

## Scottish Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The future of Scottish agriculture post Brexit](#), HC 1637

Tuesday 23 April 2019

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Members present: Pete Wishart (Chair); Deidre Brock; David Duguid; Hugh Gaffney; John Lamont; Paul Masterton; Ross Thomson.

Questions 390-515

### Witnesses

I: Sir John Campbell, Glenrath Egg Farms Ltd, James Porter, Angus Growers Ltd, and Archie Gibson, Agrico UK Ltd.

II: Stephanie Maurel, Chief Executive, Concordia, and Matthew Jarrett, Managing Director, Pro-Force Ltd.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Concordia](#)



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sir John Campbell, James Porter and Archie Gibson.

Q390 **Chair:** May I welcome our guests? It is our first day back in Parliament after our Easter recess and we are all fresh and excited to go, so thank you for joining us. For the record, will you tell us who you are and who you represent and give us something by way of a short introductory statement?

**James Porter:** Good afternoon. I represent Angus Growers, a producer organisation with 18 members, based in Angus, Perthshire and Fife. I am also horticulture chair of NFU Scotland.

**Sir John Campbell:** I am John Campbell, a farmer from the Scottish borders, a wee bit further in from where John Lamont is. We farm sheep and poultry. Eggs are our main thing—we are Scotland's largest egg producer, and we sell 1.5 million eggs every day of the week.

**Archie Gibson:** I am Archie Gibson, executive director of Agrico UK, which is a Dutch-owned farmers' co-operative but is a limited company registered for all tax purposes in the UK. I have been involved in the Food and Drink Federation for many years and am a past chairman of the Food and Drink Federation Scotland, so I have a good connection with primary production and with food processing and manufacturing. I have been asked to come along today to talk from a seed potato perspective. As a company, we are probably between 12% and 14% of the UK market, and as a group we are probably 30% to 40% of the world market, so we know a little bit about potatoes.

Q391 **Chair:** Thank you all for being so helpful and concise. We asked the three of you along today to give us an impression and a flavour of the use of EU nationals in your respective businesses and of their value and importance to the whole agricultural sector in Scotland. Perhaps we could hear from each of you about your own views of the value of EU workers. How critical are they—if indeed they are critical—to supporting your sectors? What do you feel about the arrangements just now, including both the pilots that are in place, and about how they have previously been employed and engaged in your businesses? We will start with you, Sir John.

**Sir John Campbell:** We employ quite a lot of eastern European people, not part-time but full-time. They come, they start and eventually we house them and then encourage them to buy houses locally—we lend them money. They fit into their local community; they have even got a pub in Peebles where they all go, so it is quite a happy community. They are a marvellous addition to our staff, because a lot of their tasks are quite time-consuming and not very interesting, but they all like working and they don't go away.

Q392 **Chair:** It is interesting across Perthshire, Mr Gibson, for the EU workforce.



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**Archie Gibson:** Most certainly, Chair. There are a lot of top-line statistics that inform us all about the importance of these migratory workers who come and go. For our business in particular, and across all my grower members, they are essential. To help you understand it, briefly, as a company we contract with farmers who are potato specialists and have the right seed land, which all has to be tested and certified, to grow a crop of potatoes. That process kicks off in June and July, where we need people qualified to do what we call roguing, which is basically the art of walking the crop to take out the undesirables so that the seed crop—the daughter tubers from the crop originally planted—are fit for purpose to supply the UK and our overseas markets.

We need trained people, and finding local trained people to do that is increasingly hard these days, so at that stage in the season we depend on many of our migrant workers. During and after harvest, we then depend on them to help us with all the storage and grading associated with looking after potatoes, before they are dispatched to the receiving farmer or country for planting to produce a consumption crop. It is difficult to overstate the importance of the role of those people who come to join us.

In my research for attending this afternoon, I consulted widely. I also asked the National Farmers Union of Scotland to consult its veg group, and I asked the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board to consult its members in Scotland as well. Three different approaches and three different surveys that went out, and I can honestly say that 90% of all farmers depend on that workforce. That gives you a sense of how important it is to the seed potato sector, as indeed it is to my colleagues.

Q393 **Chair:** Could you tell us what the typical split is in the EU workforce between permanent and temporary?

**Archie Gibson:** Looking at the figures I pulled together—I would be happy to share this with the Committee, perhaps retrospectively, when I can summarise it for you—approximately 10% of the EU workforce are full-timers and are critical. That might well be a higher figure for Sir John and a slightly different figure for James in their respective sectors, but for seven months of the year they are 100% critical to the business of grading and looking after seed potatoes, and therefore securing our overseas markets and so on.

Q394 **Chair:** One of the biggest features of the past 10 or 20 years has been the growing length of the season on farms right across Scotland, hasn't it? Has that been a feature in how EU national workers are managed across Scottish farms?

**James Porter:** Certainly, yes. When I left school and university and came home and started work, our season was about six weeks long. It is now around six months and getting longer as we have heated tunnels—not on my farm, personally, but on other farms. Our season is pushing out toward eight months now. I concur with Archie: we are around 5% to 10% full-time workers from within the EU and the majority are seasonal.

Q395 **Chair:** We know there is already a reduction in EU workers, which we



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have seen over the past few years. A lot of people have put that down to the value of the pound against the euro and the value of coming to Scotland. Is that a feature that you recognise?

**James Porter:** That has certainly been a part of it. There is also an element of the fact that if you can get work in Germany or Holland, financially this is not going to make you any better off. There may be a little bit of uncertainty around Brexit as well. Part of the change is that it used to be university students who would come over for their summer holidays, but the problem is that they need to go back to university in August or September and they want a holiday first. It is a slightly different age profile for the seasonal worker coming over, which lands its own issues on top of that.

Q396 **Chair:** According to the figures we have, Scottish agriculture experienced a 10% to 20% shortfall in migrant workers over the past couple of years. Do you recognise those figures? Do you have any explanation for them?

**Archie Gibson:** I certainly recognise the figures and I completely agree with them. Scotland's Rural College—SRUC—has done some sound work analysing these issues. It said that if we cannot get the staff, approximately 42% of farms might stop that enterprise, period, and 58% said it was very likely they would downsize and change. I do not think we can put too fine a point on the significance of the contribution that those individuals make not only to the agribusinesses in all sectors but in the communities in which they live and are active. We feel acutely about the notion of being made to feel welcome, appreciated and valued when looking after these people.

Q397 **Chair:** I think we are all grateful to Scotland's Rural College for its yearly survey. Its conclusions are stark: two-thirds of farmers say they are likely to switch to other agricultural activities due to lost access to migrant workers, and over 50% say they would change their business structure. Is that what we are possibly facing?

**Sir John Campbell:** Fifty per cent. of the workers from eastern Europe? Yes, it's about that, but fortunately, we realised that they would not be there forever and we are moving on to technology. Fortunately, our operation lends itself to robotic control and we are gradually getting more modernised and mechanised, because we realise they will not be here forever.

Q398 **Chair:** What did you make of the statistics from Scotland's Rural College?

**James Porter:** We can't source workers at home. Are you talking about actual growers? We need to find a way to make this work somehow, because we need home-grown produce—we cannot import it all from abroad. There has to be a way to make this work somehow. The way forward is fairly clear: to have as free movement as possible and to boost the workers scheme that we now have a trial of. It is the right model. We cannot keep sourcing from the EU because there is a fall-off of people wanting to come from there. It is a case of getting the numbers up. We need to get it up to 10,000 as soon as physically possible.



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**Chair:** We will come to the details of the trial and the costs later in the session, but we will maybe just move on.

Q399 **John Lamont:** Why does the farming sector have such difficulty recruiting from the domestic workforce?

**James Porter:** We have grown in the past 10 years. The soft fruit industry has grown 150%. The numbers are not there locally. In Angus there are only about 2,000 long-term unemployed. Angus Growers employs 4,000, and we are just one group working on the east coast of Scotland. The population is not there, and unemployment is very low just now. It is seasonal work, so perhaps half the year, but local people are looking for full-time jobs. It is quite physical, demanding work. It is not a particularly easy job, yet we are not paid a penny more for our fruit than we were 25 years ago, so it is difficult for us to try to attract more people in by paying higher wages, although our wages have gone up significantly in the last 10 or 20 years. The population is not there to employ from local sources.

Q400 **John Lamont:** Do you both agree with that analysis?

**Archie Gibson:** Personally, yes, I do. I think there are some other angles on this as well. In my world of seed potatoes, it touches on skills. This may come out in the course of other questions. Forgive me on this, but grading a potato that comes out of the field with soil on it is an extremely skilled piece of work. It comes across a machine, you take out as much clod and stone as you can. You are in a light room, standing on the table, and you have to pick off the defects.

The tolerance for the EU is 6% of total defects allowable—that includes the UK, we have harmonised standards. For the rest of the world, it is 4.7%. The eye, attention and concentration have to be good enough to be able to do that. We have no automated, optical, infrared technology that can get anywhere close to this.

People are paid quite well relative to the living wage and given all the training they need. Stability of labour is important for us. At the moment, on UK versus overseas labour, it is 98% to 99% migrant labour in the seed potato world, not indigenous labour, for all the reasons James gave. You need people local to where the farms are. Farms are not moveable. Heavy machinery is not moveable. People have to be local to the sites where this activity is happening.

Q401 **John Lamont:** So are the economies around the market of labour not working in so far as if you are paying more, you would be attracting local people? I recognise the point you made earlier that you have increased wages and you are not able to get more for your product. If the market was working properly around labour in the workforce, if you were paying more you would attract local workers, would you not?

**James Porter:** I don't think so. If you made it like oil wages, or something, but realistically, you are not going to be able to do that. I don't think the people with the necessary skills are there physically. Look at



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Archie talking about potato grading, or picking soft fruit off a bush—the clue is in the name—and selecting ripe ones and packing them properly, it is actually a very skilled job. We are paying well over the minimum wage on average. We are paying around £8.50 an hour—the minimum wage this year is £8.20—plus holiday pay, plus overtime, plus NI. We reckon the net contribution of our workers is about £1,000 per season each. It is a big contribution in tax. They are paying a lot of tax as well. They are getting paid pretty well. The top 10% to 15% will be earning between £10 and £12 an hour, which for skilled manual labour is pretty reasonable.

