



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [2 Sisters and Standards in Poultry Processing](#), HC 490

Wednesday 25 October 2017 [afternoon sitting]

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Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Alan Brown; Paul Flynn; John Grogan; Dr Caroline Johnson; Sandy Martin; Mrs Sheryll Murray; David Simpson¹; Angela Smith; Julian Sturdy.

Questions 107-324

Witnesses: **Jan Britton**, Chief Executive, Sandwell Metropolitan Council; **Bob Charnley**, Trading Standards Officer, Sandwell Metropolitan Council; **Jason Feeney CBE**, Chief Executive, Food Standards Agency; and **Jose Gomez-Luengo**, Audit Veterinary Leader, Food Standards Agency, gave evidence.

Q107 **Chair:** Welcome, gentlemen, to our second panel for our inquiry into the food safety issues at the 2 Sisters plant in particular, and generally throughout the industry. Could I please ask you to introduce yourselves, and then we will start taking evidence from you?

Jose Gomez-Luengo: I am Jose Gomez-Luengo, part of Operations Assurance. I work as an audit veterinary lead. I head a team of auditors that visit meat plants, including those of 2 Sisters.

Jason Feeney: I am Jason Feeney. I am the Chief Executive of the Food Standards Agency.

Jan Britton: I am Jan Britton. I am the Chief Executive of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

Bob Charnley: Bob Charnley, and I am Trading Standards Manager for Sandwell Council.

Q108 **Chair:** Thank you very much. I will start with the first question. When were you first made aware of the allegations of malpractice at the 2 Sisters plant at West Bromwich? Jason, I would have thought that is your ball, really.

¹ David Simpson declared his non-pecuniary interest in relation to the Committee's inquiry.

Jason Feeney: Yes. Thank you, Chair. We were made aware on the Tuesday evening, 26 September. The story ran with ITV and the *Guardian* on the Thursday, and we found out between 9 pm and 10 pm on the Tuesday, from a third party, that there were allegations being made in respect of the 2 Sisters plant.

Q109 Chair: The obvious question to you is that the Food Standards Agency works on intelligence. We were told after the horsegate inquiry that you had a Food Crime Unit. You had many things out there that were going to make sure you had very good intelligence. Why was your intelligence so poor on this occasion?

Jason Feeney: We have got a number of avenues, whether it be employees, whether it be members of the public and others who might want to pass information to the Food Standards Agency. There are a number of ways in which they can do that. We have our normal helpline. We have a dedicated line and a confidential line that members of the public and citizens can contact us on. They can email us. They can contact us through social media. There is a range of ways in which professionals, employees or citizens and members of the public can contact us. We receive information from businesses themselves, we receive information from retailers and, of course, we receive information from colleague agencies, whether that is colleague agencies such as local authorities or others. We had had no intelligence on this particular site that would give us any cause for concern prior to these allegations.

Q110 Chair: No intelligence whatsoever, even though, prior, there have been problems? Even though they were not allowing on-the-spot checks, you were not at all worried about this plant. It seems to us quite surreal that this is the situation, because it is not just 2 Sisters that are at fault here; it is the regulatory system as well. Like we said to the panel this morning, it is not just about the process. What are you doing to make sure that, in the future, your intelligence is better? We do not believe that we should be in this situation, and I have had nothing yet to reassure us. We had very little this morning to reassure us that the situation is any better.

Jason Feeney: As Committee members may be aware, we launched our Regulating Our Future programme in the summer. We published the document that I have here, which colleagues may have seen. That outlines how we think we can move regulation forward, so that it is fit for the 21st century and fit for the speed at which the food businesses and food technology move.

Q111 Chair: Let me just drill down on the intelligence for a moment. Let us be quite frank and open. The fact that you did not even find out from your intelligence sources that somebody had been into the factory and filmed this back in July and August shows that you do not have any intelligence. Why should we be confident that, in the future, your intelligence is any better than what has failed at the moment?

Jason Feeney: So far, we have had the Food Crime Unit that was established post horsemeat, following Chris Elliott's report and the recommendations. We have had that for two years. In those two years, we have made 300 referrals to local authorities and other enforcement agencies on the back of intelligence that we have received and captured. Committee members may have picked up on some of the coverage we have had recently, for example on coconut water, where we were acting on intelligence and information that we were receiving from a number of sources to intercept batches of coconut water and have them taken off the market, and work with retailers.

Q112 Chair: I do not particularly want to talk about coconut water. The issue is: why were you not investigating a plant that has had problems in the past, which it may have rectified or may not have done? You were not investigating it. How did this happen?

Jason Feeney: I was trying to make the point that we do receive a significant amount of intelligence and we act on it more broadly. If we are narrowing it down in relation to this particular plant, then we had not received any intelligence specific to this particular plant prior to—

Q113 Chair: The question is quite a straight one: why was that?

Jason Feeney: We rely on a number of sources and, unless those sources have come forward, then we rely on our inspection regime and our auditing regime to identify and reveal any non-compliances that need to be rectified by the business.

Q114 Chair: We talked a great deal about audits this morning, and paperwork, and it obviously did not work, did it? From now on, what is it you will do differently to make sure that your intelligence in the future works?

Jason Feeney: We are continuing to work with industry and we are continuing to work with the industry bodies, so that there is more of a climate of trust, and so that people feel more able to share intelligence. I am absolutely convinced that food businesses and organisations representing food businesses will receive information from time to time that they are not sharing with the Food Standards Agency. Maybe it is a concern about our openness and transparency policy that makes them reluctant to do so, but we are working with them to find ways in which they can provide us information in a safe environment that we can act upon in the interests of citizens.

Q115 Chair: Before I bring Alan in, just one last question. I understand that many of the big retailers that buy from this part also do their inspections. They have assurance schemes, along with the Red Tractor and so on and so forth. Why is it that you, the FSA, do not collate all this information and look at it? Surely, that would be one method. You are very good at process, all of you. Why on earth do you not use that process to greater effect? Why is it that so many people are doing audits but nobody seems to know about them?

Jason Feeney: The heart of our Regulating Our Future proposal and how we would like to see regulation move forward is exactly along those lines. We would like to have access to those audits. We would like to have the findings and recommendations of those audits, whether they are through private assurance schemes like Red Tractor or whether they are through retailers or the audits that the business conducts on itself. That would give us a fuller picture as to what the confidence levels are in relation to that particular business.

Q116 Chair: Do you need Government regulation for that or could it be done through agreement with industry?

Jason Feeney: No, we need co-operation. We do not need regulation.

Chair: You will be asking for that, I take it.

Jason Feeney: Yes, we have made it clear, and we are continuing to push on that.



Q117 Alan Brown: My question links to that. This morning, one of the representatives from BRC Global Standards said that, to try to improve intelligence-gathering and understand how companies work, he suggested we need to look at the culture of companies. Therefore, that is speaking to employees and getting a real feel for what is happening, rather than what is visual when you do a set-piece audit or a set-piece inspection. I am just wondering if that is something that the Food Standards Agency are looking at as well: how you can get a full understanding of workings and the culture and the pressures that employees are under.

Jason Feeney: You are absolutely right. The culture comes from the top of the organisation. If there is the right culture in the organisation, that would give us confidence about the level of assurance and intervention that we need to take place. If you take one of the allegations in relation to this case, where somebody picks up some chicken meat off the floor and puts it back on the line, the ideal scenario in that situation is when a fellow employee or a supervisor says, “That is not in line with the process we have got here. That is not in line with the procedures. That should go in the animal by-products”. You want that degree of culture, where people think about hygiene and food safety, and recognise the importance of that not just to themselves and their own employment but to the business’s future and the business’s credibility.

Q118 Chair: Is that not the real basic of the plant itself? The fact that somebody is there picking up something off the floor in that plant and nobody does anything about it—surely that is fundamental, is it not? If we are going to trust a company, and if we are going to have a certain amount of self-regulation, that must be the very basic of it, must it not?

Jason Feeney: You are absolutely reliant on having the right culture but also having the right frontline management. The culture will set the expectations and how this company behaves. The frontline management is ensuring that employees are complying with those policies and procedures. That is something that the company has to do. The company is primarily and legally responsible for the food they produce and the food they sell. As a regulator with periodic audits and unannounced inspections, we are not there every minute of every day of every shift, so that absolutely has to rely on the business.

Q119 Alan Brown: Good culture would be another employee saying, “That is not acceptable. That chicken needs to go in the bin”. What I am getting at with culture is that, clearly, when there are inspections and people monitoring that, it does not happen. It is that other culture and how you get that understanding of what else is going on and what day-to-day working is like rather than when you are there. I am just wondering how you are going to get an understanding of the real workings and the real culture of the company.

Jason Feeney: There is a limit to what you can do by examining the paperwork. From a culture point of view, there is a limit to what value you can get from reading the values statements that are on the noticeboard inside the factory. Where we will get a real feel for that is not just speaking to the management about them having those particular basics in place, but whether those are penetrating into the front line. There is nothing to stop us speaking to frontline employees, and we do. That is particularly the case where we have got a permanent presence. In slaughterhouses and abattoirs, where we have got a permanent veterinary presence and we have got meat inspectors, then we are part of the production line,

so you have a very strong feel for what the culture is like at the front end. In plants that we only visit periodically, we have got to use softer techniques, other than just paper review.

Q120 Chair: Why in this instance were you not talking to frontline staff? Why are you completely unsighted? You are not giving us an answer, are you? You did not know what was going on in this plant. Why did you not know? You are the Food Standards Agency. You have got all these unannounced inspections. You have got the whole process. Why did you not know?

Jason Feeney: Our audits are scheduled and preannounced, as they are required to be in line with EU regulations. We do unannounced inspections. This plant has been—

Q121 Chair: Yes, but we also found out that, by the time you tog up and do all the rest of it, they have probably got between 30 minutes and an hour to put things right before you get there. You are not getting to it, are you?

Jason Feeney: What we cannot do is man-mark every employee on every shift in every factory across the country. What we have to do is periodic inspections and interventions.

Q122 Chair: It is risk management, and you should have known the risk. That is where the risk management is wrong and that is why you have to put that risk management right. We have not heard any evidence yet today on that. All you have is a system. The system did not work. What you are not telling us—any of you today—is what you are going to do to change and put it right. We have had absolutely nothing. All you talk about is process, process, process. The process did not work. Is that loud enough and clear enough for you?

Jason Feeney: I was trying to move on to how we might change the process and then you took me back to the individual sites. Our proposals in *Regulating Our Future* contain exactly those features, so we have a much better registration scheme so we know more about the businesses. We have a segmentation of businesses based on risk: what is the nature of what they produce? What volume do they produce it in? How much confidence have we got in the business? Then you look at a range of assurance measures, including, with co-operation, access to a range of audits—not just the inspections that we conduct but through third-party assurance bodies as well. That will drive the level of intervention. If you breach that and if you fail to live up to those expectations, then you will be subject to more regular intervention and closer scrutiny. The whole process is designed to do that.

Q123 Chair: Even though this factory had a history and even though all of this was found out through an undercover operation, you knew nothing of it. You told us quite clearly when you got here you knew nothing about this until the twenty-something of September. It is just mindboggling.

Jason Feeney: What I said was we had not received any intelligence in relation to this plant. We had the information that we capture as part of our audit inspections and as part of our unannounced inspections. When we did our last audit on 19 July, there were a number of measures that we recommended the plant had to take to improve their procedures. It is not that we were blind in terms of this particular plant. We have an ongoing engagement with this plant. It was not showing up as a high-risk plant, but there were a number of steps following our audit in July that we asked them to take.

Q124 Angela Smith: On that point, the West Bromwich plant was audited, I believe, nine

times in July and August by yourselves and other bodies.

Jason Feeney: Yes. That is a figure that has been put out by the company, which must include retailer audits and potentially third-party assurance audits. We audited it once on 19 July.

Q125 **Angela Smith:** Did you have access to the outcomes of those audits?

Jason Feeney: No, we do not routinely have access to retailer audits. The retailers will not show us that.

Q126 **Angela Smith:** Do you think you should have access to those audits?

Jason Feeney: We have set our ambition to work with industry so that they will be more open and transparent about sharing that information.

Q127 **Angela Smith:** Which of the audits that you know about did the plant pass? What problems were identified?

Jose Gomez-Luengo: We do not know in relation to the third-party audits because we do not have access to those.

Angela Smith: The ones you know about, I asked.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: Nine non-compliances had been raised on the last audit, but they were classed as minor. That means that there is no high risk associated with them. They are things that management need to take action to resolve and put right, but we were not concerned in the sense that there was something that would put public health at risk and required immediate action.

Q128 **Chair:** I take it that poultry landing up on the floor and being thrown back on the thing would not be considered minor, would it?

Jose Gomez-Luengo: No, it would not, but we did not see that happening. We have audited the system that the factory does have. They have quite clear signs all over the factory saying that meat on the floor should be put in the waste and should not be used at all. We have seen and we have looked at the training records for staff and the training procedures that include that as an instruction that is given to staff. That is how we assess whether it is compliant or not. If we see things happening, then we will question and we will investigate further as to why this is happening, but if it does not happen when we are there, we cannot investigate why staff pick up meat from the floor when it has not happened at all.

Angela Smith: Can I go back to the audits? You said there were nine problems identified and they were mainly relating to management issues.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: Yes.

Chair: Can we not expand too much on that, Angela, because that is the next question? Just finish off your line of questioning.

Angela Smith: Finish off? I have only just started, Neil.

Chair: Right. Go on, then.

Q129 Angela Smith: My point about the management attention is it seems to me that this has been a fairly superficial process that you have identified and followed over those months preceding the publicity that the company received in September. Would you accept that it has been a fairly superficial process that you have followed?

Jose Gomez-Luengo: I would not class it as superficial, no. We do look and we take as long as it takes to look and get an idea as to what the plant performance is like. It is not based only on what we see on the day. We will spend quite a lot of time on the factory floor, just looking at the operations themselves, but we will also spend some time on looking at the management procedures in place, and the documents and records that demonstrate that those procedures are being implemented.

Q130 Angela Smith: On that basis, how is it that no audits that you know of found any cause for concern, but a couple of undercover journalists, at broadly the same time, over 12 days found widespread and significant malpractice? How can you explain that?

Jose Gomez-Luengo: There is one easy answer.

Angela Smith: You are the Food Standards Agency, not the management auditing agency.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: Yes. One thing that is easy to explain is, normally, when we come to do an audit—and Jason has alluded to the fact that we need to announce we are going to be coming; we have to do it by law—staff and management will know when we are coming. They will know the date and they will know the time we are going to be starting. Whether or not there is preparation for that, I do not know. We have to assess things as we see them.

However, it does not mean that we do not look in detail to what happens on the day. Two undercover journalists can spend a number of days in the factory. We could spend a number of days in the factory as well. I suppose, if you stay there long enough, you may get to see things that you would not normally see. That is possible. If staff know that we are an auditor and we are having a look at the premises and the facilities and the structure and everything, they will probably act differently from the way they might act when they do not know that we are there. In this case, undercover journalists passed themselves as staff members, so they might be able to see things that the regulator will not see during an audit.

