in the west of Scotland and in Northern Ireland would be tied up if there was not the dependence on migrant labour, particularly Filipinos, who are international seafarers. There is a lack of recognition on that. People think they go on land; they never go on land, they live on the boat, and that needs to be addressed as well.

Chair: It is all very complex, because in the end we need this labour in order to keep our industry going. Anyway, thank you very much for some good evidence, and we look forward to putting the report together and to putting many of your questions to the Minister when he comes before us. Thank you very much.