**Q402 John Lamont:** An issue that I get from my farmers is sometimes they get the seasonal workers coming in and once they have earned the amount of money they expect to get for that season, they are then off. Do you encounter that? Do you discover a severe shortage of workers towards the end of the season?

**James Porter:** Yes, by September, when someone has come in May and they have earned a fair bit of money and they are going over a tax band or something, they are probably quite happy to get a holiday before the winter. They will have worked pretty solidly right through. I would say that is about right. When we start picking blueberries, which kick in late August or September, it can be a bit of a struggle to get enough labour.

**Q403 John Lamont:** So that's from September until when, roughly?

**James Porter:** Till the end of September or early October.

**Q404 John Lamont:** Two or three months?

**Archie Gibson:** Yes. In the course of the surveys that I did in preparing for today, it was telling that farmers of potatoes and soft fruits—I have people who grow for me who do a bit of both—in one case they have 13 full-time employees who are all east European and 450 seasonal part-time pickers. They do lose them at critical stages because they get to an earnings ceiling that they have in mind, relative to what they are trying to achieve back home, and then they depart. There is an element of workers who are absolutely reliable and consistent, but the pool is getting older.

One of the dimensions here is that five years ago most of the seasonal workers who came had pretty good, workable English and they were in their 20s. Some of them were graduates, although the majority weren't, but they had some form of higher education, or aspiration and ambition if they weren't involved in that back in their home countries, or they were doing night school here in the UK. Now the average age is mid to late-40s, they don't have the language, and they are much harder to train and brief for health and safety, and all of those obvious, important things. They are more likely to head off once they have achieved what they want to do. This a reflection of the changing nature of the available workforce.

**Q405 John Lamont:** Sir John, you spoke at the start about how some of your workers buy houses in Peebles and are much more settled, so does that mean you are not experiencing the same fluctuations?





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**Sir John Campbell:** No, we don't experience that. We have a queue of people who want to come and work with us. I'll give you a job.

**John Lamont:** I am not sure that I am qualified enough.

**Sir John Campbell:** Your dad is a farmer.

**John Lamont:** That is very kind of you. Thank you.

**Chair:** We are not recruiting in the Scottish Affairs Committee, but if we were—

Q406 **Paul Masterton:** I have a quick question that follows some of the things that Sir John mentioned, and particularly the point that you were making, Mr Gibson, about elements of this being highly skilled. As you were saying, Mr Porter, the wages are not low compared with some other sectors. Although unemployment in these areas is low, people are choosing to work in other sectors rather than here.

In evidence, Quality Meat Scotland suggested introducing more agricultural science into the national curriculum, so that people have a better understanding of the sector. Do you think that more could be done, away from wages and working conditions, to encourage more people to consider a career in the sector, rather than going to work in hospitality or other comparably-paid areas locally?

**James Porter:** I think there is quite a compelling argument to have a farming GCSE, to try to bring people into the sector. I am also the director of Ringlink, which has a pre-apprenticeship scheme to try to bring people into agriculture, which has had a good amount of success. I don't think it is realistic for covering our seasonal workers, for instance, but perhaps for Sir John or Archie's situation you could encourage more full-time workers with that.

**Archie Gibson:** May I come back on that? I possibly didn't explain that I was one of four agricultural champions for Mr Fergus Ewing, looking at a review of agricultural strategy after the common agricultural policy. One of the themes that was touched on was education, which was led by a gentleman called Henry Graham—I did the food and drink theme. A lot of work has been going on in Scotland, which would have country-wide relevance, towards upskilling our young people who are trying to get in.

To be brutally honest about my own trade, if I was trying to persuade some youngster in Webster's High School in Kirriemuir to think about agriculture as a future, they would probably go to Sir John's model of automated egg sorting and grading, operating a piece of high-tech machinery, or potentially to a fruit bush machine—which will potentially do some harvesting, but clearly there is a long way to go—as opposed to a dirty spud in a dusty shed on a farm somewhere.

That is not an easy thing to address, but we need collectively to find ways of addressing how we re-engage the young with primary production, whether livestock, animal husbandry or cropping.



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Q407 **David Duguid:** Mr Gibson, I want to take you back to something you said earlier about the skills required, particularly for grading potatoes. I would also like to thank you for bringing back lots of childhood memories—I grew up on a farm. We don't do potatoes any more, partly because of the lack of local labour; it was very labour-intensive for that seasonal period. The question I want to ask is this. The labour that you are getting from—is it eastern Europe?

**Sir John Campbell:** Yes, eastern Europe—Poland, mainly.

Q408 **David Duguid:** Do they come with these skills already intact—

**Sir John Campbell:** No.

Q409 **David Duguid:** Or do they have to be trained up? I know from my own experience that grading potatoes, for example, is not something you can just learn in a day; it is something that develops over time. You have to have somebody beside you, keeping you right all the time. It takes a little while to get it right. You have answered the question, Sir John, by saying that they don't come ready-skilled. I just wonder whether that is the same in the potato industry, or indeed for soft fruit. If not, how long does it take to get somebody trained up?

**Archie Gibson:** The old marketing adage is that it is much cheaper to retain something than to start from scratch, so our aim is always to make the work environment as pleasant as possible for the people who are minded to come back year after year and accumulate those skills.

I will give you a flavour of how tough this is—I have just pulled out some information. In terms of tuber classification and tolerances for inspections for export or the UK standard, there are eight organisms, from wart disease to moths and beetles and viroids, that all have to be identified by looking at a potato with soil on it. You then have three classifications for rots—three separate, different types of rot. You have four classifications for skin disease, meaning external blemishes and then internal—and so on and so forth. Those skills all have to be trained for when the people arrive, and invariably the people who get into the way of it and then return are much the best. I think their productivity is higher. I am sure that is also absolutely true for Sir John and for James.

To give you a feel for how the industry has changed over time, in 1996 there were 6,900 potato growers of significance, registered and paying their levy. The statistics are all very clear, because the levies are paid to the levy board. There are now fewer than 2,000 potato growers. When it comes to seed growers, the UK has about 350, of which 280, or 80%, are in Scotland. This, as a national asset, is really rather important, because we have the ability to be self-sufficient in potato production. Potatoes are the third or, depending on which country you live in, fourth most important food crop in the world, so there is a real importance to the contribution that these folk make. But it comes back to what James said: there is a limit to what consumers are willing to pay for the product, and that makes the business on the ground, relative to skills, reward and so on, quite hard to manage.





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Q410 **David Duguid:** Hypothetically, if it took you a season to get somebody trained up, you would obviously want to get that person to come back the following year, so that you wouldn't have to train somebody up for a whole season the next time.

**Archie Gibson:** Correct.

Q411 **Deidre Brock:** Mr Porter, I think you have already suggested that the seasonal workers pilot is insufficient for the needs of the horticultural sector. Reading between the lines, I gather you would agree with that, Mr Gibson, just in terms of the numbers. Could I ask how many farms in your sectors have been successful in applying for workers via the pilot?

**James Porter:** Between the two agencies, I don't know the exact figure, but I know of at least half a dozen. My understanding—I'm sure Pro-Force and Concordia will be able to tell you in a bit more detail—is that they have been able to allocate the numbers that were due to Scottish farms, but I don't know the exact details.

Q412 **Deidre Brock:** So there are half a dozen, within your sector, that you know of.

**James Porter:** I know of half a dozen, off the top of my head.

Q413 **Deidre Brock:** And how many workers would that be, on average? Is there an average?

**James Porter:** Well, I have secured 20 from Pro-Force. I think for most of them it will be in the order of 20 or 25. There might be some bigger farms with a few more.

Q414 **Deidre Brock:** Thank you; that is good to know. Mr Gibson?

**Archie Gibson:** Of all the folk I consulted on the seed potato side, there was absolutely nobody. Most had not heard of the scheme. Interestingly, when I did the questionnaire 10 days ago, there was an article in *Farmers Weekly* that advertised the scheme and all the rest of it, and the theoretical figure of 600-odd that would come to Scotland. I think there is a lack of awareness, so it is difficult to answer questions. I think people will play catch-up as best they can, to try to tap into some of this resource.

It throws up a question around the two licensed companies, Pro-Force and Concordia, who you will hear from later. Good for them for registering for the scheme and putting themselves through all that process, which is quite onerous. There are a lot of gangmaster-licensed associated labour provider companies in Scotland providing temporary workers into the veg, fruit and potato sectors, and into primary production generally. I do not quite know why they would not be able—or why they have not registered for a similar licence—to get some of these people, because 2,500 is a drop in the ocean.

Q415 **Deidre Brock:** It is a bit of a worry if the advert appeared in *Farmers Weekly* only a couple of weeks ago.

**Archie Gibson:** Less.

**Deidre Brock:** The Government were expecting workers to start coming in on this scheme in March of this year, I believe.

**James Porter:** To be fair, it is only 2,500 for the whole UK, when the whole UK employs something like 80,000 or 90,000, so it is clearly a trial, and unless you are with one of those providers, you will not get access to those workers for this trial period. As long as those workers are taken up, it will take pressure off other growers to some extent, but it is clearly not enough.

Q416 **Deidre Brock:** Do you have any other concerns about those two companies? You just expressed two. Nothing as of yet? It is early days, I suppose.

**James Porter:** No, I think they are well-respected companies. They have slightly different models. Going forward, we may need a model that is a bit more complicated, rather than just using agencies like this. It is actually a pretty expensive process for a grower on their own.

Q417 **Deidre Brock:** I was going to ask about that, actually, because I think the farms involved have to have audits. Is that right? Are you aware of any farms that that is causing problems for? Are people actually hesitating before taking this up because of the cost of that audit?

**James Porter:** Particularly if you are a smaller grower, it is quite an expensive audit. If you are a smaller grower it might well put you off, because if you do not spread the cost of that audit over a few growers it becomes very expensive. It is worth bearing in mind that all of us—particularly in the soft fruit industry but also veg—are Sedex and SMETA audited, which any grower that supplies a supermarket has to be. They do their own inspections and auditing, which are very stringent.