Q131 Angela Smith: Dr Richard Hyde, an expert in food law at the University of Nottingham, has said—and I quote just the end of the quote here—“There are a basket of potential offences here that the regulators need to look at and decide whether further action is required”. However, the sense I get is not so much that you may not want to take the journalists’ findings seriously but rather that you cannot, and that you are not able to do your job effectively.

Jason Feeney: In relation to this particular incident and these allegations, we launched an investigation on the Friday, the day after the story was publicised. We are conducting that investigation thoroughly. These are complex and serious allegations. We are gathering evidence from a range of sources, including the business itself. We have extended that investigation beyond this particular plant to other 2 Sisters plants within the group. We are making sure that we investigate these allegations as thoroughly and properly as they deserve, because we have a range of enforcement measures available to us, up to and including

prosecution, and, therefore, we need to make sure that these allegations are thoroughly investigated.

Q132 Angela Smith: Professor Chris Elliott, a food safety academic from Queen's University Belfast has said he has never seen a plant operate under such poor standards as shown by the video evidence, so I go back to the point and perhaps finish on this. I appreciate that you are investigating, in your terms, thoroughly the matter that we are discussing today, but the point is: are you taking that video evidence seriously? Other academics in the field of food safety law are taking it very seriously. We need to be reassured that the FSA is taking it as seriously as everybody else seems to be?

Jason Feeney: I do not want to repeat myself but we appointed one of our most experienced vets. We appointed the vet that led on our avian-flu-outbreak work. He is a very experienced and highly professional vet. He is leading the investigation. As I said, we have extended the investigation beyond this immediate plant to other plants across the 2 Sisters group. We have asked for access to the intelligence that ITV and the *Guardian* are holding. They have refused to share that with us. I have written to them and requested that intelligence and they have refused to share that with us and said we would have to go to court in order to obtain that information from them. We are looking at other sources of intelligence and information that we can get, including the plant's CCTV footage itself, because the plant had CCTV. We will do a thorough and comprehensive job in terms of this investigation.

Q133 Angela Smith: Is the CCTV comprehensive? Is it all the way through the plant?

Jason Feeney: There is CCTV in the plant. What we are working on with the company is what access we have got and which cameras and coverage would relate to the particular incidents at that particular point on that particular day. We need to get to that level of detail in terms of accessing. We have got the footage that was published by ITV and the *Guardian* but they have not given us access to the rest of their intelligence and information.

Angela Smith: The CCTV is really important. If there is comprehensive coverage of the plant, we need some confidence—

Jason Feeney: That is what we are establishing as part of our investigation.

Angela Smith: We need to have confidence that you are determined to get the relevant coverage.

Q134 Chair: Do you have the power to be able to ask to see that CCTV coverage for the whole of the period?

Jason Feeney: Yes, in the same way we do in slaughterhouses.

Q135 Chair: Is the company co-operating?

Jason Feeney: Yes.

Q136 Sandy Martin: Mr Feeney, you talked about the confidential hotline that was available to members of the public who could contact you. Can you tell us how many members of the public contacted you on that hotline and which led to prosecutions at all during the course of the last year?

Jason Feeney: We get about 100 to 130 calls a month on that, and it is a mix of information, as it often is on these reporting lines. There is a triage and filtering service that we go through. Certainly, I could say that the information we have received through that channel has led to investigations and intelligence capture by the Food Crime Unit, which we have then been able to pass on to enforcement agencies. The Food Crime Unit, as it stands at the minute, is just an intelligence unit, in line with Chris Elliott's recommendations. We would like to move it to a second phase, where it has investigative powers of its own, where it can continue with those cases, and our board have said that that is what they would like to do, but it is subject to funding being available.

Q137 Sandy Martin: Do you accept that the majority of the population of this country—the vast majority, I would hazard to guess—and, I am sure, the overwhelming majority of people who work on the front line in food processing, have never heard of the Food Standards Agency?

Jason Feeney: No. I cannot remember the percentage of recognition but we do sample the profile of the organisation and how widely recognised it is. Certainly, we track a trust measure of how confident the public is in relation to the Food Standards Agency to do its job. Since we started measuring that six years ago, we are running at an all-time high. We are at 67%, which puts us high up in relation to other sectors, including the industry itself. The public do have confidence that we will do our job.

Q138 Sandy Martin: The point I am trying to make is that, if you believe, as members of the Committee think may be possible, that there is not a culture where frontline workers ignore the very sensible and careful hygienic policies of the company but rather do things that they have been told by their management to do, such as changing the labels—and I find it hard to understand why an ordinary employee would want to change the labels on anything unless they have been told to do so—you need to have some mechanism for enabling staff to contact you anonymously, with support. Are you at all proactive in talking to employees of food-processing companies and trying to make sure that they are aware that, if they have misgivings about the way that the management of their company is being operated, they can contact you in confidence and know that they are not going to get sacked as a result?

Jason Feeney: Yes, and we have whistleblowing procedures in place, which will mean that we take steps to manage the anonymity and the protection of that individual, including non-disclosure of source of information. However, we can always do more.

Q139 Chair: You need to get that out, do you not, to the employees, that they would be protected? Otherwise, they do not feel they are.

Jason Feeney: Yes.

Q140 Sandy Martin: Indeed, and in most cases, I do not think most employees would believe you if you told them that they were protected. However, I have got a suggestion for you, because I heard a very distressed woman on the radio a couple of years ago who was sacked from Winterbourne View. I know this is not to do with animal welfare but she was sacked. She blew the whistle on what was going on at Winterbourne View, in great detail, to the CQC about six months before, and nothing was done about it. She was sacked. None of her friends ever talked to her again because they all lost their jobs when Winterbourne View was closed down. She has



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been unemployed ever since. She is in penury.

The whole experience of whistleblowers in this country, on almost every area of society, is so appalling that I am not at all surprised that people are not willing to whistleblow. I believe that there is at least one whistleblower who lost their job working for 2 Sisters at some stage, probably during the 2014 investigations or the 2009 investigations into precisely the same sorts of things, neither of which were of sufficient—

Chair: Can we get to the question, Sandy?

Sandy Martin: Would you consider employing that whistleblower? It seems to me that somebody who has been in that situation and knows what is happening in that company and is aware of the sorts of mechanisms that are used to get round the Food Standards Agency and everybody else would be a great help to you.

Jason Feeney: As you say, people are, not without justification, nervous in terms of whistleblowing. What we would like to get to a position on would be the conversation I was having with Mr Brown earlier, which was having the culture within the company where people can raise issues and concerns early enough, so that they are addressed by the company and they do not need to get to the stage of whistleblowing. That would be a positive culture that you would have operating within more professional, more forward-thinking and more compliant companies.

Q141 **Chair:** Before I bring Paul in, you said the Food Crime Unit has not got investigatory powers. What on earth was it set up for if it did not have investigatory powers?

Jason Feeney: The Chris Elliott report recommended that the first stage of setting up a Food Crime Unit would be an intelligence unit, and that is what we have implemented. He then said that there should be an independent review at the two-year point. We had the Food Crime Unit reviewed independently by a panel led by a former chief constable. That panel and that review have recommended that we move to phase two and have investigatory powers. Our board has accepted that. We are now working with Ministers and with Treasury to see how we are going to make that happen.

Chair: That is something we will pursue on your behalf because that needs to happen.

Jason Feeney: That would be helpful.

Q142 **Paul Flynn:** Does the fact that a single journalist working under great difficulty, in secret, for a very short period—just 12 shifts—turned out so much material of about eight egregious breaches of food hygiene not convince you that these bad practices are endemic in this company?

Jason Feeney: They are serious allegations. We are establishing whether or not those allegations are substantiated.

Q143 **Paul Flynn:** Given the history and culture of the company, which you referred to, where this is not a new allegation—there have been at least two occasions in the past where they have been accused of the same practices—does it not strike you that this

is the permanent situation and that they only behave well when you are inspecting them?

Jason Feeney: As part of the investigation, we met with the Chief Executive, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Technical Director of the company last Thursday morning. Some of the areas we covered were, as you would expect, the specific allegations and the nature of the footage, and their explanation as to what was going on that could be seen on that footage. However, we also touched upon the culture of the organisation, the values and behaviours within that organisation. They have a new Chief Operating Officer who started six months ago, and they outlined to us, as I am sure they might do to you in the next session, the steps they were taking to make sure that the culture of the organisation reflected that.

Q144 **Paul Flynn:** They have given these assurances in the past to other people as far back as 2009. What is your explanation of the success of this company? They have taken over a great many other companies. Is the reason for their success that they are driving standards down by cutting corners?

Jason Feeney: That is a question you might direct at the company itself as to why it thinks it is successful. Certainly, from our point of view, we subject the company to the same level of inspection, and the same standards are expected of that company as—

Q145 **Paul Flynn:** The only way to ensure that these practices do end is to allow you or some other bodies the same freedom that the press have, under difficulties and legal problems, to put their own employees into the factory secretly, in the way that it is done, or to improve the surveillance by cameras.

Jason Feeney: Yes. There is a strong debate at the minute in relation to cameras and CCTV use in abattoirs and the mandation of that, which the Secretary of State for Defra has put forward. We, as an organisation, sought mandation and our board agreed that that would be the stance that we would take for compulsory CCTV in abattoirs last year, so we are pleased to see the Secretary of State and Defra responding to that.

Q146 **Chair:** Would that include cutting plants as well as slaughterhouses?

Jason Feeney: It is in abattoirs and slaughterhouses at the minute, particularly because of the handling of the live animals and the slaughter process itself, because of the complexity and the sensitivities around that, and to ensure that we have got the welfare standards that ought to be practised. You are dealing with live animals, so the risk is significantly greater, talking about the risk. We are supportive of CCTV as a management tool. We can seize the footage where there is an incident, but it is an enormously useful tool. I have seen this in plants that I have visited, where the management are looking at the behaviour and practices of their employees and seeing where there are additional training needs, either on an individual or a collective basis. Therefore, CCTV is a really important management tool, so that the management within the organisation can see what is happening on the front line.

Q147 **David Simpson:** Very briefly, Chairman, I will refer members to my expressions of interest in the agri-food sector. In relation to Jose's point at the start about inspection, you have a team of inspectors within the Food Standards Agency. Within this particular plant, whether it be a cutting plant or a slaughter plant, are the inspectors who are there employed by the company or by the Government or by local government?

Jose Gomez-Luengo: They are employed by us. Meat inspectors who do unannounced inspections are employed directly by the Food Standards Agency.

Q148 **David Simpson:** The point I am making is, in Northern Ireland, we have the meat inspectors—and you will know this, Jason—in relation to slaughter and cutting. They are there full-time, not 24 hours a day but six days a week. Is that the case here? You are saying they are employed by you.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: That is in relation to the people doing unannounced inspections. I was thinking you were referring to Site D, which is the one which has been undercover. That is a cutting plant, not a slaughterhouse; therefore, we do not have a permanent presence there. Our inspection regime or our official-controls regime is based both on auditing, which is announced, and on unannounced inspections, where meat inspectors or vets can turn up unannounced at any time of the day and have a look at the premises. We are aware of the fact that, when we do an audit, there will be some preparedness for that. That is why we are trying to back this up with unannounced inspections that will take away that element.

Q149 **Chair:** When did you last have an unannounced inspection of plant D?

Jason Feeney: November last year.

Chair: November last year, so virtually a year ago.

Jason Feeney: Yes, There was an audit last July. There was an unannounced inspection in November. There was another audit this July.

Q150 **David Simpson:** I know time is running scarce but just to finish, in relation to the slaughter plants that have meat inspectors there during the working day, is it not an idea whereby cutting plants of a certain size would have to have meat inspectors there full-time, so that they are answerable either to you or to some other authority, so that they are in charge of what is going on there? It is the same in the slaughter plant. If there is an issue in a slaughter plant, as you well know, and there is a problem on the line, it is stopped. The meat inspector sees a problem and it is stopped. Is that not something that could be looked at to give more power to cutting plants?

Jason Feeney: You have got slaughterhouses and abattoirs where we have got permanent meat-inspector presence and permanent veterinary presence. We have cutting plants that are co-located with slaughterhouses, where we have got permanent veterinary presence and we have got meat-inspector presence on a permanent basis as well. Where we have standalone cutting plants like this, then we have the regime that Jose has described. There is an option for us where we have particular concerns about a particular plant. In response to this incident, we put a permanent presence on that plant from the Thursday for a period, to ensure that it was operating to a level and a standard that we were comfortable with. We have that option but whether you wanted to do that in generality—

Q151 **Chair:** They have been in but they are now gone again.

Jason Feeney: Yes, because the plant is not operating. It is being used as training. They are retraining and they are using it as a testing site.

Q152 **Chair:** When the plant starts again, because we want to get it back going and have

full public confidence in it, are you going to have an inspector there?

Jason Feeney: Certainly, that is an option for us. We could do that.

Q153 Chair: That is not a yes or a no. “Certainly, that is an option”—that is a political answer. Yes or no—are you going to have an inspector in there or are you going to wait for another ITV and *Guardian* report before you take any action? What are you actually going to do?

Jason Feeney: Depending on what we find as a result of the investigation—we had a permanent presence there for two weeks. We stepped that out because the plant was not fully operational; in fact, it was being used for training purposes. We will look at whether or not we think a permanent presence is justified and necessary in relation to the risks that we find in response to what I would remind everybody are allegations at the minute. These are not proven; these are allegations. Is that option open to us? We will take that option. There is nothing stopping me doing that. For my own assurance, I think it is highly likely that we will.

Chair: That is probably as close to a yes as we are going to get.

Q154 David Simpson: In the industry, that is the weak link in the chain. We have it in the slaughter, at other plants and sizes. If we had that closed, we would overcome a lot of the problems we have seen.

Jason Feeney: It is possible.

Q155 Julian Sturdy: I just wanted to follow up on what David was saying on that. You have standalone processing plants, and processing plants that are co-located with abattoirs. You are inspecting both and you have permanent inspectors on the co-located sites. Historically, how many investigation cases do you have on the co-located sites compared to the standalone sites? What I am trying to say is: do you have evidence to say that standalone sites are less compliant?

Jason Feeney: The straight answer is I do not know. I could write to the Committee and see whether there is a difference.

Chair: Yes, please. That is a very good point, because it would then back up the fact that we had a permanent presence there.

Jason Feeney: Yes, and we have two different regimes in place.

Julian Sturdy: I realise that, but I wanted to know—

Jason Feeney: Yes, what the compare-and-contrast would be.

Julian Sturdy: Yes.

Q156 Mrs Murray: Can I just move it on a bit, because I am very aware that we are not very far down our whole agenda of information that we would like from you? You told the Chairman that your last unannounced inspection was in November of last year. Was that the last time you inspected this plant before the programme?

Jason Feeney: No, we audited it on 19 July. It underwent a full audit on 19 July this year.

Q157 Mrs Murray: What were your findings then?

Jose Gomez-Luengo: That is the answer to a question that was asked before. There were nine what we deemed minor non-compliances. They were, for example, related to the use of traceable labelling on trays, not necessarily in terms of fraudulent use of labelling but in terms of all labels not being taken out from circulation, which might account for that; I do not know. There were minor cleaning issues in a piece of equipment. There were issues to do, for example, with hazard analysis and critical control point documentation not being fully completed. There were issues that needed to be resolved. There were a wide range of issues that would apply to both documentation and operational practices, but none of which were deemed to be serious enough to justify what we call a major non-compliance.