Q418 **Deidre Brock:** Do you think there should be some way of co-ordinating? Smaller farmers being disadvantaged by that sort of cost is surely a problem?

**James Porter:** I just wonder whether, if you could show that you were audited by Sedex or SMETA in that year, you could avoid some duplication; by producing your Sedex audit, that should cover you.

**Sir John Campbell:** For us, audits are not really a problem, because they come from the supermarkets. They employ people—we have to pay for them, but that is fair enough—and if you don't meet that standard, you are out. We think it is very fair.

**Archie Gibson:** It is slightly different in our sector, because the seed potato industry is twofold; it is domestic market and export, but it is not retail. We all have farm-assured Red Tractor or Safe Haven schemes. Some growers who also provide consumption potatoes will have another range of Sedex or assurance audits as well. Safe Haven and Red Tractor have co-ordinated. Red Tractor is obviously promoted by many of the supermarkets, so to that extent it is the level above—ensuring that all the

seed is grown in an appropriate way and all that sort of stuff, which provides reassurances for the consumer. A lot of work has gone on in the food and drink sector generally around consolidating these farm audits, and there is still more work to do. The labour side is an important part of that.

Q419 **Deidre Brock:** Do you think the extra costs that are potentially involved with taking on these workers might lead to those smaller farmers being disadvantaged, compared with much bigger growers that can absorb such costs more readily?

**Archie Gibson:** There is no question but that we have a vibrant industry that is resilient at UK level because we have enough growers doing it—just. I gave you figures earlier about the consolidation that has happened in the potato sector over the past three decades. Much of that is because of the cost of equipment, the compliance audit for getting land tested, labour—all those things add up, and it would not take very much to tip them up. If you then take generational renewal and the lack of succession planning in many cases in a lot of farming industries, plus the absence of collaboration and co-operation—all those factors will play on individuals regarding what enterprises they follow on that farm in any given year. We are in a sensitive time, including in the potato industry.

**Sir John Campbell:** Clearly, no matter what you diversify, the things that we do—you would call them diversified farming enterprises, but any enterprise like that takes a lot of capital to set up. That is not a bad thing. It improves standards and training and all the rest of it, and it works very well. There are so many farms—quite a lot near you, John—that produce eggs and contract, and they are all doing very well. We have a queue of people who want to come on board. It is obviously a fair industry, and we are very fortunate that the supermarkets are fair as well—you don't hear that very often.

**Deidre Brock:** No, that is true enough.

Q420 **Chair:** Can I ask a bit more about this audit? A couple of farms in my constituency are fortunate enough to get workers through Concordia, and there was almost a separate staff resource made up to try to provide for and manage that. If farms have to go through that audit, which is to check on health and safety and accommodation standards—there is a cost to ensuring that that is given and that they get a clean bill of health on all this. If you are going to have only a few workers coming to your farm, is it really worth going through all that?

**James Porter:** No, provided those workers are coming in somewhere and taking the pressure off in terms of the shortage of labour—do you know what I am saying? If people are coming in, it almost does not matter where they are, as long as they are here.

Q421 **Chair:** So it is more the principle, and the fact that this scheme has allowed people in, and we will assess whether it is worth the cost to the individual farmer.



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**James Porter:** If those larger places are employing through the scheme, that means more workers are available in other places, but there is an associated cost.

Q422 **Chair:** Do you know what the cost is?

**James Porter:** It depends which agency you are with. I do not want to get my numbers wrong.

**Chair:** We will ask them.

**James Porter:** You can ask them, but I know that roughly Concordia has about £220 as the total cost of a worker, and Pro-Force is quite a lot more. I understand that that is about the visa. For instance, the worker pays for their own visa through Concordia, but with Pro-Force the employer pays for the visa. That is the reason for the discrepancy.

**Chair:** We will leave that there.

Q423 **Deidre Brock:** Of course, any costs that involve checking up on workers' conditions and health are absolutely appropriate, but it seems like a substantial amount of money.

**James Porter:** There is no doubt that it is an expensive process. That is another reason to say, "Make it up to 10,000." We are not going to use this route unless we really have to. They will tell you this themselves afterwards, but the process to get the workers in takes 30 days to get a visa. If we encounter problems again, early season or late season, by the time we manage to push a button and get workers over, the problem will already be gone. So we are not going to be able to fix it at short notice.

Q424 **John Lamont:** I just want to follow up on that point. The purpose of the audit is to make sure that the workers coming into this country are living and working in acceptable standards.

**James Porter:** Absolutely, yes.

**John Lamont:** I don't doubt for a minute that all of you are providing excellent accommodation and employment standards, but sadly there are examples where that is not the case. While there is an additional cost here, it is protecting the rights of those seasonal workers and the working and living conditions of those who might not have had the benefit of working for one of you three.

**James Porter:** I agree with you, but everyone is Sedex audited. I am not saying that there shouldn't be an audit. In fact, what I would say more is that the cost of the visas is something I would look at. It is about £230 or £240, which is far and away the biggest section of the cost. That would be the area to focus on to try and work out a way where we could reduce that.

**Archie Gibson:** It is a very interesting area. One thing I would say is that most farmers I have contact with and deal with—there are many hundreds—would, in their own right, prefer to employ people directly if



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they could. They have no problem employing suitable people directly, but we are not in that luxurious position. That is the reality of pretty full employment and that the folk who are around and about are not really suited to the work that needs to be done, whether it is fruit picking or operating machines in a sorting factory, far less doing seed potato stuff. That is one aspect.

In terms of housing, just to pick up on John's question, which was quite right, the housing issue is a concern for the smaller farmer who is a specialist in his field, which is what seed potato people are. Because the land dictates where you can do it and then the farmer has decided to invest, either historically and he has kept it going, you don't get people buying into being seed potato growers anymore. It is way too expensive in terms of machinery and anything else to set yourself up in that way from scratch.

One of the problems they have—the audit process is there, it is transparent, it's fine; they submit to that—is that rural housing is a constraint here. I put this question to you: if it is fine for new builds to be zero rated or VAT exempt, why not the renovation and restoration of rural housing? That would create the opportunity for intergenerational transfer so that the older members of the family can move into a decent quality house or cottage, or for the worker you want ultimately to be full time on your place to commit to the community, the schools and all the rest of it. I don't even think it would be a huge amount of money in the scheme of things, and I can't understand why there is inequity around that.

**Chair:** That is a fair point, although unfortunately it is not covered by this inquiry's terms of reference, but thank you for that. We will move along.

Q425 **David Duguid:** Mr Gibson, more than anybody else, reminds me again of my childhood, when a lot of the workforce in these situations came from people who just happened to live in the local community: people's wives, sisters-in-law, aunties. In my parents' generation, one family or one farm would help one farmer and then further on in the season they would all swap around. That just doesn't happen anymore because people are moving out of these communities. Like the Chairman says, that is possibly something for a future inquiry.

Mr Porter, we have touched on this 10,000 number. In fact, you gave evidence to the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill Committee, which I was on earlier in the year. You said that the pilot allocation should be increased to 10,000. What is the science behind that number because, clearly, 10,000 is still not enough to cover the whole workforce? Of course, the assumption behind the pilot is that we still have freedom of movement while that pilot is ongoing. It is an addition and it is beyond the EU.

**James Porter:** Ten thousand is based on the fact that, over the last two years, we have been short of roughly 10,000. That has been pretty well documented—that we have been roughly, on average, 15% short of

seasonal workers across the soft fruit and veg industry. That is where that number of 10,000 is from.

Q426 **David Duguid:** What has been the impact of being 10,000 people short? We hear about food rotting in fields.

**James Porter:** There has been crop loss. I think you went to the Marshalls' farm last summer—several of you did. We are working on employment one way or another and we'll get you guys there instead.

**Chair:** I wouldn't take us as an example of good employment.

**James Porter:** Maybe short term. We are looking for something a bit longer term than that. That is certainly where that number has come from. I've lost my train of thought.

Q427 **David Duguid:** The question was about the science behind the number. Can you actually equate 10,000 people to the amount of crop lost? If we had had those 10,000 people, we wouldn't have had that crop loss.

**James Porter:** Yes, we did have crop loss last year, as you saw at the Marshalls' farm and several other farms in the area. There was something a little bit more endemic than that, though. Even farms that didn't suffer crop loss were perhaps short. I know a lot of farms—even we were tight at times—where you end up getting people to do more overtime. Although you are not losing crop, your picking costs are a lot higher than they would have been otherwise, so your cost per kilo rockets up because of that shortage.

Q428 **David Duguid:** Again, this is something you and all panel members have said already. That 10,000 shortage is almost entirely, if not 100% entirely, non-UK sourced, albeit not traditionally, but certainly in recent years.

**Archie Gibson:** Scotland's Rural College produced a figure that assessed that the figure specific to the potato industry as such was 850. The fruit is the 10,000 bit and there is the 850. That helps portray the fact that the numbers are frankly not going to give us the reassurance we need as a sector to sustain our operation at the moment.

**Sir John Campbell:** Could I add one thing? Clearly, I am an egg man, but in the poultry industry, which is the killing of the chickens, it is a completely different situation. There are huge amounts of people employed there and there are serious problems with recruiting, but I am not involved in that side. It is worthwhile making that point.

**Chair:** Absolutely. I have got 2 Sisters in Coupar Angus in my constituency, so I know those issues. We will now pass over to the fruit picker supreme, Mr Hugh Gaffney.

Q429 **Hugh Gaffney:** Two baskets. If the Government decide to introduce a permanent seasonal workers scheme post 2020, what should it include for the needs of Scottish agriculture and horticulture? What do you think it is going to need to meet that from 2020? We've started with a pilot.





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What do you think we should continue with? I've written down a couple of things but I want to hear your suggestions.

**James Porter:** It would be good if we were able to source workers directly to growers. It creates a direct route, which is what we have been used to doing over the years with the EU. I don't know how you structure that. It means there is a direct communication between the grower and the workers, which means that we can cut out costs to a large extent, but also the worker who is coming over knows exactly—they have a better and a more direct relationship. It would be very important to try to establish some way of doing that going forward. That would be the main thing, I would say.