Q158 Mrs Murray: Can I ask you about the labelling and traceability? I notice, when the Committee did their investigation into the horsemeat scandal, one of the answers that Lord Rooker gave was that you acknowledged that problems of food labelling had fallen through the gaps and were “not really for us”. Could you tell me: would it be you who was responsible for seeing these labels removed and a later-dated label put on? When you look at inspecting a plant, do you go back to look through the records, the sales notes and that sort of thing as well? I come from this because I used to have a fishing business where fish that my late husband caught had to have traceability straight from the catch to the consumer. Does the same sort of thing apply to this plant, and is it the Food Standards Agency that would have to ensure that that was adhered to?

Jose Gomez-Luengo: There are two aspects of traceability, and I will start clarifying that. Legislation in relation to traceability requires traceability one step back and one step forward. That means that, as far as the legislation is concerned, any food business operator needs to know who has supplied them with products and who they have supplied with their product.

Q159 Mrs Murray: And the dates, presumably.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: The dates go in parallel with that, yes. If there are food safety elements to that, yes, there would be labelling traceability there. In that case it would fall within the FSA remit.

Q160 Mrs Murray: Forgive me for interrupting but I just need to make sure I am absolutely clear on this. If you have a date that a supplier supplied the factory, and it showed when that happened, it would have accompanying paperwork.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: Yes.

Mrs Murray: And then, if you have a date where the processed goods were supplied to a retailer, you would have a clear date, then. If, for any reason, that label had been removed and reapplied, surely, if a retailer had returned goods, there should be accompanying paperwork for that as well, so there should be a clear audit trail. Who checks that?

Q161 Chair: Can I come in on that? There is 100,000 tonnes of fresh meat being processed today in that plant. An extra 5,000 tonnes come back from another source. Out of that plant will come 105,000 tonnes on that day. Is your audit as detailed to that? This is what we have got to drill down to. Your audit happened on 19 July. We heard that the filming went on in July. We are just not confident that your audit

is doing the work that it needs to do. It almost proves that it is not, indeed.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: If you are asking me whether we go to the level of detail for every single consignment, the answer is no. We would spend years doing that. What we do is a sample exercise and we may—and this is what we normally do—ask for a traceability exercise.

Q162 Chair: So you have no idea of the amount of meat that goes through that plant and you cannot check whether the same amount of meat that went in that day went out that day. What happens to the meat that they do not process, which stays chilled overnight? Does that automatically go back into the processing plant the following day? I suggest that may be the case. You do not know, do you?

Jose Gomez-Luengo: If we look at that, yes, we will find that, but, as I said before, we look at a sample exercise. We will not look at every single day's production. Even on the day we come, we may not look at all the production for the day and what happened the day before or the day after. We will look at a sample.

Chair: You will not pick up this type of abuse if you do not change your auditing system.

Mrs Murray: It is very clear.

Chair: That is absolutely as clear as the nose on your face.

Jason Feeney: We can undertake a sample of those transactions that have taken place and—

Mrs Murray: Sampling is not going to work if you do not—

Q163 Chair: Especially when you have had form on this, surely you would go out and say, “Into that plant, on a given day, 100,000 tonnes came in. 105,000 tonnes went out. Where did that other 5,000 tonnes come from?” These are big plants. This is a massive plant and very important to the poultry industry, the safety of the public and to farmers—very, very important—but it has to be right.

Jason Feeney: I agree with that.

Chair: You are not monitoring it, though, are you? You are not getting down to that. You have all these marvellous systems, have you not, with paperwork coming out of your ears? Yet you cannot get down to the basic fact of how much meat goes into that plant on a given day and how much meat comes out. Because that way, you can prove. If I stuck 100,000 tonnes of corn into a heap and took out 110,000 tonnes, I would have to know where the hell the other 10,000 tonnes came from.

Q164 Mrs Murray: I have to say to you that this applies with fresh fish already. In 2013, it was clear that food labelling had fallen through the gaps. What steps were taken in 2013 to make sure it does not fall through the gaps now?

Jason Feeney: It is absolutely clear that traceability is the responsibility of the FSA. As Jose said earlier in response to the question, companies are required to have clear information, including date and volumes, of one step back and one step forward.

Q165 Mrs Murray: Do you check it?

Jose Gomez-Luengo: Yes.

Jason Feeney: Jose said as well that, yes, we do check that on a sample but what we do not do, and what we cannot do for all the businesses, is check every single transaction that every single business does every day. That is not proportionate regulation.

Mrs Murray: I am really sorry but that is what does apply in the fishing industry.

Q166 **Chair:** What has happened here with this plant is that it is so massive that you cannot really audit it. That really is the crux of the matter. As long as that plant behaves in the right way, it is absolutely fine but, if it does not, you do not have the necessary capability of auditing it. You cannot audit, you are not auditing, and you do not seem to have a process of the total amount of meat that goes in on one given day and the total amount of meat that comes out the next day. That would start to show up immediately anomalies, and that is when you could come in with your investigation. If these spot checks are looking at various consignments and things, that does not work.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: It does not follow that taking 100,000 tonnes of meat into a plant will result in 100,000 tonnes of meat leaving the plant the following day.

Q167 **Chair:** No, but there should be an audit as to what happened to that 100,000 tonnes.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: That is what we look at. The auditing system looks at how the plant deals with that in terms of paperwork and in terms of documentation. That is what you have to rely on. You have to see what system the plant has for recording intake of product. How do we know what product has been recorded as coming into the premises? How do we know that the system the plant or the operator has follows this product through the process until it becomes a finished product that is going to be dispatched from the plant? That is what we look at, so that we can tie what comes into the plant with what is dispatched from the premises.

Chair: You can do that then.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: We can do that, yes, but it does not mean that we will do it—

Q168 **Chair:** Do you do it on a total consignment in a plant the size of 2 Sisters? It is about 200,000 tonnes at Site D. It is a lot of product and it takes a lot of following, and I suspect you do not follow it.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: Yes, which is why we do not do it, because it would take quite a long time. Just because of the complexity of it, it would take a long time.

Q169 **Chair:** One minute, you tell me you do it, and the next minute, you tell me you do not do it.

Jose Gomez-Luengo: I have told you that we do a sampling.

Q170 **Chair:** Which do you do?

Jason Feeney: It is clear. What Jose is saying is that we do that on a sampling basis to give us assurance that what we are seeing on the paperwork matches with what we are seeing in the plant. What Jose is making clear is we do not do that every single day to check out the balances for every single day since we last audited it a year or so earlier.

Chair: No, that is not the question I am asking.

Q171 **Mrs Murray:** Chairman, could I just ask, then: since this has been known and since that programme, have you looked at doing that so that you can ascertain whether this is a consistent problem or whether it has just started? Clearly, you know there is a problem now. You have seen the television programme. Have you decided to have a look at this, to conduct a proper audit, and have you done that?

Jose Gomez-Luengo: Yes, that is part of what we are looking at now.

Chair: I have some confidence that you might act on a lot of these findings. We would like to know the details of that in future. As I said to the panel, we are going to come back to this because we are really not satisfied with what is happening at the moment.

Q172 **Angela Smith:** Mr Feeney, you said earlier, in response to a question from my colleague, that it is not for you to answer a question about why the company is successful. They are the words you used: “It is not for me to say why the company is successful”. That was in relation to a question about driving down costs. Can you define to me what you think “successful” in this industry looks like?

Jason Feeney: From a Food Standards Agency point of view, successful is compliance with food safety and hygiene requirements and, in the broader industry, in terms of animal welfare requirements as well. What I was saying was it is not for me as a regulator to form a commercial judgment about why the business has been more successful than others, and others less successful.

Q173 **Angela Smith:** Surely it is the job of the Food Standards Agency. One cannot entirely divorce the decisions taken by a company about how it operates and the relationship of that with the costs incurred by the company from the standards that it maintains in relation to food safety and hygiene. Surely, it is impossible. Surely, the FSA understands that there could be a clear relationship between driving down costs and falling standards in relation to food safety.

Jason Feeney: There could be an issue where it increases the risk factor that it might generate non-compliance. If we felt that we were seeing non-compliance by a particular business being driven an excessive cost-cutting culture, then that would be something we would tackle. We tackle non-compliance whatever the cause, whether the non-compliance is because it is ineffective management or whether it is driving down costs. We will tackle the non-compliance in terms of the enforcement regime we have.

Q174 **Angela Smith:** I would have thought there was a relationship between ineffective management and driving down costs, but what I am going to ask you is which tools you have to hand and which tools you deploy to assess that relationship between how a company runs itself—and you do rely heavily on inspecting management structures and management mechanisms—and food safety and hygiene. It would be good to know how you use these tools.

Jason Feeney: We get a strong feel for the business, as Jose was saying earlier, because we do not, in terms of our audits, simply go into the offices of the plant and examine the paperwork. We get out on the shop floor. We are observing what is happening in the interaction between the employees and the supervisors, between the managers and the staff.

We are free to talk to staff and to talk to supervisors and managers within that plant. There are softer techniques that we can use that allow us to get a feel for whether or not the practices and the culture within the business are posing a risk to hygiene and safety requirements.

Q175 John Grogan: I will try to be as brief as possible. I was struck by something you said at the very beginning: that this was not regarded as a high-risk plant. I suppose the question is, “Why ever not?” Given that Jack Dromey, in 2009, said that he had been told that, often, the date on chicken meat was changed so that meat that should have been thrown away was sold to supermarkets. Many people had told him that, and that was not denied—so he said—by the company at the time then, in 2014. Should this have not been on the watch list and at the high-risk end of it, and should you not have had someone in there as a result of that? Why was it not high risk?

Jason Feeney: That is because of the result of the audit and the inspections that we had undertaken at that plant and what we had found and established. As Jose detailed in relation to the last audit, we had found a number of minor non-compliances, and that would generate a certain assessment about the risk attached to that business and that particular plant. Because of the findings of those inspections and audits, it was not one of those that was giving us serious cause for concern at that time.

Q176 John Grogan: However, there was all this evidence building up that there was a cause for concern, and the public now will hear that you put in a permanent presence at one site, as I understand it. There are 12 sites, are there not, that the company has? Presumably, you would put in a permanent presence at all of them because, unlike the site in question, they are all at full production at the moment.

Jason Feeney: Yes, they are.

Q177 John Grogan: Is there a permanent presence in there and, if not, why not?

Jason Feeney: There is not, and the reason why not is that, again, as a result of the inspections and audit we do and the investigation that we are currently undertaking, if it gave us cause for concern that any of those other plants were at risk and/or seriously non-compliant, then we have the option of putting a permanent presence in.

Q178 John Grogan: Respectfully, however, the inadequacy of those investigations that you have undertaken has been demonstrated by this. Just to give public confidence, I would urge you to reconsider that. Moving quickly on, however, because I know we are short of time, you referred to the fact that you met the company on Thursday last week—the Managing Director. You have given some public comment before then on the progress of the investigation. You said that you had found no threats to public health but matters requiring management attention had been identified. Presumably, you are not ruling out anything at this stage, including prosecution. Was it discussed with you at the plant that they were going to sack the person who was identified in the film as changing the labels and so on? Was that mentioned? Presumably, that makes it a very serious matter indeed.

Jason Feeney: You will understand why I am cautious about revealing too much about the investigation and what its findings—

Q179 John Grogan: You were talking about the investigation a few weeks ago, saying it

was only management attention that was required.

Jason Feeney: We have extended that investigation and we have a range of enforcement options, up to and including prosecution. I do not want to jeopardise any action we might take by inadvertently providing reasons as to why any serious action might not be successful, so I have to be cautious about what I say in relation to the breadth of the investigation, but yes, we did discuss that last Thursday.

Q180 John Grogan: However, given that this guy has been sacked, can you confirm that the company has now accepted that there was a serious breach of regulations?

Jason Feeney: The evidence from the company is part of the investigation. I know, in the next session, you are going to be speaking to the same people we were speaking to.

Q181 John Grogan: Sure, but just finally, would you revise your remarks or the remarks attributed to the Food Standards Agency a few weeks ago that it was only matters requiring management attention, and that there is a possibility that it is a little more than management attention? That perhaps was an unwise remark at the early stage of the investigation.

Jason Feeney: It would have been better to have said that this is an ongoing investigation and we will get to the bottom of what has happened, and then we will take the appropriate enforcement action, depending on what we find.

Q182 Sandy Martin: Are you going to be interviewing the person who was sacked?

Jason Feeney: Yes, we can do that as part of the investigation. We will do that but we have not lined up the appointment, as it were, yet.

Chair: Caroline, I want to bring you in, because I want to also bring in the meat inspection and local authority and Environmental Health and what-have-you. I notice you have been let off the hook, so to speak, so far, so we want to put you back on the hook now, so, over to you, Caroline.

Q183 Dr Johnson: I did have a question for the FSA first of all. You say you are not going to put anything in in terms of the other plants, in terms of a permanent presence, and in response to a previous question, because you have no concerns about the other plants. However, there is a news report from 2013 that suggests that the company was fined for three food safety offences at Ipswich Crown Court in relation to their plant at Stowmarket. A year later, in 2014, there was an exposé in the news about their food safety at a different plant, and now this is a third plant that is involved from the same company in alleged malpractice in terms of food safety. Does that not suggest to you that the problem is wider than just the one plant and that you need to look at all of them in the same level of detail?

Jason Feeney: Yes, and that is why we have extended the investigation. We have visited all the plants. We are subjecting those plants to an increased level of scrutiny. That does not necessarily mean we have to have a permanent presence; it depends on what the value of the permanent presence would be. I would say that we will take account of the record and the track record of the company, but obviously we will place greater weight on the evidence that is most recent.

Q184 Dr Johnson: The other question that I had was related to all four of you. On the



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FSA website, you make the point that one of the reasons why you do the poultry checking is that it is to prevent *Campylobacter*, which, on your own estimates on your own website, costs the UK economy around £900 million a year and is responsible for over 100 deaths. You say that 80% of *Campylobacter* comes from contaminated poultry. I notice that, prior to March 2016, there are quite a lot of data on your website about how you have been monitoring the chicken to see what proportion of the chicken contained *Campylobacter* when sampled.

To what extent do you still look at that, because those data are over 18 months old? It was being reported three-monthly but it does not look to be anymore. To what extent do you look at those data as a marker of food safety within an organisation, and how often do you monitor the 2 Sisters plant for that?

Jason Feeney: We have a regular sampling programme that we undertake with all the major retailers, which is where the focus of our energies has been in relation to *Campylobacter* over the last three years. We have seen significant improvements in terms of the highest rates of infection dropping now down to the 6-7% range, when it was well into the 15-20% range.

Q185 **Dr Johnson:** On your website, you suggest that is because you monitor it in a different way now, and that the twenty-something percent figure was related to measuring the amount of neck skin and that you now remove that, so that would improve your rate. However, since *Campylobacter* requires such a very low infective dose in order to cause ill health in a person, the fact that you have a small amount actually is not that relevant.

Jason Feeney: We have refined the way that we measure it to try to make it more accurate. Your question was about whether we publish that on a regular basis. We are publishing that and have been publishing that quarterly. I think I am right in saying we published the last set of numbers last week or the week before. We are moving to a position where we have agreement with the retailers that they will publish the information to our standards and our protocols. That is a really good step forward in terms of the industry being more open and transparent about its own numbers and its own figures.

Q186 **Dr Johnson:** What I saw on your website about *Campylobacter* is 18 months behind.

Jason Feeney: I will check that because, within the last two weeks, we have published the latest set of samples.

Q187 **Chair:** If I can interrupt, your Chief Executive yesterday said that the amount of *Campylobacter* dropped from over 20% down to 6%, so you must have those figures.

Jason Feeney: Yes, and we publish them on a regular basis.

Chair: They are outdated; you say they are not.

Dr Johnson: They have changed the way they—

Chair: That was the point that she made.

Jason Feeney: I will check on the website to make sure, because we do publish it and it attracts a lot of press attention in media where we do it, and we did it within the last fortnight. What I would say is that 2 Sisters, as a company, have been at the forefront of working with us to tackle *Campylobacter*. They have been one of the most co-operative and one of the

most ground-breaking companies in terms of trying to reduce a lot of the *Campylobacter* in the industry, and working with the retailers that they supply

Chair: We will remember that as a brownie point in a minute. I am conscious that Mr Britton and Mr Charnley have not said anything yet, and we have to move on to their relationships with 2 Sisters and how they co-operate with the FSA, etc.

Q188 **Dr Johnson:** The opening question, I guess, is: what is your role in monitoring the 2 Sisters plant?

Jan Britton: Our role is around food standards. Essentially, we are responsible—we are the competent authority for ensuring that food is labelled correctly. While traceability is an FSA responsibility, it is our responsibility to make sure that, when food is labelled, it complies with both the general requirements that all food has to be labelled with, and any specific requirements that relate to a particular product, and that any claims made about the food are, in fact, true.

Q189 **Chair:** The date?

Jan Britton: The date.

Q190 **Dr Johnson:** When we see these videos on the television, suggesting that labels have been changed and dates have been removed and altered, does that represent a failure of your processes to detect that?

Jan Britton: Yes.

Q191 **Dr Johnson:** What are you doing to make sure that you do not fail to detect that, should it happen in the future?

Jan Britton: Many of the comments that have already been made about the process the FSA follows equally apply to the process not just that Sandwell Council follows but any—

Q192 **Chair:** Are you inspecting?

Jan Britton: Yes, that is right. We follow a risk-based inspection methodology that looks at compliance with process.

Q193 **Chair:** But the same question as Caroline: you did not find it, did you?

Jan Britton: Indeed, that is right, and one of the questions we, in relation to our specific responsibilities in Sandwell, will be asking is: how do we learn from that and move forward in a way that tells us something different? We have known 2 Sisters. One of the advantages of the local authority being involved in this sort of work is that, unlike the FSA, with 600,000 food business, we know these companies on our local patch. We have had longstanding working relations with them, and I would have said that our strength was knowing the culture. I would have said our strength was knowing these companies over prolonged periods of time at the local level.

What this evidence that has come through from the media inquiry shows, or at least suggests to me, is that perhaps we did not know this company as well as we thought we did, and we have to ask ourselves, as we go forward, what we are going to do differently. The regime that we follow is nationally prescribed. We follow a national framework with a national risk assessment methodology and we comply with that methodology.

Q194 Chair: When were you last in the plant?

Jan Britton: We were last in that plant in—

Bob Charnley: March this year, 2017.

Q195 Chair: You consider that often enough to be in there, do you?

Jan Britton: We have been back since the news broke.

Q196 Chair: I am not particularly interested in that because you would have gone back there, would you not, once it is all over the media?

Jan Britton: Yes.

Chair: What we are trying to drill down on is: why did the media find out and why did you not?

Jan Britton: Yes, I understand that. The question we are also asking ourselves is whether the frequency with which we visited that company is going to be sufficient in the future.

Q197 Chair: You say also you know the company, which is an interesting statement to make. You know the company, you know the history and you know there have been some previous problems, so why do you not keep a really strong eye on what is happening?

Jan Britton: We followed that national framework and complied with all of its requirements in respect of this company. We knew of some of the history. We did not know all of what might now be evident.

Q198 Chair: You offered the evidence that you knew the company, so do not try to walk away from that. You knew the company. You know the history. You have certain rules that you have to follow but also, surely, the whole argument of this risk-based business is that you take action if you think there is a problem. If you knew the company, you did not know the company well enough, did you?

Jan Britton: I agree.

Q199 Chair: Why did you not take that action?

Jan Britton: You have already said that the evidence that is now available to us in the media report demonstrates we did not know that company well enough to take more action than we were doing. The council's record is one of compliance with the national scheme. The question whether that compliance is sufficient in the light of what we know is a valid one and one we are asking.

Q200 Chair: You are reviewing your processes and your procedures and you are likely to change them dramatically. Am I leading you as a witness?

Jan Britton: You are leading me but you are saying what I would have said anyway.

Q201 Angela Smith: Can I just ask on that: will you be reviewing the national scheme itself from your own perspective as to whether or not that is adequate?

Jan Britton: We, as an individual local authority, do not own the national scheme but we certainly have the right to put evidence forward for the owners of the scheme to consider. In context, at the moment in Sandwell, we have 13 plants or 13 locations that we consider to be at the highest level of risk in terms of our relatively narrow food standard labelling responsibilities. We will be looking particularly at those plants: what we do, the frequency with which we inspect, and the manner in which we inspect.

The comments about the time that it takes to get in and the pre-warning that is given are all valid comments. Again, to my point about being local and being the council with 13 or 14 such plants on our patch, we do not have to have quite the regard that the FSA do to the scale of the whole sector, so our ability to fine-tune what we do to particular circumstances is greater. I will certainly be looking to exercise that ability to do something locally that meets local needs.

Q202 Dr Johnson: I have two more questions. Were you aware of CCTV that has been suggested is at this plant, and has it been reviewed by your council?

Chair: Do you look at it?

Jan Britton: We are aware that there is CCTV and we were aware that the Food Standards Agency were reviewing it. We have not in the past routinely looked at CCTV.

Q203 Dr Johnson: Do you think it would be beneficial for not just abattoirs but for food processing plants to have mandatory CCTV?

Jan Britton: In the generality of my experience as a council chief executive, having eyes on something is a fair way of making sure that rules are followed and regulations are complied with, so I would say that would seem a very sensible avenue to pursue.

Q204 Dr Johnson: Thank you. My final question is about the penalties. When you want to modify someone's behaviour and they are not doing what you want them to do, you have options of carrots and sticks, do you not? The BBC report that I referred to earlier about a fine imposed on this company in 2013 suggested that they had been fined £112,500 for food standard offences. When there was the exposé or investigation into chicken potentially dropped on the floor in Scunthorpe in 2014, the FSA initially said there was no proof that it had gone into the food chain, but later said it was a regulation breach but there was no fine. What is the maximum penalty that you are able to impose for such breaches? Do you think it is a) adequate, and b) actually imposed and enforced properly?

Jason Feeney: I would say we have seen an upward drift in terms of the penalties being applied by the courts. Recently, we have had a few six-figure fines as a result of prosecutions that we have taken, both in the hygiene space and also in the animal welfare space as well, which is an area that we have been paying more focus and more attention to over these last two years. We are seeing the courts taking these offences more seriously. Food business operators have been sentenced to custodial sentences, so we have had people sent to prison. We have had restaurant owners prosecuted by local authorities, particularly in relation to allergen breaches that have led to, in one or two cases, manslaughter charges and deaths. The strongest I have seen in my time here is somebody getting sentenced to eight years in prison.

Q205 John Grogan: I do not think it has been touched on for a little while but, in 2013, this Committee concluded there was a "lack of clarity about where food safety

responsibility lies” and “this has weakened the UK’s ability to identify and respond to food standards concerns.” Do you think there has been considerable progress? That is to both the council and then the FSA.

Jan Britton: We feel that we have a good working relationship with the FSA. We have no complaints about that working relationship. I have asked the questions that you would expect me to ask about data-sharing and ongoing work and relationships between our two organisations, and I have had nothing but assurances they are strong and continuing. They are not an immediate response to this problem. They are a consistent and longstanding feature of our work. That does not mean there cannot be improvements and, no doubt, that will be one of the things that we consider.

My personal view and my professional view is that there is a balance between a national regulator with national overview and the role of a local authority on the patch— notwithstanding the comments about the case, I do know this area, and my councillors know the area; we understand not just the regulatory regime for this company but we know how many people they employ; we know where people live; we have a relationship which is different to that which a national body could have. That builds a strength in the system that a single national agency might not be able to bring. I am not saying that that strength worked totally well in this instance—I acknowledge that is a weakness—but that balance between a national regulator and a local authority strikes me as being a powerful force for good things, if harnessed well.

Jason Feeney: I would fully agree. We have made great strides in terms of the relationship. It is very clear about what the local authority’s responsibilities are and what ours are. We have just heard an illustration of that. We are responsible for traceability; the local authority is responsible for labelling and best-before dates and use-by dates in terms of trading standards. It is very clear about who is responsible, and I could not agree more on the balance between a national oversight of the industry and the local knowledge on the ground and the flexibility that was referred to earlier. That gives the regime the best that we can do in terms of balancing the responsibilities. However, there will always be cases where it has been difficult.

Q206 Sandy Martin: Over and over again, some of these abuses in companies have been discovered by undercover operations by television companies and by newspapers. Do you not think that it is time for the FSA to start using some of these sorts of undercover operations in the same sort of way? It is not good for the confidence that this country has in the Food Standards Agency that we normally expect the most egregious things to be discovered by the newspapers or by television stations rather than by the Food Standards Agency.

Q207 Chair: I would include not only the FSA but the local authority as well in this, because you have to work together and you have to work together more, dare I say it, than you are at the moment. How do you get this in there and how do you get people working undercover?

Jason Feeney: We talked about this earlier. There is more we can do in terms of providing awareness and access, so that we can get information and intelligence from those who are already employed in a company. Never say never but it would be a significant step to place undercover employees into particular businesses. We would need to weigh that up carefully in terms of what the ramifications of that were, but I would not say never.

Jan Britton: A lot rests in the conversation about culture and the comments that have already been made about whistleblowing. The council, on its webpages, offers the opportunity for confidential whistleblowing relating to trading standards issues, but I do completely take the point that was made earlier about the confidence with which people take up such offers, and there is an avenue there that we would readily explore. I am minded to think about Crimestoppers, which is a route to pass confidential information to the police via an external agency, for example, to give a greater confidence to people, and there might be things we can explore in that area that help.

Chair: That is good because we have got to find a better system where people feel comfortable that they can come forward and they are not going to be pressurised, not just by 2 Sisters but by any other company, because I suspect there is a lot of pressure on the workforce in this industry, across the piece. It is a bit like the Volkswagen scandal over engines: it was not just Volkswagen in the end, was it? That is what we have got to be conscious of. This needs to be a test case on how we can deal with the situation better.

Q208 Julian Sturdy: The Food Standards Agency audits local-authority performance in ensuring food standards. When was Sandwell Council last audited by the FSA?

Jason Feeney: We capture performance information in relation to food inspection on a regular basis and we publish that annually in terms of relative performance between local authorities. I have not got the specific date of when we audited this particular council but we do get that performance information and publish it on a regular basis.

Q209 Julian Sturdy: Carrying on from that, the Food Standards Agency can provide funding to local authorities to assist in maintaining food safety. Have you given any money or funds to Sandwell Council or have they received any in this financial year?

Jason Feeney: No, not that I am aware of.

Q210 Julian Sturdy: Do you do that to other local authorities?

Jason Feeney: We provide funding for training support. That is largely what we provide it for, so that they can access training. However, the funding—you will be more expert at this than I—

Q211 Chair: Sorry to interrupt you but is the crime unit that you set up not supposed to do precisely that—help with whistleblowers being able to come forward?

Jason Feeney: Sorry, we are on local authority funding.

Chair: Sorry, that was me.

Jason Feeney: That is a different thing.

Chair: Finish that and then I will come back.

Jason Feeney: On local authority funding, it will be in the grant, will it not? It is the mainstream funding for the officers.

Jan Britton: We have not received any specific grant funding from the FSA in recent years. In my tenure as Chief Executive, we have not been specifically audited by the FSA either.

Q212 **Julian Sturdy:** Have you ever received any grant funding from the FSA?

Bob Charnley: No, we have not, but the FSA do run an annual food sampling programme, which, as a region, in the West Midlands, we bid into, so we receive funding from that to take so many samples, targeted at the priorities that the Food Standards Agency has set.

Q213 **Julian Sturdy:** Mr Feeney, how long have you been with the Food Standards Agency?

Jason Feeney: I have been the Chief Executive since April this year. Before that, I was Chief Operating Officer for two years.

Q214 **Julian Sturdy:** I was thinking more over a 10-year period, but you might be able to answer this. Over that period, have you seen or has it come to light that commercial pressures coming down the supply chain are starting to override safety? What I am saying is: are we seeing more of these incidents arise than, say, 10 years ago because of that?

Jason Feeney: As the Chair was saying, there is always pressure within the industry about margins and there is always that risk, as we were talking about earlier, that that leads to a potential for food safety and hygiene risks. I would not say that that was a greater risk now than it was, certainly from the two or three years I have been here. I would not say that there is a noticeable escalation of that.

Q215 **Julian Sturdy:** How about Trading Standards? Have you seen anything over your time that would say that the commercial pressures coming down the supply chain have meant that we are seeing more of these incidents arise? I am not saying in 2 Sisters but anywhere.

Jan Britton: I could not point to anything that I would describe as clear evidence of that being the case. However, knowing food businesses locally, the last 10 years have been a very difficult time. It seems to me that the good ones have more often survived than the bad, and that might perhaps run counter to some of what you are saying, but I could not offer that as knowledge evidence that I could give you detail on, I am afraid.

Q216 **Alan Brown:** In terms of commercial pressures or financial pressures on the regulatory side, what has the impact been, first of all, on Food Standards Agency budgets over the past few years? Clearly, councils have had cuts. How is that managed?

Jan Britton: We have been required to reduce our revenue budget as a local authority by about £170 million a year, but this is a high-priority regulatory role where we have a statutory obligation to meet the expectations, so this is an area that has not been reduced or cut as a result of budget reductions. It is a duty that we have to comply with and we do so. As we go forward, if we determine that a different approach or an enhanced approach is required, then, knowing Sandwell Council as I do, we will resource that appropriately.

Jason Feeney: I will be as quick as I can. In the last Spending Review, we got a flat-line settlement, so it is a real-terms cut, depending on how you go with inflation, of probably between 5% and 10%. We have received additional funding for our work on EU exit in this financial year.