**Archie Gibson:** I'll try to put myself in the shoes of a young person, a migrant worker. If they come to the UK because it is an opportunity, and they do well in that business, that industry or that sector and they fit in, you cannot achieve that in a short period of time. They have to have time to bed in, find their feet and all the rest of it. At the moment, as we have all acknowledged, it is basically an older workforce that is being attracted to come here. There is the risk, which John brought out earlier, that they get to a certain level of income that they have achieved in that season and then go home—prematurely, relative to our needs.

My feeling, which is borne out by conversations I have had with many people, is that we need something that is actually quite attractive. I would say an 18-month period, because if this idea of a 12-month cooling-off period becomes set in tablets of stone, you have to have a period that maybe attracts them to come back after a break, if a break is enforced. I just think that an 18-month period might help a youngster to come here, make some savings to allow them to pay for their education back home, and climb the greasy pole in their own life choices that they are making.

At the moment, as I see it, we are in danger of saying, "Listen, this is a second-class place to go. You are much better off in Germany, you are much better off in Holland, instead of coming to the UK." We should be making it feel as though we want these people and that they are valuable, which is what business has to do every year. The pilot is the pilot—let's not confuse it with the end result—but we need to build something that is going to be attractive to the totality of the UK production sector, not least Scotland.

Q430 **Hugh Gaffney:** That said, we're giving a living wage; we're giving £8.50. Accommodation is a big thing you mentioned, so instead of seasonal workers, why can we not make permanent jobs, and why not advertise those in the UK? Why not look for the workers within the UK, to make it permanent work? If we are going to look at getting young ones to complete education, why not move the universities closer to the farm, and build a community where we give the education, we give the training, and we give jobs and accommodation? Can it be done? Is there work all year round that we could give?



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**Sir John Campbell:** That is a good question. Clearly, after they've been educated, they don't think farming is the place to come to, if you know what I mean.

**Hugh Gaffney:** But also that cycle of education—

**Sir John Campbell:** Yes, but we do offer housing and more to them after they have been there a while. We encourage them to buy the houses, and earn the money to buy the houses. They work for us; it's not an issue with us. It's not an issue.

Q431 **Hugh Gaffney:** Not in your business, but in the fruit business and the potato business—potatoes are all year round, just like eggs. In the fruit business, is there anything that can replace it come the winter, so we have permanent workers?

**James Porter:** We employ nearly 300 people on our farm during the summer, but there is no way we could employ that many people outwith our season. The work is simply not there, nor is it ever likely to be because stuff doesn't grow in the winter.

Q432 **Hugh Gaffney:** So you are very dependent on migrant workers coming back every year, but now they are getting other jobs in other countries where the climate is a lot better.

**James Porter:** I referred to it a little bit, in that if you have a young person going abroad—you know, people from this country still do it; they go and work in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and wherever. People move around when they are young and do harvesting jobs. My wife went and harvested olives in Crete when she was 17, and I do not think she earned very much, but people do that.

Archie has put his finger on something there: whatever we do, it needs to be flexible. I do not see anything wrong with people moving about at that age to do seasonal work. I think it is quite a healthy thing, and whatever we do should be flexible. Why do we want to put barriers in the way of this happening? It is a healthy thing, and whatever we do should be as open and flexible as we could possibly make it.

**Chair:** Thanks for that. Well, we've got a strapline for this inquiry now: "Stuff doesn't grow in winter."

**Hugh Gaffney:** That is my point. The supermarkets are always full during the winter.

**Archie Gibson:** The nature of the seed potato job is that it is a wholesale trade, so we do not have retail. We do not pack stuff that goes into a supermarket direct; we would go through a pre-packer, so in part the problem is the structural way the industry is configured. Take garden peas: they will be harvested and frozen within six hours; then they are kept there until consumers eat them. You cannot get a fresher thing than a frozen garden pea.

**Chair:** Thank you for that answer. I am conscious of the time and I want



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to have this session wound up by three. We have a couple of other questions to go.

**Q433 Paul Masterton:** We talked a bit about visas earlier, so I wonder what your views are on the temporary short-term immigration route announced in the White Paper. Given the controversy around a £30,000 salary, do you think that that short-term route will help meet the needs of Scottish farmers? Obviously you won't be able to use the tier 2 system, because you won't be paying these people £30,000 a year.

**James Porter:** Is this the 12-month working visa with a 12-month cooling off?

**Paul Masterton:** Yes.

**James Porter:** I think we referred to this a little earlier on with Mr Duguid, talking about training and how long it takes to train somebody up. If you put in a bit of effort and get somebody trained up in these jobs only then to have to tell them, "You have to clear off for 12 months," that doesn't fit any model that any business would seriously look at. You really need to kick that into touch straightaway.

On the £30,000 limit—this was all discussed at the immigration Bill Committee—I do not think the average wage in Scotland is anywhere near that. It is not a realistic number at all. It certainly would not work in agriculture. I do not think it is realistic in any way, to be honest.

**Q434 Paul Masterton:** In that vein, how would you like to see the Government support farms whose reliance is moving away from seasonal but on to permanent, fairly low-wage EU migration after we have left the EU?

**James Porter:** The NFU's position is to ask you to retain free movement of labour for EU countries. I understand that might not be the position everyone wants to take, but that would be the obvious solution to me.

**Q435 Paul Masterton:** Do you have any alternative thoughts?

**Archie Gibson:** We need a flexible system. We need to encourage people to come in, and if there is some form of break it needs to reflect the timeframe that business can justify their investment to train people. I mentioned 18 months earlier, and I suggest that is a more realistic figure than 12 months. The £30,000 figure will not offer anybody in the sector any opportunities. That is for the scientist going into GlaxoSmithKline in Montrose who is very good at a particular sciencey thing they do. It will not help us at all.

**Q436 David Duguid:** I want to clarify Mr Porter's point about the NFU's position on maintaining freedom of movement for EU workers. Does that not contradict the recognition that a lot of labour from EU countries is staying in the EU because their own economies are improving? Aren't you looking for employees further afield as well?

**James Porter:** I think we are looking at two different things here. For instance, historically our permanent and semi-permanent staff have come



from the EU. I do not think we will have nobody wanting to come from the EU anymore. The vast majority are still going to want to come over from the EU, but the numbers are reducing and we need to look at alternatives to boost that.

**Chair:** We will leave that one there.

Q437 **Ross Thomson:** Sir John, you touched on this issue earlier in answer to one of the Chair's questions. It would be interesting to hear a little more from you, as well as from James and Archie, about whether the uptake of automation and technology on farms is a viable way of reducing dependency on migrant labour, and to get an idea of what you think some of the obstacles are to the uptake of new technology in some sectors.

**Sir John Campbell:** Clearly, the updates cost. Automation is something that our business lends itself to, and we are moving down that road as quickly as we can because we see the benefits of it. It does cut out jobs, but you cannot cut all the jobs. You still have to go out to the hen house and gather the eggs and things like that, but automation is a magic tool in our business.

Q438 **Ross Thomson:** What about in other sectors?

**James Porter:** In soft fruit, it is not a realistic proposition. I am sure there will be some ways of automating some processes so we can reduce the need for labour, but if you look at that new raspberry harvester they are trialling, for instance, it can pick the berries that it can see on the canes as it goes up, but somebody has to walk behind with a trolley and pick off all the ones that are hidden by leaves. They have to walk exactly the same ground as they would have before, so the solution is miles away—plus that machine then has to select not only ripe ones but ones that are not rotten. For a non-destructive crop where you are going through and selecting, I do not see it ever replacing people picking fruit.

Q439 **Ross Thomson:** On that point about the solution being miles away, are you yourself, or are you aware of any other farms that are, working with the research community to look at potential—

**James Porter:** Yes. We are not shy of investment. We have spent a lot of money on polytunnels and table tops. After this year, all of our farm will be on table tops. That is a significant investment, which has been partly funded by the producer organisation. We are not shy of investing if we can see an opportunity. It is not easy employing hundreds of people on your farm, looking after them and so on, so we would be doing it by now if it was doable.

**Archie Gibson:** In potatoes, it is quite simple: two-tier pallet houses are used to put potatoes on to a supermarket shelf. The potatoes are graded, washed and sorted. When they are washed, they can go through an optical grader to be sized into whether they are a baker or a salad, and those with defects—black dot or other recognisable things—can be eliminated.

Technology exists at that level now to do a hundred different machine-learned tasks, so it is coming on.

Applying that to the seed world can't be done, because in the seed world the potato is covered in soil. We tend to have slightly heavier, really bodied soils in Scotland—that is true in the UK generally—so at best there is a dust sheen over the potato and at worst there is actually sticking soil. Machines—near-infrared cameras—cannot do the job. We collaborated with ScanStone near Forfar with a view to going with them to Switzerland to look at a farm there. They have very light, sandy soils, and this seed farmer in Switzerland was achieving a degree of automation, but each size fraction would require an investment of over £100,000, with no certainty that the technology would do an adequate job that people, as James described, would not have to back up and check.

**Sir John Campbell:** There is one last thing I would like to say about the three businesses we do. I actually am a hill farmer—diversified, believe it or not—and that does get Government support, but the three businesses we are in get no direct subsidy at all. Fortunately, that is what makes them good.

**Chair:** On that perhaps encouraging note, we will leave this session here. Thank you all very much for coming down from Scotland to help us with this inquiry. If there is anything further you feel you could usefully contribute to the inquiry, please send it to us, but thank you.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Stephanie Maurel and Matthew Jarrett.

Q440 **Chair:** Thank you very much for joining us today to help us out in this little inquiry. Just for our records, will you say who you represent and anything by way of a short introductory statement.

**Matthew Jarrett:** Good afternoon. I am Matthew Jarrett, managing director of the Pro-Force group. The group specialises in labour provision into the fresh produce industry, worker accommodation and training of its workers. Over this season—this year, 2019—we will be employing about 14,000 seasonal workers into the UK. Obviously, we are a pilot operator. We have not supplied Scotland for a number of years, so I am sure this will be interesting, but we are committed to ensuring the success of the pilot. That is for the workers, the growers, the industry and the Government. We are very much looking forward to getting involved.