Q217 **Chair:** Gentlemen, thank you very much. It has been a good session. We all want



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much better inspection and much tighter inspection. There is a need for whistleblowers to be able to freely come forward. The point that David Simpson made was very valid, about the fact that, perhaps in these large cutting plants, we may well need a full-time meat inspector. That is something that perhaps FSA and local authority should look at, because we have to try to make sure that confidence is brought back to the consumer, so that the very successful poultry industry and farming industry can be maintained. It is in all of our interests—both consumer and producer—that this does not happen again, so thank you very much for the evidence.

Witnesses: **Ranjit Singh Boparan**, Chief Executive, 2 Sisters Food Group, and **Chris Gilbert-Wood**, Technical Director, 2 Sisters Food Group, gave evidence.

Q218 **Chair:** Thank you for coming to our inquiry. Can you, first of all, starting with Mr Chris Gilbert-Wood, introduce yourself, and then, please, Mr Ranjit Singh Boparan.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I am Ranjit Singh Boparan. Here with me is Chris Gilbert-Wood, my Group Technical Director.

Q219 **Chair:** Please give me just a little more detail. Naturally, you are very much 2 Sisters. Are you a Director or Managing Director?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I am the Chief Executive Officer of 2 Sisters Food Group.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: I am the Group Technical Director for the 2 Sisters Food Group.

Q220 **Chair:** First of all, when were you first made aware of the allegations of malpractice at your Site D plant at West Bromwich? When did you first know that there was a problem?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: We were contacted on Sunday 24 September.

Q221 **Chair:** You were not aware that these problems that were shown up on camera were happening in your plant.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Absolutely not aware. We were not aware. The first we heard was from the *Guardian* at 12.30 on 24 September. That is when we started our incident team.

Q222 **Chair:** Do you accept that these allegations are accurate and that they represent the practice that went on in your plant, even though you say you were not aware of the situation?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Chair, we were very disappointed and upset when we saw the footage for the first time, which was aired by ITN. We absolutely apologise for the doubt this has caused to our customers, consumers and employees. We want to reassure you we do treat food safety at the highest of our standards. We are continuously committed to improving food safety every day.

Q223 **Chair:** Mr Boparan, as you can tell from probably listening all day, I am quite a straightforward man. Not only are you a big business but you have huge investments yourself in the poultry industry. You have huge farms down in my constituency. I have many farmers in the constituency who produce very good-quality chicken.



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When you have a problem like this that closes down that particular cutting plant, it has a huge economic effect on the farmers but also on you. The question—and I am being quite straightforward with you—is that perhaps something like this is not only not in the interests of the consumer because they cannot have complete confidence in poultry, but surely it is not in your financial interests either to have a situation like this.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Chair, it is not in anyone's interest to have a situation like this. The whole supply chain suffers. The confidence does get knocked. We have gone through the four allegations and we would like to explain them. The first allegation is the product on the floor. That absolutely should not have happened. Nobody should ever pick up product off the floor. We have 30 tonnes of product a week that we dispose of for product being on the floor.

Q224 **Chair:** From your total plants or that plant?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: The total plants. That plant is no different to any other plant in scale of floor waste. We train our staff when they join us. There is a four-hour induction programme. They are retrained every three years. There are signs up across the whole factory: "Do not pick up product off the floor". There are 400 hygiene people in these factories who wear orange overalls. They are the only people who can pick product off the floor, but still somebody picked product off the floor. Someone has made a mistake. We have to apologise for that and I have to take responsibility for that.

What are we doing about it? That is more important.

Chair: Yes, that is much more important.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: What we are doing about it is we are not doing the training that we were doing for four hours anymore. We are going to do eight-hour training, not every three years but every year. We are going to have a theme every single month to go through a process. Whether it is floor policy, traceability or labelling, that is what we are going to do. We are going to put a mystery worker going into factories who can see these things happening. We are doing a number of other things that we will share with you. We have to say that went wrong and it is a mistake, and we will continue to do things so that we do not have these mistakes.

We then move on to the labelling. When you look at the labelling, you saw the individual change a label from the 15th to the 16th. Naturally, this is a cutting plant; it is not a slaughterhouse. When you change a label from the 15th to the 16th, it is naturally the next day. I will tell you what the problem is first and then I will tell you what we have done about it.

First of all, I have to say that it does not look right from a consumer point of view. When I looked at that footage, it just did not look right. However, the individual there in question was removing a label and putting another label on. The 15th production had finished and, when you cut chicken in a cutting factory, what happens is one chicken becomes 14 pieces. Not every customer buys in balance, so you are removing drumsticks and putting them into crates for when the next production could go on, or it could go up for the freezer. We have to keep the date on for the traceability. The individual who was putting the 16th labels on, from my point of view, when we looked at it, as the 15th finished and the 16th started, he was

giving labels for the 16th because that was the correct product label for what was in the crate. If he had left the 15th on, that was incorrect.

Q225 Chair: The chicken in the crate was processed on the 15th. Surely, the moment you put the 16th on it, that poultry meat is a day older. With poultry meat, it is very essential that we eat it fresh. It is not like beef and lamb, where the more you hang it, the better, to a degree. Chicken meat is not like that, so why was that label there in the first place and then why would you change it? We have got to find out why a date was changed.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: First of all, the only date that is important is always the kill date, because that is the day the bird is killed, and the life starts from that date. Pack date and cut date are not that important. The most important thing is the kill date because then you can trace it back to the factory, to the farm, to the feed mill and to the hatchery. That is what you can do. Chris, would you like to comment?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Yes. To try to help, this is a cutting plant, as we have heard. The factory takes in whole chickens from a number of the slaughter plants in our estate, and those chickens go on to an automated cutting line. They come in with their kill date. What we saw in those trays were parts of the chicken. It was not the incoming chicken. They go on to an automated cutting line and they go round the machine, and chicken is taken off at various places. It may be taken off at various places for various reasons. As Ranjit suggested, it is sometimes because things are not selling in balance or there is a breakdown in a part of that machine and we need to take the chicken off the line and put it back into refrigeration. We have what we call work-in-progress. What was seen there was the labelling of the work-in-progress within the factory.

When this came about, I was asked, because we take these things very seriously, to do a full investigation into what I think had happened and whether there were breaches of what we were doing. There are two reasons why it may have been necessary to change the labels and in fact, to do exactly what we are saying, which is to make sure that the kill date is accurate. There are two reasons: one is that, when we move to the 15th kill date to the 16th kill date, sometimes the trays that are ready to take product, if they do not take them off the floor, meat of the 16th goes into trays labelled the 15th, so it is very important to—

Q226 Chair: Yes. You say the kill date is important and I accept that entirely but, as far as we are concerned, we believe that the meat that was changed from the 15th to the 16th is a day older, however you look at it. The meat that is processed one day and then put into the process the following day is a day older. If you then put on, the following day, the acceptable use-by date for the 16th rather than the 15th, that meat is a day older. You are being economical here with something because, like I said, we are not entirely daft. Like I said, why were labels being changed? If it was not wrong, why did you sack the person who was doing it? They were, according to you, acting in the right way.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: I do not think this Committee is daft. I would not have that as a view. I am trying to explain the outcome of our investigation. We do believe that what was happening was the labels were being changed to reflect the meat. If we want to talk about the individual, that individual was not sacked for that event. That individual was sacked because that activity was not part of their normal job function. We can see no reason why that

individual would have been involved in that activity. If that activity normally takes place, it is done by our QC staff.

When we suspended and then interviewed that worker, first of all he denied that he was the person on the video footage. We have now got a number of supervisors and his work colleagues and others to say, “Actually, it is you”. We then asked him why he was changing the labels. He continued to deny that he was changing the labels. We then asked him whether he understood what he was doing, and he just continued to deny it. We then asked him if somebody had told him to change those labels and he said that he had never been asked to change labels.

The other piece of information is he was also one of the people seen picking chicken up off the floor, which, again, is a role that would not be his. During the course of that investigation, the people who investigated during his suspension found that he was not co-operating with our investigation. In the outcome of that investigation, he had deliberately done things that he knew he should not have done.

By contrast, another worker who was seen picking chicken up off the floor admitted they had picked the chicken up off the floor. We went through a retraining programme and they continue to work with us. Therefore, he was sacked not for what he did but for the fact that we could not find a reason why he did do it and he would not satisfactorily explain why.

Q227 Chair: Let us be absolutely clear. Either these labels should not have been changed—and at one stage you held up your hands and said that it was wrong and that these labels should not have been changed—or, as now, you are arguing in front of us that it is perfectly alright to change the label but it is all to do with the kill date. Which is it? Where are we?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: When you look at it, everyone sitting here has looked at that footage and said, “It is all wrong. It is totally wrong”. When I look at something like that, it is wrong. I agree with you. However, it is not wrong because what was happening was the correct kill date was being put on the meat inside the crate, but I have to say to you it looks wrong. Therefore, if it looks wrong, it should not be done.

Chair: Let us get down to basics. If there is the 15th on that tray of meat, surely there is a logic that one of the labels is wrong. Therefore, we are bound to say that, if it has got a 15th date on it, it was killed earlier than that that was on the 16th date. There is a logic to this, and so it is no good to come here and spin us a story that “This is what we do because it is all to do with the kill date”, because I know very well that, from the day that you kill the chicken, you have so many days before you eat that chicken. If you can move that chicken 24 hours, it becomes 24 hours younger than what it was, but it is not, in reality, because that meat is progressing and deteriorating ever so slightly every day until we get to the day that we should consume it. With poultry meat, it is very important that those dates are right. We are not convinced by this; we really are not.

Q228 Sandy Martin: Just on that specific point, there might be a misunderstanding here. Is it not the case that, when the date on the tray is changed to the next day, that needs to be done when the tray is empty? Otherwise, you will never know whether the meat that it is in there is the meat from the date that is on the tray before you change

it or the meat that is in the tray from the date after you have changed it. Is there not a very real danger that, if you change the label while there is meat in the tray, you will get meat from two separate days both in the same tray? Is it not the case that, in fact, the meat in the tray was in the tray on the date that was on the tray and then the label was changed? If it had not been that case, would it not have been changed before the meat ever got into that tray?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Thank you, because you have explained, better than I was attempting to, to the Committee what we think may have happened. It is absolutely essential that the meat in the tray reflects the label on the outside. What we found through looking at this is our process is not as robust as it should be. Immediately, therefore, we have now changed it. We are not labelling trays anymore. Every tray has a plastic liner, and every liner is folded on top of each other. Every liner now has a label put across it, so, when you open the tray, you rip the label and it is very obvious. It is put in at the time, it is sealed at the time, and it is ripped when it is opened. We have strengthened our system and made it more fool-proof for exactly the reason you are saying. What we think we saw was legitimate, other than the things that I have said, which we could not get the worker to collaborate with our investigation, but it was not as good as it should have been. We have now changed it.

Q229 **Sandy Martin:** You said that the staff member was not particularly co-operative but I should imagine they were also rather scared. Is it not unreasonable to sack somebody for doing something that you say was the correct thing to do?

Chair: Also, the information in the *Guardian* newspaper was that he was asked by a supervisor to change that label, so you are saying he was not and he did it entirely off his own back. Which is it?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: He was not co-operating. He even denied he was on the footage. There is an appeal process, and we welcome him to do that. The appeal process is over a number of days. It has gone past that. We were quite open to keeping it open because we do not mind having a dialogue. We have never, ever fired someone or dismissed anybody who has been a whistleblower—absolutely the opposite. We would never do that.

Q230 **Paul Flynn:** What advantage to the worker is it to change the label?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: None whatsoever.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: None whatsoever.

Q231 **Paul Flynn:** Yes, but what advantage to management is it to change the label? It seems very likely that this was part of the culture of this company to cut costs at all stages, which is your reputation.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: No. First of all, we do not cut costs. There is no evidence we cut costs.

Q232 **Paul Flynn:** What about your wages? Are your wages up to the standard of others? I gather you employ a great many eastern Europeans on lower wages than your competitors.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We employ 36 different nationalities. That is what we employ. I started on the factory floor on the living wage and I worked my way up there. The thing is I encourage every single individual: if they want to do that, they can do that. There is a

process in place. On this thing about us cutting costs, we do not. We have invested £497 million in capex in these businesses. We have programmes for staff to develop and become management and move on.

Q233 Paul Flynn: Unite the union say that you have a record of fear and bullying in your factory. Do you think the appointment of a new Managing Director who is convicted for assaulting a person so hard that he lost an eye is going to enhance your culture of fear and bullying or eliminate it?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We work very closely with Unite. We have an industry body who come and audit us. Secondly, we have statutory directors, with five non-execs on there, and underneath that we have 12 operating directors. He is one of them.

Q234 Paul Flynn: If, as a member of the public, I want to avoid your products in the future, is it clear that the retail products come from your factory? Is it clear, if I am a customer of Harry Ramsden or the other companies that you serve, that the products are from you? Can I avoid your products in the future because of what I have seen on the television?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We produce safe food but the thing is we will continue to improve our systems.

Q235 Paul Flynn: Yes, alright, but your company has been built up by mainly takeovers and, quite rightly, I believe it has been said that yours is a race to the bottom, not only in low wages and poorer conditions for your workers but in being dismissive of the hygiene regulations. The reporter was only in your factory for 12 shifts and found this huge number of breaches of hygiene regulations. Does it not suggest that your poor standards are endemic in your factory and part of your culture to cut costs?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We have a very high standard. You have heard it today. We have a number of audits across all our businesses. We treat food safety very highly. The way we run the sites is at a very high standard. The UK has one of the highest standards in the world.

Q236 Paul Flynn: That is not, however, what the film said. That is not what the reports reported to us. The other inspections coming in are ones in which you often have notice and you can prepare for them, but this is something that was accurate. Here we had someone who appeared to be an employee and was working under very difficult circumstances. It was very difficult to film in those circumstances secretly, but he managed to get enough evidence to have us all here today to be greatly concerned about the standards in your factory.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We have carried out our own independent investigation. These are allegations and some of them are very misleading.

Q237 Paul Flynn: We have seen the film ourselves. What about the ones about the changes of meat coming back and being relabelled for Willow Farms? Is that not dishonest, when, apparently, they are from a different source?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We produce products to specifications of customers. We adhere to those specifications and we have not breached any of those specifications. We pack from one product to another. That is perfectly acceptable. The agriculture standards from ACP and Red Tractor are exactly the same, and there is nothing wrong with that.

Q238 **Paul Flynn:** You did not answer my question. If I go into Tesco to buy some chicken, how will I know it is from your company? Will it be labelled, so I can be warned? If not, should it not be?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: The FSA has numbers on the packs, which you will be able to tell from.

Q239 **Paul Flynn:** What can a customer do?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Exactly the same. We have an identification by plant.

Q240 **Paul Flynn:** Do I know if it comes from a factory with your low standards or from a factory with reputable standards?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I am sorry. We do not have low standards. There is nothing to tell me we have low standards. I will tell you what: I invite all of you to my factory—all of you. Come announced or unannounced. We have people who work there. There are 850 people in question here and their families in question here, and I cannot accept that you say we have low standards, because those factories do not have low standards. We have high standards with our farmers, we have high standards with our suppliers, and we have standards with our staff.

Paul Flynn: However, the evidence is against you.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Forgive me. Just on something else you said, no chicken moves back from a retail store back down the distribution network. It does not happen.