**Stephanie Maurel:** I am Steph Maurel. I am chief executive of Concordia, which is a charity that is 75 years old this year. We are a labour provider, mainly—up until this year anyway—with agents that we work with in partnership in eastern Europe. We bring in about 8,000 workers from eastern Europe every year.

Q441 **Chair:** I think this is the first time you have given evidence to a Select



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Committee in the House, so we are grateful to hear from you directly in this inquiry. To get things started—we will start with you, Mr Jarrett—can you tell us a bit about how this pilot will work? What will be your responsibility to labour providers?

**Matthew Jarrett:** We have 2,500 visas allocated for this year between us. We are running 50% of those, so it is split 50:50. We directly recruit all our workers. We have chosen Ukraine and Moldova for the first year of the pilot. Just stepping back, we knew that we had been successful in being the pilot operator in December. We are now in April, so there is a lot of work to do to get established in those countries. Stepping outside of Europe, where we have been recruiting for many years, has meant we have eyes wide open in going into these countries. We have had to set up limited companies over there with permits to recruit directly in those countries. Then we have had to go and get a GLAA licence and so forth. It has been a very busy last three months getting ready to be established.

Recruitment is going very well. We are seeing significant interest from Ukraine and Moldova and the calibre of staff we are seeing is significantly improved against what we see from European workers, where we have been pulling out of the same pool, and it is getting very tough. We are out in Ukraine, running recruitment open days, advertising open days, assessment days. If the person is successful, we assist them with their visa process, and that is where we are at the moment. We have done the recruitment. The visa process is happening, and that is very slow, by the way.

Q442 **Chair:** We will come to the visa process specifically later, because it is an important issue, but I am just trying to get the mechanics. I think you explained very well what happens in Ukraine and Moldova and the recruitment. Perhaps this is for Ms Maurel, but how will particular farms in Scotland be selected as part of the pilot project? What happens at that stage?

**Stephanie Maurel:** The farms were selected quite early on—early January. We found out about the pilot at the same time in mid-December. We worked with our statistics and statistics from the National Farmers Union to say, “Where are the crops that need extra support in terms of workers? What are the geographical areas?” Scotland came out very strongly in that. In fact, Scotland and strawberries were the two that came out very strongly. We have worked with those farms—

Q443 **Chair:** How do those farms emerge? Is it through conversations with the NFU or through officials in DEFRA?

**Stephanie Maurel:** No. It was interesting to hear what was said earlier about potato farmers not knowing about it. We have had no specific potato farmers apply for any of the permits, although we have had mixed farms apply. We have got our website. We sent out to 650 farms across the whole UK saying what we were doing, what the criteria were and how to apply to us. We probably had more than 200 farms come in to request workers. We have worked with about 20 or 25 at the moment.





Q444 **Chair:** Are there criteria for selecting those farms? If there are 200 farms saying, “We are interested in having some of these fantastic foreign workers as part of the pilot”, as Mr Jarrett has described, what then happens? How are farms selected? Are there criteria that you would use? Do you visit the farms? Tell us about it.

**Stephanie Maurel:** They are visited and they are audited. They need to have the Ethical Trading Initiative audit. We then work on whether or not they meet a criteria list.

Q445 **Chair:** Can you give us a flavour of what those criteria might be?

**Stephanie Maurel:** Yes. Geography is probably number one. We consider where has there been a strong need—especially in the last two years—based on previous data. That is where we have had that 10%-15% workforce shortage. Another criteria is the crop: based on our data and NFU data, we look at where there have been real shortages in terms of crop. This includes soft fruit—predominantly strawberries—and brassicas and potatoes.

Q446 **Chair:** Do you have any idea how much this pilot is going to cost? You heard some of the conversations about the costs of the audit, and you mentioned the visa issue. If the farm is to be a successful candidate at the conclusion of this, what will be the cost to it?

**Stephanie Maurel:** Concordia has a registration fee of £700 for every single farmer with whom we work, whether for EU or non-EU workers. That covers an annual audit—or two audits in the case of the non-EU worker farms—as well as human resources support, general back-office support and a pastoral fund. We put money aside to help them with trips and outings, and anything that meets our charitable objectives. On top of that, it is £180 for every single worker if the order has been put in to us before 7 January.

Q447 **Chair:** What is that for?

**Stephanie Maurel:** That is for one worker. It is £220 if the order has been put in after 7 January. All of the growers have non-EU workers before 7 January so all of them have come through at £180.

Q448 **Chair:** Mr Jarrett, is that roughly similar for you, from what you are hearing?

**Matthew Jarrett:** It is a slightly different model. We are charging an audit fee, which is significant. I heard your comments earlier. The audit fee is £1,000. It is a third-party audit: inspectors from the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority go out to the farms and assess them for health and safety. It is more about the accommodation. We talked about Sedex and the various audits. At this point in time, we feel that we still need to go out and check the standards.

Q449 **Chair:** Are you not satisfied with what Sedex say?

**Matthew Jarrett:** It is something to be worked on.



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Q450 **Chair:** Has there been any sense from these farmers that it is far too expensive when you have gone to visit these farms and discussed these costs?

**Matthew Jarrett:** Absolutely. And the audit fee is one of those issues that is being pushed back to us.

Q451 **Chair:** Is this audit fee set by you as a company? You have not had any information or guidelines from the government?

**Matthew Jarrett:** We proposed our offering to run the pilot, and that was accepted. We are following what was accepted by the Home Office and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

**Chair:** What you have told us about the mechanics of this is really helpful, and has helped us understand what is going on.

Q452 **John Lamont:** Good afternoon. Could I ask about the pilot scheme and the 616 workers who have been initially assigned to farms in Scotland? How did you get the allocation across the UK? Why was that the number in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK?

**Matthew Jarrett:** For Pro-Force, part of the tender document process involved looking at the usage by area. We had a weighted score, and we allocated to Scotland and to various points in the UK in line with DEFRA's mapping and understanding. We then got a percentage. That guided us initially to where we were. Then it is about the growers coming to us and showing interest, and we go to them and take it forward.

**Stephanie Maurel:** We did something similar with our own and NFU's data. We tried to give more to Scotland than we managed to, in the end. We tried to give 800 permits and 800 workers to Scotland, and it was reduced down from the growers we offered it to. They said they had managed to secure workers from elsewhere, so we are down to 426 for this year.

Q453 **John Lamont:** When do you expect the workers from these pilots to start arriving in Scotland?

**Matthew Jarrett:** In Scotland, they will be arriving from the middle to the end of May for Pro-Force. That meets the seasonal needs. In the UK we have the first arrivals this week.

**Stephanie Maurel:** We have about 50 Moldovan workers in England, and should have 45 or 46 in early May in Scotland.

Q454 **John Lamont:** On the basis that you both allocated more workers to England than Scotland. The vast majority of Pro-Force workers will be based in England. Is it true to say that the issue of seasonal workers affects not only my constituency and Angus, Perthshire and the rest of Scotland but the whole United Kingdom, because the need for migrant labour is not particular to Scotland?

**Matthew Jarrett:** Do you want to answer that, Stephanie, because you have been supplying?



**Stephanie Maurel:** Yes. We think that there is more of an issue with recruitment in Scotland than in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We have struggled more to recruit specifically for Scotland for the past two years. It is a perception issue, to the point that we will get a worker in Bucharest coming into our agent's office and saying, "I will do anything, but I won't do strawberries and I won't do Scotland." They may never have been to Scotland or even the UK, yet in their mind they will earn less in Scotland or not be treated as well. That is not the case; we have white-labelled videos, leaflets and everything, which our agents are doing an excellent job of showing, but in an awful lot of workers or potential workers there is still a really strong mindset that they do not want to go to Scotland.

Q455 **John Lamont:** Is that a new thing, or is it historic? Where has it come from?

**Stephanie Maurel:** Ten years ago, there used to be 10 workers for one post, and three years ago it was four to one, but now we have three or four offers on the table for one worker. If it is Scotland versus Kent versus Herefordshire, it is highly likely that they will take Herefordshire first.

Q456 **Chair:** Are you doing anything to address that? If they say that that is what they want to do, what do you say in response?

**Stephanie Maurel:** We have done an awful lot of work directly with certain growers who have done videos. We are also doing a lot of work with the agents. They will propose date-wise or need-wise first. So a strawberry farm in June will be proposed first or only to certain workers, rather than something that is coming on later, either in England or with a different crop.

It is really tough. We get together as an industry to see what we can do with trade fairs. It is quite difficult, in that labour providers are competitors, but we are all suffering exactly the same thing, so we are trying to work together as much as we can. We are stumped on certain things, though, if I am honest.

**Matthew Jarrett:** I would add that under the pilot we are not having those problems—these are historic problems. Obviously, we are hitting a new labour force at the moment, so hopefully we can amend them.

Q457 **Chair:** But it does sound as if in your case, Ms Maurel, you are still having these issues under the pilot. Are you still having them?

**Stephanie Maurel:** We have huge demand for everything. This is specifically historic.

**Matthew Jarrett:** This is historic—not the pilot.

Q458 **John Lamont:** We discussed the audit requirements in the previous session, but how many of your new applicants who are seeking seasonal workers fail the audit? How many go through that audit process and have issues identified that have to be resolved before they can take workers from your companies?



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**Matthew Jarrett:** We are in the audit process at the moment. There are some farms that we have picked up on and we are working on a corrective action plan with them. We are not saying that they cannot use our workers, but we are highlighting the issues and working with them. When we are satisfied that they are fixed, we will put the labour on. It is really important in this market that we are able to look after the workforce we are bringing in—I cannot stress that strongly enough. As soon as we start putting them on farms where the accommodation might not be up to standard or the supervisors might be aggressive towards the workers, we have a significant problem.

Q459 **John Lamont:** So arguably it might be easier to address the issues with workers refusing to go to Scotland once they know that all their destination farms have met that audit standard. It might be easier to sell on that basis, because they will know the standard and the quality that they are going into.

**Stephanie Maurel:** I would not highlight Scotland as an issue for audits in anything at all. We have some excellent farms that have made very heavy investments in their amenities.

Q460 **John Lamont:** You said earlier that some workers were saying that they did not want to pick strawberries or go to Scotland.

**Stephanie Maurel:** Yes, it is a real perception issue, but hopefully the more stories go back about the great experiences that workers have had, the better it will get. The non-EU workers do not have anything—they are not separating Scotland from England or any other country.

Q461 **David Duguid:** I will resist the temptation to dig into that much more, but it is fascinating. I understand that there is a perception, but if you could provide the Committee with anything from inquiries by yourselves or anyone else that would help us to understand the root cause of that perception, it could be useful. Who knows? Perhaps we could do something about it—a visit to Bucharest, maybe.

**Matthew Jarrett:** Just to add to that, I think that they feel it is a long way. They may come in at Dover in Kent, and then it is another travel up through the country, going past London with all the bright lights and so forth.

**David Duguid:** We do have some bright lights of our own.

**Matthew Jarrett:** I know!

Q462 **David Duguid:** Anyway, I will stop being defensive and go on to the question that I wanted to ask. I am not sure whether you were here earlier when we talked to Mr Porter of Angus Growers. His suggestion when he was giving evidence to the immigration Bill Committee earlier in the year was that the 2,500 should be closer to 10,000. I read here that Scotland's Rural College has estimated that up to 15,000 non-EU seasonal workers may be needed—across the UK, that is, not just in Scotland.



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Do you think that this pilot will be enough not just to tackle the labour shortage but to help validate the process? I guess that is one of the reasons for the pilot—not just to back up the numbers but to validate the process. What do you think the impact is going to be if the numbers are not quite there?

**Matthew Jarrett:** I think this year we will see some significant problems for the industry. We started daffodil picking in January in Cornwall with 900 staff. As much as we got the right amount of staff—EU labour—we could not react to an early crop. Those farmers lost significant crop. I think that is going to be the story through the year. It is harder—we were talking earlier; our offices are 13% down on registrations year on year. We look at the numbers between 10,000 and 15,000 and there is a big difference there. That has been generated from the NFU. That is at real peak times of the season, not the whole season. Will the pilot be able to tackle that? No. The people are coming in, they have been allocated for six months; I do not think it is enough to tackle those peak periods.

Q463 **David Duguid:** If the Government were to change the number from 2,500 to 10,000 or 15,000, could your side of the industry, as agencies, scale up to that extent?

**Matthew Jarrett:** Yes, we are confident that we would be able to administer around 5,000 fairly quickly. It takes about six months to get to that stage, so that is not a fix for tomorrow, but it is certainly possible in the second year of the pilot.

Q464 **David Duguid:** Is that the same for Concordia?

**Stephanie Maurel:** Definitely, the interest from Russia, Ukraine and Moldova is huge—especially Ukraine. We could probably quadruple in terms of interest. I do not think we could process that number of people and interview them in time. I do not particularly want to go into it now, but it is clear that we would not be able to get through the visa process in time.

Q465 **David Duguid:** So there is a lack of the lead time required. You mentioned Ukraine and Moldova a lot. I understand that both your organisations are focusing on those two countries. Why Ukraine and Moldova specifically?

**Matthew Jarrett:** We are just moving further east. It is relatively close to get over. It is probably £150 by bus to the UK. We are not too far away so we can react quicker and reduce the costs to the worker. We have had experience of using Ukrainians under the old SAW scheme as an industry, with some very successful results. We are tapping into agricultural universities. These guys are young, motivated and coming over for a real reason. We are not seeing that from Europe.

**Stephanie Maurel:** I agree. We have gone to those three countries because we have worked with them previously. We have gone to partners we have worked with previously. We have gone to countries where perhaps ethics are not as high as we would need them to be. We are both



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licensed and we have to uphold our licences, so we have gone to partners that we have trusted before and we still trust.

Ukraine has 33 agricultural universities. Students are absolutely desperate to have practical experience which at the moment they cannot get in the Ukraine. They are looking to us and to our country as an open door to that experience, not just to the language, the earnings and the cultural exchange. They learn skills to take back to further their own career. These people are going to work in agriculture or to have their own farms.

**Q466 Chair:** There are a couple of things I want to better understand. I want to make sure I am not misinterpreting you. You said you could easily have managed with another 5,000 or 10,000 in these schemes. You also seemed to say—I will allow you to clarify this so that we can understand perfectly what is going on here—that we are not going to learn all that much from the 2,500 pilot. I do not know if it is because of the way in which the numbers have been distributed or that they are so small. Is that roughly what you were trying to say to the Committee in your previous responses? If not, clarify it for us so that we can understand.

**Matthew Jarrett:** There are two things there. As recruitment activity goes, both businesses can scale up significantly, very quickly. What we are finding extremely hard—I know we will pick up on this later—is the visa process and those visa offices being able to manage the number of applications going through. That is a significant problem that we are facing.

**Stephanie Maurel:** In terms of learning, with 2,500 and two significantly different models we can learn an awful lot. We have gone across vegetables and fruit, because it had to be edible horticulture. We are doing different types of farm in different areas of the country. We will be looking at rates of pay and day sickness. There is an awful lot we will be able to learn from this, because although 2,500 is not enough for the 80,000 to 90,000 we need seasonally, it is a huge amount to run statistical data on, and we can learn something from it.

**Q467 Chair:** I don't want to put words into your mouth, so tell me if this is correct: we would learn an awful lot more about a successful pilot scheme if there were more people involved in it.

**Stephanie Maurel:** I am not sure that is necessarily true. I think the more data you have, the better—always.

**Matthew Jarrett:** I agree. What we are learning now, 2,500 is absolutely enough, but we are not able to impact on the labour shortages through the pilot.

**Chair:** We will come to that specifically. I was just interested in what you said in response to Mr Lamont.

**Q468 Deidre Brock:** Therefore, what you are learning in this particular sector could extend to other sectors such as fishing. I know there is a big shortage there, which we have discussed very often down here.





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**Matthew Jarrett:** Yes. We are restricted to edible horticulture at the moment.

Q469 **Deidre Brock:** But what you have learnt from this could potentially be taken into those other sectors.

**Matthew Jarrett:** Yes, it could be extended into any other industry.

Q470 **Deidre Brock:** This is obviously focused on recruiting seasonal labour outside the EU. Do you see that as a viable option in the long term for the agriculture industry and other industries that require these sorts of workers?

**Matthew Jarrett:** Absolutely. At the moment, we are struggling as an industry to pull the required numbers and calibre of labour from the EU as it stands, so we would still be at this point, I believe, regardless of Brexit. We have just been pulling from the same labour pool for the last four years and we need to look for the next labour pool.

**Stephanie Maurel:** Five years ago, Concordia recruited from Poland. We don't have more than 10 people coming through now from Poland, so we have moved away from certain eastern European countries. We are now in Romania, Bulgaria and Lithuania. This year, in direct contrast to last year, we are already seeing numbers dropping from Romania. Interest is really falling away.

Our biggest age group is 40-plus; four years ago it was 18 to 25. They are more rural and do not, as a population, speak English as well. There is quite a lot of movement. Because of such strong economies in Romania and Bulgaria, they are keeping their own labour and they are paying them more, so they now earn three-and-a-half to four times the salary when they come to the UK, rather than the five to six times of a few years ago.

Q471 **Paul Masterton:** I presume that the sector did not have such easy access to migrant labour prior to EU enlargement in 2004. Are there lessons that can be learned from how the situation was dealt with historically, or have things changed too much in terms of a lot of these countries' economies now being much more prosperous and successful, and the local population being more educated? Is it just too different a world from pre-EU expansion, when access to labour was not quite as easy, or are there still lessons to be learned from how things were done before there was such easy access?

**Stephanie Maurel:** That is an interesting question. There are still things to be learned from before. However, we will never be able to go back within the EU to recruiting students, for example, because we need a much longer season—five to six months on average. We have run focus groups galore over the past few years, just trying to understand where the drop off has come from, and the students look at us as if to say, "I could do six months of really hard, dirty labour, or I could go to Italy on a six-month Erasmus placement". We don't come into the mix at all. It is not even on the list of considerations now, whereas when you start leaving and going to countries where coming to the UK is a real knowledge grab



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and growth opportunity—countries such as Ukraine and Russia—that is where the interest is coming from, and the majority will be students, so we are going back in a certain way to what we saw maybe 10 years ago.

Q472 **Paul Masterton:** So in some ways it is a bit of time lag. Ukraine and Moldova are where some of these other countries were 10 or 15 years ago—countries which are now much more successful in their own right. The young people coming through are looking for different things, but, as you say, as you move east, they are almost a generation behind.

**Stephanie Maurel:** The Bulgarian Government offer financial opportunities and rewards to keep students in the country working after university. They are quite desperate to keep their own labour, so with or without Brexit we will need to look further than eastern Europe.

Q473 **Paul Masterton:** I ask because there is a temptation—I think we are all guilty of this—to look for simplistic reasons for why there are drop-offs and shortages, but it is not as simple as saying that, because of what happened in 2016 and because we are ending freedom of movement, we now cannot get anybody. It is clear from the evidence we have heard today that it is not easy just to put it down to those things, because there is a much broader issue about why we have these workforce challenges in getting people over.

**Stephanie Maurel:** Interestingly, in other countries in Europe almost no one uses only EU labour to pick their crop. Germany is going out to Ukraine, and Spain and Portugal look to Morocco and north Africa. Sri Lankan workers are coming in. Almost no country uses only EU labour. We are probably one of the last to look wider.

Q474 **Paul Masterton:** In the previous panel the NFUS position was presented as, effectively, “This could all be solved if we retained free movement of labour with the EU”, but your view is that that is too simplistic a request and would not deal with the shortages.

**Matthew Jarrett:** In my opinion yes, absolutely.

**Stephanie Maurel:** We have been short as a sector by 13%, and it will probably get worse this year.

Q475 **Deidre Brock:** Presumably the length of time it is taking to process the visas would have to shorten considerably for it to continue to be an attractive option. From what you were saying, Mr Jarrett, that has been a problem.