Q241 **Chair:** Why did those labels show that then?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Those labels did not show that. Those labels showed packs that were being opened and repackaged. Those packs probably had been packed earlier in the day. When we have tried to investigate that one, we were told this happened on 17 August. We did not pack one of those products on 17 August. The previous time we packed that product was on 3 August, so we are struggling, again, to put the footage together and work out what it is. Again, however, because we want to take this really seriously, we have taken it at face value, and what sometimes did happen was, if you packed to a provisional order—so, the supermarket might say they want 100 trays and they only came in and took 80 trays—you would take product back during that shift, open it up, provided the specification was the same, the kill date was the same and everything else was fine, and you would then use it for another customer.

Chair: We may well take you up on your invitation to come and view your plant.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Please.

Chair: Because where I do disagree with Paul is that we want your factory to be absolutely clean and absolutely perfect, because we want the consumer, the retailer and those producing poultry for you to have the full confidence in your operation. Like I said, however, we really want to find out exactly what happened because, like I said, then you can put it right.

Q242 **Alan Brown:** The one individual, you say, was sacked because of non-co-operation, not because he was changing the kill dates. This person is changing the kill dates. It



is not his job; it is somebody else's job. What is the whole breakdown in the process that would lead to some employee taking his own initiative in doing that? Why would he be doing that and who else is failing in their job? Who else is failing in food hygiene when they are not seeing the chicken has gone on the floor, if it is their responsibility? I will just add: you have said at least you have reviewed some of this. In terms of trays, you have to unseal the tray but, if somebody has put chicken back on the conveyor belt, surely that does not matter. You might have this seal, but if somebody is mixing the chicken, you have still potentially got a mix-up of kill dates, so the whole process needs to be absolutely bang-on.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Let me just reassure you. We have CCTV footage. We have got 36 cameras in this factory. We have got three months' CCTV footage archived now for anybody to inspect. Every single day of every single hour. We have got that. We have gone through that. The other thing is what we have also done now as a corrective action, so we can manage good manufacturing practices, is we have put someone full-time watching that CCTV during production. We have done that ourselves, because we want to make sure we get the confidence of the consumers back. We do take food safety very seriously, and putting an individual on each shift while we are in production at any time, they will be watching that CCTV. It is not for theft or anything like that. It is only to look at food safety: does everybody do what they should be doing? That is important for us to give the reassurance to the customer for food safety.

Q243 **Julian Sturdy:** I just wanted to drill down, if I may, a little on procedural operations in the factory, if I can, because there seems to be a little confusion about this. Just to throw a scenario at you, the sales are going very well, your retail outlets are pulling you out of chicken, and then suddenly a retail outlet says, on one line, "We do not want that anymore this week" or "this day", but the chicken is still in the pipeline, so to say, so the kill rate is still going at the same rate because you cannot claw that back. What happens at that point? You have suddenly got a backlog, at no fault of your own but because one of the retailers has changed a policy. What happens then to that excess chicken?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: If I just talk you through each, we have a SOP department: sales order processing department. The one thing we cannot do is slow down the supply chain of the live animals because—

Julian Sturdy: Exactly; that is my point.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: You just cannot do that. You have six or seven weeks to do that. Before that, you have got the hatchery, where the eggs come from. If the orders slow down or if the orders increase—if the sun is out, the orders could increase—what happens is, in that factory in question, we have two spiral freezers that can freeze two tonnes an hour on each one.

Julian Sturdy: You freeze it.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We allocate it and we put the product into the freezer.

Julian Sturdy: It will be taken off and frozen.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Absolutely.

Julian Sturdy: You have got to freeze straightaway because—

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Freeze straightaway. It will go on to a different—

Q244 **Chair:** How many freezers have you got on plant D then?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Two.

Q245 **Chair:** How big are they?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: They are two tonnes each per hour.

Q246 **Chair:** You can freeze things down in two tonnes per hour.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Yes, so we do four tonnes an hour.

Q247 **Chair:** You have 200,000 tonnes a day going through. You cannot freeze very much meat, can you?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: No, but if the orders slow down, we can use that. Also, if the orders slow down, we can tray product. We can freeze it into bulk. These are IQF freezers that can bag the product into a bag.

Q248 **Chair:** However, you know that the moment you freeze that meat, it will be worth half the value of what it is as fresh meat—as chilled meat. Therefore, you are not going to freeze anything until you have to, because it is not economic for you to do so. You are being driven into this position. I have some sympathy for you, believe it or not, because of the retailer keeping the prices so low. You have got about a 3% margin, so you are going to look for every means to keep that meat fresh. You do not freeze very much, I would add.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Chair, we freeze over 500 tonnes a week.

Chair: Yes, but not at that plant.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We put those spiral freezers in there for a reason. We do freeze. The thing is, from our point of view, when you are killing 6.5 million chickens a week, you have got to keep the supply chain going. It is too hard to do what you are saying, which is change the dates. You physically could not do it.

Q249 **Julian Sturdy:** Leading on from that, then, what happens when your things slow down too much and your freezer capacity cannot cope? You still have excess chicken and you are freezing as much as you can; what happens to that excess chicken?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: There are a number of avenues that we have. We can sell live chickens, as we have done sometimes. You can not bring the whole bird into the cutting plant, and sell the whole bird. You can sell it to the markets. You can export it. There are a number of facets that we have. That is what the sales order processing team are constantly doing. We use IT to actually drive that, so we can plan and re-plan and re-plan each day.

Q250 **Julian Sturdy:** What I am trying to get at is that at no point in the chain, are you saying, is there any pressure to change that kill date?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I can absolutely, categorically say there should be no reason at all for anyone to change any dates, because—

Q251 **Chair:** There should not be, or there is not any reason? It is an interesting wording.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: No, there is not. When you have a supply chain of the magnitude from the farm to all the way through, you have to keep it going. You cannot be static.

Q252 **Chair:** I understand that, but from the day that chicken is killed, how many days do you have that it can be sold as fresh meat? Chicken has quite a short shelf-life. So as it is chilled, if a chicken is slaughtered, what is the maximum number of days that that chicken has to be eaten, if it not frozen?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: You slaughter it on day one, and you would cut it on kill-plus-one or kill-plus-two.

Chair: So that is either the second day or the third day. So we are at three days.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: You give the product 10 days from kill, so the supermarkets or the customers would have another five or six days.

Q253 **Julian Sturdy:** That was a good point. What are the supermarkets looking for, for use-by date? They want the maximum, so with different outlets do you have different requirements?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Most of our supermarket customers have a date regime based on kill-date-plus. They also have a date regime based on the minimum night in depot. We have to balance those two. However, the driving factor is the kill-date-plus, exactly as the Chairman says, because you cannot extend the life of a chicken. Now, those dates do vary.

Q254 **Chair:** You can if you order the dates on it. Physically you cannot, but in reality if there is a different date on that chicken, the life of that chicken, as far as the sale of it to a supermarket, has been increased, and so has the value of that chicken.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: We have said we do not do that.

Chair: I am not convinced that the filming does not show that, you see. I understand that you are putting it right, and I very much applaud that, but I think there is a changing of the date, and that is the bit of your evidence that I do not really accept.

Q255 **Julian Sturdy:** What I was trying to drill down on was that there is, at any point in the chain, a pressure—a financial pressure—on the company, and I am not blaming the company for this, because when supplies change that is going to put different financial pressures on you. For example, the Chairman has talked about frozen chicken, and we are aware that once you freeze you are going to lose money on that chicken, or the value reduces. What I am trying to get at is whether, at different points in the process, there are certain pressures—financial pressures that might come down the supply chain through changes in policy or changes in requirements—that put pressure on you as a company on those kill dates?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: It absolutely does not. It absolutely does not.

Q256 **Julian Sturdy:** At some point, are you literally throwing product away?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We throw away over 30 tonnes a week.

Julian Sturdy: 30 tonne a week does not seem a lot to me.

Q257 **Chair:** You are inclined to mix, dare I say it, statistics to do with your whole business and statistics to do with plant D. You are not throwing away, necessarily, 30 tonnes from plant D, or are you?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: No.

Q258 **Chair:** No, that is the total. What is your total production per week, with all your plants?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: 6.5 million chickens.

Q259 **Chair:** What is that in tonnage, because one minute you are talking about chickens, the next minute you are talking about tonnage? How many tonnes of chicken meat is 6 million chickens?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: About 10 million kilograms.

Q260 **Chair:** 10 million kilograms? So that is 100,000 tonnes, is it? You are saying that it is 30 tonnes you are throwing away, so that is 3%.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Yes.

Q261 **Chair:** Okay, so that has it in perspective. If it is 200,000 tonnes, that would be six tonnes at the cutting plant at plant D. Is that right, for the record?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: That is about right, yes.

Chair: At least we have got to grips with that.

Q262 **Julian Sturdy:** Very, very quickly, you semi-answered this in a previous question. The retailers cannot or do not return any product from their distribution outlets back to you; is that the case?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Yes, that is the case.

Q263 **Julian Sturdy:** That never happens?. If they cannot move it, or it passes their shelf-life that they want to sell, then it is disposed of by them at that point, at their cost.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: That is right. It is at their cost.

Q264 **Dr Johnson:** I think you said earlier, when we were talking about the incident of picking up off the floor, that you threw away 30 tonnes of wastage a week that was on the floor, but is this 30 tonnes a week wastage of all kinds, or wastage off the floor?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: The six tonnes in question is floor waste.

Chair: It is six tonnes in the plant D, and 30 tonnes over the whole.

Q265 **Dr Johnson:** I think my colleague Julian may have been asking about waste because it was not used. Not because it was dropped on the floor, got dirty and was

contaminated, but because it was not needed by suppliers because you had overproduced what you took to market.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: One of the absolute core skills of a poultry business is that you must maximise the use of the carcass. The skill is, you have a number of routes to do things, so you will move things: fresh meat goes into an added-value product, or it has a number of routes. It is about using those routes to balance off the ebb and flow of product.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We talk about 200 tonnes of product coming in. What you have is about 65% yield. The rest is waste. When you produce the chicken, when it goes into the cutting factory, you are only going to get 65% out of what you put in.

Chair: This is what they call the killing rate.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Because of the bone.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Because of the bone, the skin, the hocks and floor waste. That will go to different channels—pet food, etc—like that.

Q266 **Dr Johnson:** Okay, so just to clarify that point, you have 30 tonnes of waste in your company and six tonnes in this particular plant, which is going because it has been contaminated or because it is a bit of the bird that people do not want to eat.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Correct.

Q267 **Dr Johnson:** When you have the 200,000 tonnes of bits of bird that people do want to eat, which is labelled wings or whatever it is you have ready to be packaged, and you find that actually this week you only need 190,000 tonnes because the supermarket does not want the other 10,000, what happens to that, assuming it does exceed freezer capacity?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We see the orders on a daily basis, and we have forecasts seven days in advance.

Dr Johnson: But they will not be perfect.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Do you know something? With the systems nowadays they are very accurate. Weather can change things, and it does. Consumer behaviour can change things. What we do here is that when the orders drop, we can freeze the product, or we can trade the product. We can do that and we do do that, and we have records of how much we freeze every day, how much we trade every day, because it has to be recorded to go back to the mass balance.

Q268 **Dr Johnson:** My other question was about the CCTV. You said that you had CCTV in your factory, looking at the production line as opposed to the car park.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Correct.

Q269 **Dr Johnson:** You said you had three months' worth, which would cover certainly some, if not all, of the period that that the reporter was there. Have you reviewed that footage? Has your company reviewed it?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Yes, we have reviewed the footage.

Q270 Dr Johnson: Did you see the incidents that were in the *Guardian* and ITN's footage on your own CCTV cameras?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: No, unfortunately we did not.

Q271 Dr Johnson: None of them?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Part of one of them, but sadly the CCTV footage does not cover the complete factory.

Q272 Chair: You are going to make sure, now, that the CCTV does cover every aspect?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Every aspect.

Chair: You put that on record.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: That is absolutely on record.

Chair: This will all be recorded for posterity.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We want to get the confidence. If there is something that we learn from this, we will put it right and move it forward. We have realised that actually the CCTV does not cover one of the rooms in question. We will put CCTV in there, but not only are we going to put it in there; we are going to put it across all our factories.

Q273 Dr Johnson: We know that the reporter produced a snapshot of 12 shifts over a roughly six-week period, in which there were a number of incidents. Did you see any incidents on your CCTV? Presumably these 12 days are roughly representative of the total period of six weeks. There is no reason to believe they should not be. Did you see any other incidents that took place on the CCTV, about which you were not aware because the reporter was not there on those days, and if so what action have you taken in response to that?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: I have not personally viewed the CCTV, but I do not think we have found anything else of the nature that the journalist reported.

Dr Johnson: You "do not think".

Chris Gilbert-Wood: I have not had it reported—

Q274 Dr Johnson: Are you in charge of looking at this CCTV footage?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: If I can explain, in what Ranjit asked us to do as an incident team, my job was to absolutely take the video footage as though it was real and investigate it and see what was happening. There was another team that were tasked to look at the CCTV footage and see what else was going on. They have not yet finished that investigation, so I have not seen the outcome of it. We thought the most important thing was to get down to the food safety allegations that were made.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: There have been no other food safety situations, otherwise they would have reported it straightaway.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Yes, they would have reported it straightaway.



Q275 **Dr Johnson:** Is this factory not producing chicken at the moment? This factory in question is not producing chicken at the moment.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: What we have done is two weeks' worth of training for every individual. How we have trained them is in different classrooms, to talk them through basic food hygiene, floor policies, labelling policies—all of these. We have then tested them, and the majority passed but some did not. We retrained them and then tested them again, to see if they had passed again. The majority have passed.

We have also done some training. What you do in theory and practice sometimes is two different things, so we have done it in theory; we then took them on the factory floor and practised it, to make sure that they fully understood what they had been practising in the classroom.

Dr Johnson: Okay, that is great. You say on your website, you will only recommence supply once you are satisfied your colleagues have been appropriately retrained. However, you also say that this video demonstrates an isolated incident of non-compliance with your own quality management system. If it is an isolated example and all of the rest of the CCTV from your whole factory is perfect, and all you have is two employees who have dropped chicken on the floor and picked it up, and they are the only faults in the whole factory, why do you need to do such extensive training of every single person, if they were behaving perfectly on your CCTV?

Q276 **Chair:** Also, can I add to that the same questions I asked the FSA and everybody else? Why, suddenly, after these revelations from these journalists are you taking all this retraining and doing it all properly? Why did you not find this for yourselves? If you have a system that works, you would not need to do all this retraining, which is the point that Caroline's making. Therefore surely these journalists—I am sure you do not think this in your heart—have actually done you a very good turn because you are now retraining your staff, you will make sure less chicken is thrown on the floor, your wastage will be much less and the confidence in your product far greater. However, why did you not find that? You cannot have it both ways. You cannot have it that there is no problem with your factory, and yet you are retraining everybody. Why is it that you did not find it all?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We asked for evidence from the *Guardian* and ITN, from the Sunday. We have continuously asked them for the evidence, but they never gave it to us. The first time we saw it was on Thursday. Like I said, we were shocked and disappointed with what we saw. The first thing we had to say was, "If that is true, we need to take the appropriate action." We had to, as a precautionary measure, do this anyway, because you have all seen it: it was the right thing to do. On Sunday we suspended production.