**Matthew Jarrett:** Absolutely. The Home Office says it should take 15 days, but currently it is 30-plus days, which means we cannot react to our growers quickly enough.

**Stephanie Maurel:** There are probably two things within that; as you can imagine, we talk a lot about this. First, we have to separate the pilot from what would happen. We have been recruiting since early January, which is incredibly tight when asking deans of universities to change their exam timetables so that we can have their students. We are doing possibly nine



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months' work in three months in a country that we have not been in for a good decade. There is an awful lot we are doing that we can put down to this being a pilot and that we would not have to do in other years.

Q476 **Deidre Brock:** And would that be the case for the Home Office as well?

**Stephanie Maurel:** In Russia we are putting a small number of visas through, so we do not have many issues there. In Ukraine and Moldova we do not have our own visa offices, and it is tendered out to a company called TLS. In Moldova, until about a month ago the office was open only one day a week for us to get both our volume through and to try to get visas. There is a cost just to get the appointment for a visa application. There is a cost to get the passport sent to someone, and the cost of the visa itself. That is quite high, but at least it is standard for all countries. We are discovering quite a lot of things that are coming to a head in a short amount of time.

Q477 **Chair:** On visas, it strikes me as almost absurd that we are having a pilot initiated by the UK Government in a short period and a season that lasts five to six months. You say it takes 30-plus days—that's a month lost in trying to secure a visa for someone to come here to see whether a pilot will be successful. When you approach the Home Office or any of these agencies, what do they say to you about why it is taking such a time?

**Matthew Jarrett:** They are supportive and understanding, but we are not able to make any real movement forward. Our biggest issue is that if we don't get people on the ground quickly, we could miss the season. Then we will have 2,500 people in December and January.

Q478 **Chair:** The first strawberries in Perthshire and Gowrie in my constituency are now available this season. I think you said that you have 40 people so far—

**Stephanie Maurel:** We need 46 people in about the next week. They won't be here.

Q479 **Chair:** Again, when you go to the Home Office, do they just say that they can't get that done? What type of conversations are you having?

**Stephanie Maurel:** The Home Office has committed to a three-week turnaround for the visa stamping process, so that every application via Kiev, Chişinău, or wherever goes to Sheffield, which is where it is processed. That takes three weeks as the Home Office commitment. It is still early days—as I said, we have only got 12 people all the way through the process, and I think you, Mr Jarrett, are on similar numbers. For me it is about getting an appointment at the visa offices. It's not really the process of the Home Office behind it. It's just that if we are trying to put 2,000 people through two visa offices, one of which is open for only one day a week—it is now open for a second day a week, but with a charge of €90—

**Matthew Jarrett:** In addition.



**Stephanie Maurel:** In addition—to have your appointment. So we are asking people who are students, who are trying to pay their termly fees and who are coming over here to earn a minimum wage, to pay out quite a lot of money to come over. Our recommendation is: don't pay the extra money; we will just have to try to work with growers and see whether we can delay—whether we can move workers from somewhere else. If you are paying £244 for a visa and you are almost doubling that with the extra fees for your appointment and getting your passport sent to you—we can't ask that of people.

Q480 **Chair:** The way you describe it makes it seem like one hell of a bureaucratic process for a student to come from Moldova to assist the UK Government in a pilot in order to see whether there is any value in making sure there is a long-term scheme in place. There is almost a disincentive for people to try to get involved in all this if they are having to go through this.

**Matthew Jarrett:** It is a real barrier. Take Ukraine: Germany take 60,000 workers from Ukraine to Germany for agriculture and they don't charge at all. So where are you going to go? Are you going to come to the UK and queue up for a couple of weeks—

**Chair:** I think this is something we will have to take up with the Home Office, just to ask a little bit more about it. Thank you for that, because it helps us to understand what is happening when it comes to these visa arrangements.

**Stephanie Maurel:** I would just stress this point. In 2020, if we can start in September, knowing clearly whether there is an extension or an increase in the volume, it will be less of an issue. I don't think two days a week will ever be enough, but we will be starting to put visas through on 1 January, not 1 April, which is what we were both doing.

**Chair:** That is very clear. Thank you for that.

Q481 **Hugh Gaffney:** Some of the witnesses have called for the pilot to be expanded to cover other industries such as food processing and hospitality. Do you have expertise in these sectors?

**Matthew Jarrett:** I have been pushing fairly hard in terms of horticulture. I touched on daffodils and I have had a number of growers in Scotland requesting our services for next year, as they have struggled with labour this year. That is not part of edible horticulture, but it's field-based and labour-intensive and absolutely should be included. Going further on, where do you stop? You go into warehouses, industrial food processing, retail—where does it stop? Where is the need? We go all the way through from field to fork, so we will supply warehouses; we supply Sainsbury's and Tesco warehouses and distribution centres. We don't have the challenges in that sector that we probably have in agriculture for field and packhouse work.

Q482 **Hugh Gaffney:** Do you think there is a difference, then, between horticulture and others?



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**Matthew Jarrett:** I think so, yes. It is probably seen as lower. We lose a lot of our candidates to those warehouses—Amazon, for example—that pay slightly more. It's not outside; it's not in the rain; it all looks attractive.

Q483 **Hugh Gaffney:** Are you saying that you bring them over here first and then they go and find other work?

**Matthew Jarrett:** Typically, they will use us—because we have accommodation, we are a pretty safe bet. They will come over, work for us, earn enough money and then leave and go and find something else—the grass is always greener.

Q484 **Hugh Gaffney:** So you find it hard to compete.

**Stephanie Maurel:** What I would add to that is that we do quite a lot of dairies, game farms, turkey plucking—anything that is seasonal has, for me, exactly the same issues with recruiting as edible hort.

Q485 **Hugh Gaffney:** Do they go for other jobs and then come back for the seasonal work? I spoke earlier about getting work all year round. Is this what is happening with horticulture—people basically work for the season, find other work and then don't come back because it has better pay?

**Stephanie Maurel:** We find that they come over—our average is five months; we could do with it being a little bit more, but that's okay. They are committing, maybe, to a six or seven-month contract. Because of the shortage of workers, they are doing a lot of overtime; they are doing a lot of hours. They are getting paid more. So, as was mentioned earlier, after three or four months they are saying, "I've reached my magic number; I would like to go home now," and they are leaving early. That means that for top fruits, like apples, which is a great crop—we generally have no problems recruiting—we are struggling to recruit, because workers are going home, so there is no one to transfer into these crops. We would love to move them around from job to job. It's a different type of candidate that comes in, and we tend not to have those so much, but there is definitely attraction for it; we are just not finding the matches for it.

Q486 **Hugh Gaffney:** Would the markets that you are sourcing seasonal agricultural labour from also provide labour with these skills and for these sectors? You could find other skills; you could find other workers. Your business would find them if need be.

**Stephanie Maurel:** We haven't found it for hospitality; we have not been looking for it, so I would not want to answer on that, but in all, global, agriculture, then yes.

Q487 **John Lamont:** Will the pilot scheme provide the flexibility for workers to transfer between farms as the season progresses?

**Matthew Jarrett:** Yes, in short. Pro-Force is slightly different from Concordia. We have our own accommodation as well, so we have 2,500—not in Scotland at the moment unfortunately, but that is something we will



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be looking at doing. Where we have our hub, we can touch multiple growers with our workforce, so that is quite attractive. That is another reason, a point of difference, and probably why the Home Office went with our application.

**Q488 John Lamont:** So they would stay in the same accommodation—they are in the hub.

**Matthew Jarrett:** Absolutely, and then we can move people from farm to farm as well. We have some growers wanting three months' work, which I can marry into top fruit later in the season, like Stephanie was saying, so we are able to move people around the UK.

**Stephanie Maurel:** We do something similar but we don't house them, so we would move them from farm to farm, including the non-EU workers. They pack their bags and physically move from farm to farm.

**Q489 John Lamont:** So it is quite easy to monitor where the workers are at any particular point in time.

**Stephanie Maurel:** Definitely.

**Q490 John Lamont:** Following on from that, some argue that there should be a separate immigration system in Scotland compared with the rest of the United Kingdom. Given what you have just described and how you operate your business, how would that impact on your operations?

**Matthew Jarrett:** We could look at that in isolation and build a scheme around Scotland, absolutely. I think there is synergy. We can move people around and I think it can be successful for those peak months that we are trying to assist the industry.

**Q491 John Lamont:** But in terms of moving workers, say, from the south of England to parts of Scotland to reflect the season, that would surely involve an additional level of bureaucracy for you.

**Matthew Jarrett:** Absolutely. That would probably be a separate workforce.

**John Lamont:** A separate workforce?

**Matthew Jarrett:** Quite possibly.

**Stephanie Maurel:** We are moving asparagus growers from Herefordshire to Scotland for strawberries this year, so a totally different system would impact on that.

**Q492 John Lamont:** So you are content with it being uniform across the United Kingdom.

**Stephanie Maurel:** I am. I echo what Matt has said. Otherwise you would recruit directly for Scotland and have to consider it a separate operation.

**Q493 Chair:** What happens if one of these people from Moldova or Ukraine comes on the pilot scheme to one of my farms in Perthshire but stays for only three months? Is a visa subsequently given to someone else to come





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in for that period?

**Stephanie Maurel:** No.

Q494 **Chair:** Definitely no. So have you done any projects, assessments or work on how many people are likely to drop off and on the impact that would then have on the farm they had been allocated to?

**Stephanie Maurel:** It is expected to be zero. It won't be zero, because it never can be, but we expect people to come for the full length of the contract—six months or slightly less, depending on what the farm requires. In our experience—the partners we work with send workers to Germany, the States, Canada—

Q495 **Chair:** We have heard from the Scottish Rural College that drop-off is a real feature of seasonal work, particularly with workers from outwith the EU.