Q277 **Chair:** You believed there was a need to do this, so therefore there was a problem. You still have not answered my question: why did you not find the problem? Why did your systems not find it? Why did your CCTV not find it? It seems rather convenient that the one place where all this happened there was no CCTV. Why is it that your system has not worked, and can we be confident now that your new system that has been put in place because of this undercover investigation will work?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: You say it has not worked. We have a whistleblowing line. We display it across the factory. We have had 47 incidents this year. 17 confirmed that what they said was correct. The rest we have had to overturn. That happens. The reason we can reassure you is we have looked at it. These four weeks have been very, very difficult for a lot of people. I look at it and I see the look in the eyes of the operatives on the factory floor who come to work every single day to do a good job. Nobody comes to work to do a bad job. Not one of my employees comes to work to do a bad job. I do not go to work to do a bad job. Mistakes happen. Perfection is an illusion; it does not happen. What we try to do is learn from the mistakes and put them right. That is what we are doing. Product on the floor is not acceptable. It is irrelevant.

Q278 Chair: We are happy that you are putting it right, but the one question you have not answered is why your internal processes on food safety and hygiene did not pick this up. You have not given us an adequate answer. We should not be here. You should not be sitting here. It is not doing you any good whatsoever, sitting in that seat, because your business is losing money, the consumers are not confident on food safety through the unit, and the farmers are being affected badly in producing. I want it sorted as soon as possible.

Can we be reassured that in the future—because you have had other cases over the years—they are not going to happen?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I have been in the industry for 30 years. I have told you I have worked right the way up from the factory floor. I asked my own team the same question that you have just asked me. How is it that we have not found and been reporting what has been done? From our point of view, what we have had to do is re-look at how we look at things. We have changed a number of things, and I am going to say to you today—and you can put it on record—I reassure you we will continuously improve. I reassure you food safety will be the highest thing on our agenda. I reassure you that food that we produce is safe. That is what I can give you.

We are on a journey. We talk about culture. Over the last 15 years, we have built a bigger business, no question. We have bought businesses that were on the brink of failure. We have helped and turned them around. We have actually improved employment and increased employment. What I am saying here today is that it is time to build a better business—not a bigger business but a better business. With that, I have to change, and the business will change. What we are doing there is making sure that food safety and health and safety is at the top of our priorities.

Chair: We appreciate your statement. Naturally, as you well know, this is all recorded. We are going to put it in a report, and we will probably bring you back in six months' time to give us reassurance that all of that has been put in place. However, we accept what you are saying.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Chair, could I just support that? One of the things that Ranjit asked me to do, over 12 months ago, was put together a programme that would start to address changing the culture of the various businesses. I reported that programme to the board in January, and we have been putting together training programmes and activities that we believe we will put in place to change the culture of the business; you do not do that overnight, but it will do things over the forthcoming years. This is not just a reaction to what

has happened. We were on our way on a journey. This has been a catalyst to implement faster and quicker. That commitment was there, and that desire to make the business better before bigger was there previously. We know we have to do it and we are dealing with it.

Q279 Dr Johnson: It is interesting what you say about the culture of the business. In 2013, as I understand it you were fined £112,500 in relation to your plant at Stowmarket for food safety offences relating to shelf-life, and then in 2014 there was an investigation into dropped chicken in Scunthorpe. Each time you have said sorry, that you did not expect this to happen, that you are appalled by it, that you want to improve, and that things are going to get better. However, things are not better, and I wonder two things: first, is the fact that you wanted to change your culture in January a sign that you knew this was going on, and recognised there was a problem with the culture?

Secondly, if you recognised there is a culture at one plant and you have a history of problems with at least two others, is it a sign that actually you should be stopping supply at the other plants and instituting the same intensive retraining programme—or at least the testing programme—of your other employees at your other plants? Test them to make sure they know what they are supposed to do.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We have done the training programme at Site D, with the team that we have there. We are now cascading that across all of our factories. When we say we are going to train every individual for a minimum eight hours in a year, that is what we are going to do, and we are going to do it every year, not every three years. We are going to do that. We have started that programme. We are going to put CCTV and we are going to have the CCTV monitored 24 hours for GMP—good manufacturing practice—across all our sites. We are not going to do it at one site; we are going to do it across the whole of the estate. That journey has started. It does take time for these things to happen. The training programmes have started. The CCTV is being reviewed and being ordered straightaway.

Q280 Dr Johnson: Have they been given to the FSA—the three months’ worth?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We have said to the FSA, “Absolutely. There is three months’ worth of footage. We are more than happy for you to come and have a look at them”.

Q281 Dr Johnson: Have they taken you up on that offer?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We are working with the FSA.

Q282 Dr Johnson: Have they taken you up on the offer?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Yes, they have.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: They have.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: They mentioned we had a meeting last week. We talked about the CCTV footage. We are just at the point of arranging to get it to them.

Chair: We very much welcome that, again, you have put on record that you are going to have CCTV in all of your plants across the whole of your estate. This is good information.

Q283 David Simpson: I have a number of things. I will keep them as brief as I can. I



raised it with the Food Standards Agency, in relation to meat inspectors. What would your reaction be to a full-time inspector being in your cutting plants, and this particular one?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I absolutely welcome it. If they want to put two on there, they can do, because they have them in all our slaughterhouses and they do not have them in the cutting houses. We do not mind having them on site full-time. We absolutely welcome it.

Q284 **David Simpson:** The second point is that I picked up Chris saying that you had asked him to review the footage as if it was real. I think the message from the Committee today is that the big concern is, yes, what we have seen on TV, but some are trying to get their head around this labelling issue. The guy who you are telling us was involved with the labelling is the same guy, I understand you are saying, who was involved with the meat falling on the floor; he would not co-operate on all of that. Have you any suspicions at this stage about the labelling? Who would have told him to change the labelling in the way he did, when he should not have been doing it? Can I come out with an outrageous statement? Do you think that this is a conspiracy theory?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: That is still with the investigation. We suspended a number of people when the allegations came out, from the general manager through to line supervisors and people, and we investigated, to see and interview them and ask them about the allegations. None of the line leaders have given us any indication that they have ever told people to change meat. When we showed the footage to a number of our employees and asked them what they thought was going on, a number of them said they did not understand it, and if they did understand what was going on, it would be done by a quality controller, not by the person who was doing it.

So from the basis of our investigation thus far, we do not understand exactly what is going on and we can find no evidence of anybody doing that. However, as I said, the other part of the investigation is not yet completed, and so I cannot give you any more than the facts as I know them at the moment.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We have brought in an independent forensic team. I asked Chris to do one investigation, and we had a forensic investigation doing the others. Once we get the reports, we are more than happy to share them with the Committee.

David Simpson: That would be very interesting.

Chair: Yes, it would be very interesting. Please keep us informed of the actions you are taking, because, like I said, I do not want to see you in here again in this same situation. It is not good for the poultry industry, it is not good for the consumer and it is certainly not good for the farmer, and it is not good for your employees either, in your plants. Dare I say that it is not good for your pocket either, and I am sure you are only too aware of that?

Q285 **John Grogan:** I listened to you very carefully at the beginning of the evidence. You expressed shock at the allegations, and so on, and have taken some actions since. However, as my colleague mentioned, there was evidence of wrongdoing and malpractice going back before 2013 to 2009. Do you remember the conversation you



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had with Jack Dromey, who has been quoted as saying some of your own workers, who you had sacked, “told us that often the dating of chicken meat was changed so that meat that should have been thrown away was sold to supermarkets. I remember that vividly, and putting it to Ranjit Singh and not for one moment did he deny it”? Do you remember that conversation, and would you like to comment on it, and that you did know—not just two years ago or three years ago—eight years ago that this was a potentially serious problem in your business?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: May I just talk you through that meeting? Jack Dromey was the official for Unite at the time.

John Grogan: I think it was TGWU at the time.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Sorry, TGWU.

John Grogan: Detail is important in these things.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: 59 people unconstitutionally walked off the line. They were dismissed. That is where the conversation started from, and he was banging the door, “We want to see you”. I refused to see him, because they did something that they should not have done. However, one individual, unfortunately, got into hardship and I heard about it. I invited Jack to come and see me to reinstate some of these individuals, because I did not want to see people come to hardship. We had a number of conversations, and we were more than happy to get the individuals back, even though we did not have to do it.

A passing comment from Mr Dromey was, “People are saying you are changing dates”. I said to Mr Dromey, “Please give me the evidence, and I am more than happy to investigate it”. I never heard anything else.

Q286 **John Grogan:** If you had been told by a senior union official that lots of people had been making these allegations, should you not have taken some of the action then that you are proposing to take now? I would have been massively alarmed, had I been in your position, to be told such things.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: What I am trying to explain is that we do change labels. It is part of our process. Honestly, I really would like you all to come to the factory. I would love to talk you through what we do, and how we have changed it. We would actually demonstrate it.

Q287 **John Grogan:** Do you stand by the statement that you or possibly the Managing Director has said in the conference call with the investors that there have been no breaches of food safety regulations.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I was not on that call.

Q288 **John Grogan:** Surely, as the CEO, you have been informed of that? Perhaps Chris can help.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Yes, I can. I was not on the call either.

Q289 **John Grogan:** Who was on the call?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: It was our Chief Financial Officer and our Chief Operating Officer. I have been through the transcripts, and they were very clear what they were doing was quoting

from the FSA website, and at that time the FSA, as you heard this morning, had found no breaches of food safety. That is what they were quoting.

Q290 John Grogan: Now you accept there have been breaches of food safety regulations.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: We have come and said that there was meat on the floor.

Q291 John Grogan: I am just asking you: do you accept there have been breaches of food safety regulations—yes or no?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Product on the floor—

John Grogan: So there has been. You are now admitting it.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I accept that product on the floor is not acceptable.

John Grogan: I hope you will be informing your investors, because it is serious.

Chair: Sorry to interrupt, but it is not about the product on the floor, is it, Mr Boparan? It is about the fact of picking that product up off the floor and putting it back. Surely, theoretically, all of that meat was then contaminated? It should not have gone through the food chain any further. Therefore, all of that went into the food chain.

Q292 John Grogan: So there has been a breach of food safety regulations.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We are working with the FSA, are we not?

Q293 John Grogan: You are not even prepared to say whether you think there has?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I said there has been a mistake made. I am saying mistakes were made—

John Grogan: For clarity—

Ranjit Singh Boparan: For clarity, mistakes were made.

Q294 John Grogan: You are not admitting there were—

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I am accepting there was a mistake made.

Q295 John Grogan: Can I make a suggestion, then? You very kindly invited us down. Clearly your business is in trouble; some of your retailers stopped taking from you for a while; you are going through crisis management at the moment. Instead of inviting the Committee, why not say to the FSA, “For the next year, we want your inspectors not just in this plant but all the other plants, and we will fund the costs of that, to try to get some public confidence back”. I do commend you for building up the business, but, as you say yourself, you are an important employer. How about that suggestion?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I absolutely welcome it. I will accept it.

John Grogan: Thank you very much indeed.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: We have started to talk to the FSA about that last week.

John Grogan: That is progress.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Anything that brings confidence to the consumer, we will do.

Q296 **John Grogan:** On a similar theme of confidence to the consumer, I have to touch on it: corporate governance. You were asked a question by my colleague, what exactly are the qualities of the Managing Director at the moment, and have any of your investors ever challenged his appointment?

Chair: I think this is the last question on this one.

John Grogan: Yes, I have asked the question, Chairman.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: My view on this one is very straightforward. We appoint people based on their experience and knowledge. We have a statutory board, which is the governance board, which has five non-executive directors on it and three executive directors. One of the executive directors is myself, one is the CFO and one is the COO. We have another board, which is the operating board, that run the businesses. There are six MDs on there. He is one of them. He will report to the COO, not to me.

Q297 **John Grogan:** What are his qualities that justify that position? It is a good example of giving jobs to offenders, but what exactly are his qualities?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: His qualities are the same as the rest of the MDs. He was appointed to that job on merit. He was selected by people other than Ranjit to do that job.

Q298 **John Grogan:** There is no thought that he is in charge of this, which has cost your company an awful lot of money, and perhaps that is a bit too much too soon?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Absolutely no thought and absolutely no evidence from our investigations.

Q299 **John Grogan:** You said that you do not want to get any bigger, and you want to concentrate on changing the culture. With the culture, what are you trying to change? Clearly Chris is a trusted man. What was your brief? What were you trying to change in January? What was wrong with the culture?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: First of all, I would say absolutely for a number of years now we have wanted to get better.

Q300 **John Grogan:** Better at what?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Better at everything we do: systems, procedures, training, culture, the whole lot. We are consolidating. Invest inwards, rather than outwards. Invest your capital inside.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: The culture we are trying to develop is one of continuous improvement, compliance, and motivating our employees. Interestingly, Chris Elliott wrote in the *Grocer* at the weekend, and I am going to steal his statement because I think it articulates it better than I can. He says it is a culture “that values its staff, treats them with respect, trains them, empowers them and rewards good practice”. That is what we are trying to achieve.

Q301 **John Grogan:** You said you did not want to get bigger, and you have a record of expanding. Does that mean that the deal with Burtons is off, and the nation’s Jammie



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Dodgers are not going to be taken over by you? You are not going to get bigger, so I am presuming you are not going to be taking them over.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: When we say better, we mean better.

Q302 **John Grogan:** You said you did not want to get bigger.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Yes, but that is not getting bigger.

Chair: I think in fairness, we are not here to—

Q303 **John Grogan:** Can I just ask one final question, then? Can you give us any knowledge at all? You seem to have a lot on your plate at the moment in running the current business. Are you trying to merge with or take over Burtons?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I will answer that question. If we are—

Chair: I think that is—

John Grogan: Chairman, with respect—

Chair: No, I am sorry. I am chairing this meeting.

John Grogan: You are, yes, with a certain style.

Chair: Yes, and there is a moment where we are inquiring—

John Grogan: Chairman, to not let a Member ask a question is a serious—

Chair: Yes, would you—

John Grogan: The witness was prepared to answer, Chairman.

Chair: Would you let me finish, please?

John Grogan: Certainly, yes.

Chair: Thank you. The situation is this: we are here to view the food safety and the standards in the plants that Mr Boparan runs at the moment. I do not know that he necessarily has to answer a question from you as to whether he is going to acquire another plant. I think that is probably slightly out of order.

Now if Mr Boparan is prepared to answer it, I accept that. However, I think we are getting a little bit on the edge of where we should be.

John Grogan: Chairman, I respect your judgment as always. I will also say that it was the witnesses themselves who referred to not wanting to get bigger. I would not have asked the question if the witnesses' evidence had not led me to it.

Chair: Mr Boparan, I am in your hands. If you want to answer it, you can, but you do not necessarily have to.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I have said to this Committee, and it is on the record, that we are looking to make our business better before we make it bigger. For a number of years, now, we are going to concentrate on making it better.

Q304 **Sandy Martin:** Mr Boparan, you were fined £112,500 for breaches in the Stowmarket plants, as Dr Johnson mentioned earlier. Can I ask—I am hoping that the Chair will not rule me out of order on this one—what your turnover is? You are the second largest food company in the country, I believe.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Our turnover is around £3.5 billion.

Sandy Martin: Okay, so a £112,500 fine is not a massive proportion of your overall turnover, is it?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: That was done in what year?

Sandy Martin: That was 2013.

Dr Johnson: It is something you do not really remember.

Q305 **Sandy Martin:** Indeed, which actually is very largely my point. It was such a small fine, in comparison to your overall turnover, that you do not even remember it having been done. You did say right at the very start when you were giving us your initial thoughts—I paraphrase—that you were holding up your hand and, “We are going to be safe in the future”. No doubt you said the same sort of things in 2009, and in 2013, and in 2014, and in Llangefni, and in Scunthorpe, and in Stowmarket, and in Anglesey. We have evidence from a quality assurance manager who was working in West Bromwich in 2009, nothing to do with Smethwick, who left the company and who says that kill labels were being changed in West Bromwich in 2009, and presumably have been changed in the West Bromwich plant since 2009, right up to the current date.

If you were to be fined, and if you were to be fined another £112,000, it would make virtually no difference to the turnover of your company, would it? So why do you believe that we should believe that you are going to improve or change the way that your company is operating. Clearly it is very profitable. The fines are making no difference to your overall turnover. Your company have been caught doing the same sort of thing multiple times over various years, and there is no reason for us to believe that anything will change in the future, is there?

Chair: Get to the question. The question is: are you going to change the culture, and with what has happened in the past can we be absolutely reassured that the assurances you are giving us today will actually happen? That is the crux of the matter.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: First of all, £112,500 is a lot of money, in anyone’s eyes. We have bought a number of businesses and have had several cultures across the business. You have mentioned a few there, including Stowmarket and Llangefni. It was only six months after we bought the business this happened. This is the difference: what we are saying now is we are not going to buy any more businesses. What we are going to do is concentrate on what we have got and make that better. Culture does not change overnight. You need to recognise that. We have started a journey; we will continue that journey. You will see some dramatic changes straightaway. It will be led from the top, and the rest of the teams will be following. This is a moment of change, and we will change it.

Q306 **Alan Brown:** Again, I am hearing what other MPs have said. Obviously the commitments you say you are making and this culture change sound great, but we are here because there have been a catalogue of incidents before. It is hard to get our heads around both aspects of that. I just wonder, in terms of consumer confidence, whether you have reviewed what consumer confidence is right now. Has that actually had any impact on your business?

It also strikes me that 2 Sisters provide a third of the chickens that are eaten in the UK, so therefore it is almost like when the banks were too big to fail. In terms of food production and food supply, it is almost like you are too big to fail as well.

What evidence has there been of a dip in consumer confidence or a dip in your market that is actually going to ensure that you do have to drive this change to be better, to guarantee the consumer confidence?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: As a business, we have to get customer confidence. Anything like what we see on ITV and in the *Guardian* does dent customer confidence. It does. You lose one consumer; that is too much. You say, “You are too big to change”; we are not too big to change. We absolutely are not. This is not the banks. This is a business I have grown up with and built to where it is. I am not going to go through this again. This is not a good experience for me.

The thing is, in 12 months’ time or whenever, come and talk to me or I will come and see you, and you can tell me if you have noticed a change. Give someone a chance. Give someone a chance to prove. I have had a lot of things I have had to achieve in my life. This is another one. I will achieve it, but give someone a chance to do it. That is all I am asking.

Q307 **Chair:** Mr Boparan, we will give you a chance but you have had several chances before. One thing I can promise you: you think I might have been quite tough on you today, but I can assure you if you do not change your practice and there is a problem, and you have to come back in here in another six months or a year, what we have been like today will be nothing compared to what we will be like then.

I am not only interested in your business; I am interested in the consumer and I am interested in all those suppliers and farmers and growers who go into your plants. If we do not get it right, not only are you going to be ruined, but so are they. I am hugely concerned about that, and you are as well, because you have big poultry units as well. That is what it is all about. It is no longer whether you can cut a corner and make a little bit more money. You have cut one or two corners in your time, and this is costing you a lot of money, and it is costing the consumers and farmers a lot of money. Are you ready to get those retailers? Will they buy from you? Until they buy from you, those big retailers, the whole system is shut down, is it not?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Correct.

Q308 **Chair:** Are they buying from you?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: It is interesting. I was with the factory this week and last week, and I sat down with 40 individuals in a coffee shop. Whenever I go to a factory I do a coffee shop—people off the factory floor, no supervisors, no managers, and I just listen to issues or any grievances or anything. You can talk about anything. People have been working there 15 years, and were absolutely distraught, crying, and they said to me the same thing. This is the thing for me: I will personally go and see every retailer to ask them to recommence products in that factory.

Q309 **Chair:** They can be absolutely reassured, can they, in the evidence that you have given us this afternoon: that you have put the situation right, that you are putting the retraining in there and that you are doing everything absolutely right? We need Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Asda, Lidl—all these people—to actually go back in the market and buy your chicken, because it is not just about you; it is about all the people who supply you and all the consumers that eat the chicken that you have processed, under whatever label it might come. You can imagine the retailers, naturally, do not want

the bad publicity or any food safety risk. They have to be reassured. Do you believe they are reassured?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I believe they are reassured. We have evaluated everything, we have put even better procedures in place, and we will continue to do that. You do have this awkward situation, which is about who goes in first. Nobody wants to be the first one, yet they all want to be in there.

Q310 **Chair:** So at the moment, your big retailers are not buying from you.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Not from that plant.

Chair: None of the chicken that you cut, and you cut 200,000 tonnes a day?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: That plant is 200,000 kilograms a day.

Q311 **Alan Brown:** Does that mean other plants are actually cutting more to make up for what is not being filled from this plant?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Some are, but we are not meeting all the orders.

Q312 **Paul Flynn:** We all agree with what the Chair has said—that we want to keep the farming industry going—but many of us would welcome a change back to some of the manufacturers and people in your position in the past, who appear to have had higher standards than you have had, and are not serial offenders, as you have been in this trade. While we want to keep it going, I think we should see that all of the times that you have been accused of bad practice are put up against you, and you realise that many of the companies you have taken over had superior standards to the ones that you have been practising.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: So the question is—

Paul Flynn: There was an investigation in 2014 that has not been mentioned—

Ranjit Singh Boparan: You are talking about the—

Chair: I think it has.

Paul Flynn: Has it? The *Campylobacter* infection.

Chair: That was mentioned while you were out.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Do you want me to talk about *Campylobacter*?

Q313 **Paul Flynn:** No, let us talk about the fact that there have been charges against you on all stages, for all the time you have been growing your empire, and reducing standards in the industry—of wages and of hygiene.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: First of all, we have bought businesses who were on the brink of closure, so we have safeguarded thousands of jobs. Secondly, how do you go and change standards to go lower? It does not happen. You cannot do it. I would encourage anybody to come into the factory and say, “Reduce the standards”. The employees would not do it. We improved standards. We have constantly improved. You look at the standards and look at the audits of what we have got and where we have got up to. Can we do better? Absolutely we can. We are not going to sit here and say we cannot do better. We can do better, and we will do better. However, do not say we buy businesses and then we then take the standards

down and reduce wages. We cannot reduce wages. We do not reduce wages. It is an assumption.

Paul Flynn: It was Unite the union, who would know about these things, that suggested—

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Can I say something? I have been working in the food industry for 36 years. I spent 25 years working for Marks & Spencer, I spent 12 years working for all sorts of businesses, and I have now been working for Ranjit for three years. I have been going into many of the plants you are talking about consistently as a food technologist for a customer, as a professional food technologist working in manufacturing, and I can tell you the standards in those plants have got better and better and better during my career.

Q314 **Dr Johnson:** I have a technical point on the labelling issue. You said that the labelling issue looked like something you did not want to see but it was okay. We have been led to understand that labelling is checked at the beginning of the day, so every morning you come, you check that your trays have got the right dates on, maybe there is a tray with the wrong date on, and you change it so that it is right for today. What time of day did this labelling issue that is on the video actually occur?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: There are two times of labelling in the factory—

Dr Johnson: What time of day did that labelling event actually occur?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: All we know is that that individual was working on the evening shift.

Dr Johnson: So it did not occur in the morning.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: No. We have not been able to ascertain exactly what time it happened. That is one of the challenges.

Q315 **Dr Johnson:** Why would the labelling of the date of a product need to be changed in the afternoon? Surely, if it is going to be changed at all, it would be being changed very first thing in the morning?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: What happens is product comes through the factory, and we might have been taking product with a kill date of the 15th in the early part of the shift, and at some stage we will move on to the next kill date. When that kill date change happens depends on how much volume of product we have from the various kill dates.

Q316 **Dr Johnson:** However, the dates of the 15th and the 16th as described is, as I understand it, the date of packing.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: No, it is the date of the kill date.

Q317 **Dr Johnson:** Your words at the beginning were that this matter is not a kill date; it is a packing date. That is what you said at the beginning.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: It is the date of kill.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: It is the date of kill.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: It is the date of kill.

Dr Johnson: You said it was the date of kill that mattered.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: We said date of kill. We do not put pack date on anything, because the only thing to keep the fresh meat has to be the date of kill. This is why I would really like you to come round. A cutting factory could have two different kill dates in the same day. It probably does have two different kill dates. Some slaughterhouses will kill Friday, Saturday, Sunday, but the cutting plant runs Monday to Friday. You will get two kill dates. However, what I was trying to explain to you at the beginning, which I probably did not explain very well, is that naturally after the 15th comes the 16th. We finish the 15th, and someone will put the 16th on.

What I did not say to you is that before we would literally straightaway used the 16th after the 15th. What we have done now is every time a kill date is changed or a processing plant is changed, we put a two-minute gap in the line. Everything is cleared, every label is removed, and we start again. Before, it was a continuous process. Whenever you change a kill date or you change a plant, you put a two-minute gap in there. We have now put that in place.

Q318 **Dr Johnson:** To clarify, you are saying that these dates were being changed by this person, whose job it is not, just on his own initiative, without being instructed by anybody else, because you were now having a different batch of chicken.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Correct.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: To be clear, what we are saying is that could be what is happening. We have not been able to ascertain that from our investigation, and, as I have explained, the individual would not co-operate with our investigation. There is another investigation taking place where we are trying to get to the bottom of it.

Q319 **Chair:** I have one final question on this, and we will try to drill down to it. I think you were saying the maximum time from when you kill a chicken to when you can eat it was 10 days in total, so therefore you kill it at the slaughterhouse and it might take a day to get to your plant. Therefore you kill it yesterday; it gets to your plant today. If you have 200,000 tonnes of chicken being cut up and you only need 175,000 tonnes that day, because the order changes, you have 25,000 tonnes of meat left in your plant. I suspect the next day you bring in 175,000 tonnes, add the 25,000 tonnes you had the previous day, and it all goes on as the next day's production. You may be able to do that, I do not know, but we have to be absolutely reassured that fresh meat is fresh meat and you are not changing the date from one day to the next. It has to be tempting, when you have this meat there, to actually move it onto the next day.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: I appreciate that, Chair. However, individuals who work on the factory floor do not think that way. They follow a process.

Q320 **Chair:** No, sorry, I am not asking the individuals about it. I am just asking what happens, because you do not necessarily use all of that meat in one day. Therefore, what happens to the meat you do not use on that day? Does it then go into the next day's production with the next day's date on? That way the chicken is one day older than it should be.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: In answer to your colleague's question, we explained—and you quite elegantly explained—why the system has to keep moving. We do not hold large stocks of

chicken. The system moves. It either goes to fresh or it goes through the spiral chills, or it goes for block freezing. We keep the whole system moving.

We also explained that it is the kill date that determines the life, and it is the kill date that is sacrosanct, and that determines the life.

Q321 Chair: For the whole day's production, the whole 200,000 kilos of that day at plant D, you can assure me that none of that meat that was slaughtered a day ago, with today's date, will then move on into other poultry that you bring in the next day to cut up and you add that poultry meat that was on the previous day to today's meat?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: The date code we put on the chicken will be reflecting the date it was killed.

Q322 Chair: You will not mix that up between one day and the other, and you can say on record that is not happening.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: If we do, we would use the oldest date to determine the shelf-life.

Q323 Chair: Therefore, if you have chicken left over, you would mix it with fresh chicken but you would actually put the older date, not the newer date? Is that what you are saying, for the record?

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Yes.

Q324 Chair: That is on record. Okay. My final question is, again, going back to the retailer. How can you—and we, through this inquiry—reassure both the public and those big retailers to buy your product, because it is safe? If they do not, not only is your business at risk, but so are many farmers. Can I also say you and your contract farmers produce organic chicken and free range chicken, as well as conventional broiler chicken? You have the full gambit. You have a good product, but unless it is properly processed with confidence, as we have said all along, we cannot have that product bought with confidence. The confidence has got to return. How quickly can we return that confidence, and get one of those retailers, brave men or women as they are, to actually come and start buying the chicken from plant D?

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Chair, you are right; we have to get the supply chain going. To get the reassurance, we first have to be really clear that the things we are doing are sufficient. I believe they are. I have explained to you today what we are doing. I hope that you believe they are.

The other thing is: do we have a full-time FSA inspector for the next couple of years? I welcome it. Why would we not have that? That would give the consumer confidence.

Chair: And a meat inspector.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Absolutely.

Chair: This message will go out very clearly, because this is a very public inquiry being followed hugely. That message will go out. Also, as I said, we may well take you up on the offer of coming to see your plant. Also, I have said that I hope and pray—not because I do not necessarily want to see you again—that you do not actually come here before this Committee with another problem, because there is



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history of this. I believe you today, that you are going to put that situation right. However, like I said, if that is not the case, when you come back again we have all this down as recorded evidence. I think you are very aware of that.

I appreciate you both coming this afternoon. You have taken some very frank and straightforward questions. You have given some good answers. Those answers are on the record. We look to hold you to account on that. However, I do appreciate both of you coming, and I want the consumer confidence restored, retail confidence restored, so that the farming community as well is confident that they can sell their chicken and quickly, because I know how short the chain is from the hatchery through to production, and the knock-on effect it has. Even in my own constituency alone, probably 2,000 people are involved in that. I understand the implications. Thank you very much.

Chris Gilbert-Wood: Thank you.

Ranjit Singh Boparan: Can I just finish off? I do invite you all. I would really welcome if you could come down and have a look. This experience has been an experience I am not used to. I do not want to be here again. I really do not. In my 30 years, I continue to learn every day. A day does not go by that I do not learn something new. Today I have learned something new.

I also want to apologise to the Committee for having to do this. I want to apologise to my consumers, my customers, and most of all my colleagues, because over the last number of weeks they have really been through a hard time. Again, we will produce food safely every day, and we will continue to improve, and what we have said here today we have started already, and we are more than happy to keep you updated with how it is going.

Chair: I am happy to accept that apology. Like I said, I can assure you we will be watching your actions, because actions speak louder than words. We look forward to you carrying out the commitments you have made on record to us today. I thank you both for attending.