**Stephanie Maurel:** But not from non-EU. We expect that to be 100%—

Q496 **Chair:** So you are not expecting any drop-off whatever. When someone is given their visa, with all the difficulty that they have gone through, and they come to Scotland, to one of my farms in Perthshire, they will stay for that full six-month period. You are not anticipating or expecting any drop-off.

**Stephanie Maurel:** There will be unexpected grandmother deaths, but I do not expect any significant number of early leavers from the non-EU scheme. I expect very significant numbers from EU workers.

Q497 **Chair:** Again, in the experience of farms, a lot of these people are returners who come back year after year in order to build up a relationship with some farms. In this pilot, will there be the opportunity for that type of relationship to be built up? Is it seen specifically as just six months—once it is done, that's it gone—or are you trying to build in features such as people building relationships with farms so that they may be able to return in subsequent years?

**Matthew Jarrett:** We are grading the workers and the farms, and having a portal for people to be able to do that. One of the things that we are trying to say to the best workers is, "You will come back next year. You will be offered a visa for next year."

Q498 **Chair:** Can you say to them that they will be offered a visa?

**Matthew Jarrett:** We can. The only issue is that they have to have six months away. Because we are late in starting, if they come on 1 June, they will go for six months and they cannot come back any earlier the following year.

Q499 **Chair:** Is that the same with Concordia?

**Stephanie Maurel:** Yes, that is absolutely fine. Returnees who come back year on year are brilliant for the farm, and it is brilliant for the worker. They are trained and, in terms of labour abuse, they know exactly where they are going to be well looked after. On EU workers, we are dropping



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returnees at 10% a year for the past four years. We are down at about 39% for the whole of the country at the moment, so we are losing returnees from Europe at the moment.

**Q500 Deidre Brock:** Further to Mr Lamont's questions about the possibility of a stand-alone immigration system in Scotland, we have looked into that in quite some detail. We have done a report on that and it has featured in a number of inquiries that we have been running over the past few months. It is certainly the case—we have had a number of witnesses tell us this—that separate immigration systems within set-ups such as the United Kingdom are entirely possible. I am just wondering whether there is something about Scotland that makes us uniquely incapable of having such a system and able to get around any sort of minor issues that there might be.

**Stephanie Maurel:** I have not planned the business case for it, but it would all depend on what skills we would need in order to move people across. As long as that is clear, there is no reason why we can't.

**Q501 Hugh Gaffney:** Who actually pays for the travel to come over?

**Stephanie Maurel:** The worker. In Concordia's case, the worker pays the travel to come over here and their visa or consulate costs—the £244 plus whatever else it comes to. For that, they get their free insurance, the free support and the 24-hour helpline from us and their agent.

**Hugh Gaffney:** They pay that to come over for six month, then go back over.

**Stephanie Maurel:** Yes.

**Q502 Paul Masterton:** The Government have said quite clearly that they will revoke your licences if fewer than 95% of your sponsored workers go back after six months. Are you anticipating any difficulties? How are you planning to enforce that, or do you just not foresee that people will be trying to stay longer?

**Matthew Jarrett:** It is all about finding the right people in the home country who are motivated and who understand what the whole process is about. That is why we are focusing on universities, because they have a reason to go back. That is why we are focusing on countries where there is not really any real conflict to talk about. We have both had significant interest from Pakistan, for example, but we wouldn't take those because they wouldn't go back. That is a point. Within our pricing model to the grower, we also pay a departure bonus and that is there to offset their visa costs initially, but it is triggered once they go back home, so there is a carrot there.

**Q503 Paul Masterton:** Is that the incentive that is mentioned on Pro-Force's website?

**Matthew Jarrett:** That is right.

**Q504 Paul Masterton:** What about from Concordia?



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**Stephanie Maurel:** I echo what Matt said about finding the right person. It is all in the interview process. Everyone will be interviewed face to face. They have everything explained to them, they know where they are going and they know what they are doing. For us, that is absolutely key. Again, the partners we work with do other programmes, to Scandinavia especially. They have a 100% return rate. The only country they don't have a 100% return rate with—we are talking about a few individuals—is the States. We don't envisage it being an issue, but we are tracking it.

Q505 **Paul Masterton:** Basically, if you do the correct legwork at the start of the process, you shouldn't have problems at the end.

**Stephanie Maurel:** Yes. The students cannot continue their university degree or diploma if they don't go back in time and we give them three days to check in and say they are back.

Q506 **Paul Masterton:** In terms of the ongoing monitoring and protecting the welfare of people who are coming over in the pilot, how are you going to do that? We have talked a little bit about the audit process. Will there be spot checks? Will you be flagging things if there is suddenly a spike in calls to the helpline that there is no hot water or something? Is that the sort of monitoring that you will do?

**Matthew Jarrett:** Yes, it is ongoing monitoring, on a day-by-week basis. We have our own people out there visiting the farms on a weekly basis. A lot of the workers we are allocating are directly employed on our payroll as well, so we are monitoring hours worked and performance at work, and liaising with the growers.

**Stephanie Maurel:** Similarly, we have audits and then spot surprise audits and checks and focus groups with workers. All workers have their own log-in to our database, which is our central post, and they can put their queries or complaints or anything through that as well, and then we will send out our auditor ourselves to check things out.

**Paul Masterton:** I think we covered some of the audit stuff earlier.

Q507 **Chair:** These will be the only non-EU seasonal workers who will come into the UK through this pilot; no other schemes exist just now. Is that correct?

**Matthew Jarrett:** Yes.

Q508 **Chair:** I am just looking at some international examples about non-EU workers, which I presume you are very familiar with. For example, you will have looked at what happens in Germany, where they have 6,000 Ukrainian students who come for up to 90 days to work on German farms. The Spanish figures show that there are 72,000 Moroccans working on Spanish farms. The figure of 3,500 is just a total and utter drop in the ocean compared to how other nations have gone about protecting their horticultural sector and their seasonal workforces. What do you think we could learn from some of these international examples?



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**Stephanie Maurel:** It is difficult, because I think we are world-leading. The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority is licensed, it is known throughout the world and it is really respected, in terms of the sector but also for other countries. I think there are possibly things we can learn about the support we give to the worker. I think Matt said earlier that you don't need to apply for your visa when you go from Ukraine to Germany; you just get stamped at the border. There are things that we could do to make it easier for them.

Q509 **Chair:** Are you saying that German standards aren't as high as the UK's when it comes to this? Is that what you are suggesting?

**Stephanie Maurel:** I am saying that Germany is doing it slightly differently, to try to attract students into their country. They do not pay tax. They come in for those days and then they leave, and they can come in and out across the border; I think they can do it in two lots. So I think there are things we can learn about different ways of doing the programme. In terms of the ethics and how well we look after the worker, I still think we are probably the best.

Q510 **Chair:** But at least they are getting the crop picked, whereas we are losing 20% to 30% of our crop, because we have got so few workers. I am not supposing that Spain is having these issues just now. When we go to the supermarkets, we see lots and lots of Spanish-picked raspberries and strawberries.

**Stephanie Maurel:** I go back to what I said earlier: we are probably the only country that until this year was using only EU workers.

Q511 **Chair:** What about you, Mr Jarrett? Is there anything we could learn from these countries?

**Matthew Jarrett:** Yes, I concur. We need significantly more workers to reduce the exposure of the industry.

Q512 **Chair:** Okay, we will leave that there. If this pilot is a success—we all hope that it will be and we are grateful for your review about how all this is going to proceed, and we have picked up some of the difficulties and issues—how long would it take to get a permanent scheme in place? Would that be something that you would be able to speculate about just now, or do we have to wait to see the results and conclusions on this?

**Matthew Jarrett:** We have to see the results and conclusions. I think there are some learnings. We have touched on the auditing process and the costings; I think that will come with scale, to reduce the cost to growers. I think the length of visa—six months—is probably not long enough for the industry. I would much prefer to see nine months, and I would much prefer to see other sectors allowed in, such as ornamental horticulture.

As for our being able to increase our numbers, I do not see that as a problem. Now we have a model that enables us to go to other countries as well, because we are not restricted to Ukraine and Moldova. Those are countries we chose, but we can go globally, so that is really encouraging.



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We have to be very careful, as an industry, not to open up any abuse into our supply chains through this visa process, and stepping outside of countries where a body such as the GLAA does not have the resource to monitor agents and the like.

**Q513 Chair:** The UK Government say that they will review this in December 2020, I think, when the pilots have concluded. Have you any idea at this stage what sort of review that will be and what sort of things they will look for to determine whether it is a success or not?

**Stephanie Maurel:** The three key measures that were part of the tender were: that people who applied for the visa got the visa, that workers arrived at the farm, and that the workers then arrived home. That, in terms of a Home Office measure, is very much a migration question. For us, it is whether or not the workers did a good job, were treated fairly and supported the farm. I do not think nationally that we will be able to measure if they have made a difference, because they won't—there are not enough of them. I think we can measure productivity and the difference on the individual farms, and possibly countries.

**Matthew Jarrett:** We are measuring the impact on hospitals, doctors and so forth—we have to do that on a weekly basis. That will be interesting and telling. But they are not entitled to use the NHS; we are taking out private medical insurance for these people. I don't see that as being an issue.

**Q514 Chair:** Lastly from me, other than the visa issue, which we have kicked around a little bit, is there any other single thing that you think could be done to improve this pilot scheme and ensure that it is equipped for success?

**Stephanie Maurel:** No.

**Chair:** So it is all designed perfectly?

**Stephanie Maurel:** We are shaping the design as it goes along. From one tender process, we have two quite different models on the ground. There is the same end and outcome but two different models. I think they are testing two things differently, so we will hopefully learn from each other.

**Q515 Chair:** Mr Jarrett, can you think of anything that could be done to improve it?

**Matthew Jarrett:** No, other than just speeding up the visa process. I worry that we are putting up a barrier with the significant cost to come over on the pilot scheme—£244 plus travel and so forth—against other markets and countries that are not charging anything. I think we should look at that.

**Chair:** Thank you both ever so much. That was really helpful and we have got a good sense of how the pilot will be operated. We will maybe have you back at the end of all of this to see what you made of it all and whether it is going to be worthwhile. Thank you ever so much for your attendance today.