



Select Committee on the European Union

Energy and Environment Sub-Committee

Corrected oral evidence—Veggie tubes: proposed restrictions on naming vegetarian foods

Wednesday 19 June 2019

10.25 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Teverson (Chairman); Lord Cameron of Dillington; Viscount Hanworth; Lord Rooker; Lord Selkirk of Douglas; Baroness Sheehan; The Earl of Stair; Baroness Wilcox; Lord Young of Norwood Green.

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 - 12

Witnesses

I: Mark Banahan, Campaigns and Policy Officer, Vegan Society; Dr Geoff Bryant, Technical Director, Quorn Foods; Ruth Edge, Chief Food Chain Adviser, National Farmers' Union; Jackie Kearney, Chef; Laura Sears, Individual Giving Officer, Vegetarian Society.

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Examination of witnesses

Mark Banahan, Dr Geoff Bryant, Ruth Edge, Jackie Kearney and Laura Sears.

Q1 The Chairman: I welcome everybody to this meeting of the Energy and Environment Sub-Committee. This morning, we have a round table, where we are looking at proposals that have been made by the agriculture committee of the European Parliament for restrictions on naming vegetarian food. It is something we would like to explore, because it could go into the future reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and have implications in the United Kingdom, whether we are inside or outside Europe.

I remind Members that they should declare any interests the first time they speak. I remind everybody that this is a public evidence session and that it is being recorded and transcribed. If our witnesses have any problems with the transcription, which you will see later when it is completed, please let us know.

I would like to start off by everybody introducing themselves. I shall ask our members to say who they are, to have equality between sides.

Lord Rooker: I am Jeff Rooker from the House of Lords. I am a former Minister at MAFF and at Defra, and I was Minister for Farming in Northern Ireland for a year as well.

Lord Young of Norwood Green: I am Tony Young, a Labour backbench Peer. What I have learned about farming, apart from "Countryfile" and "The Archers", is mainly from this Committee, which has been quite a lot. I am afraid that I am an unreconstructed omnivore, or carnivore.

Lord Selkirk of Douglas: I was an MP for 22 and a half years, and a Minister for the Environment in the Scottish Office, so this is of very great interest.

The Chairman: I am Robin Teverson. I chair this Committee. I am a Liberal Democrat and I live in rural Cornwall.

Baroness Wilcox: I, too, live in Cornwall. I come from a trading family—fish mainly, Marks & Spencer, Tesco, Waitrose and all that—so I am quite used to it. Then I became chairman of the UK National Consumer Council to try to see whether we could make it easier for people to understand what they were eating. I am looking forward to today.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: I am Ewen Cameron. I was a farmer. I too live in Cornwall. This is a south-west conspiracy, as you can see. I am a Cross-Bench Peer.

Baroness Sheehan: I am Baroness Sheehan. I have a financial interest in a small farm in Oxfordshire, about 58 acres, on which there are sheep.

Viscount Hanworth: I am Stephen Pollock. I am a Labour backbencher and an academic mathematician, and I am an omnivore.

The Chairman: It is not compulsory to declare what you eat and do not eat for this session. I happen to be a pescatarian, but I do not say it very often because it sounds like someone older than an octogenarian. Laura, would you like to start?

Laura Sears: I am Laura Sears, from the Vegetarian Society UK. Following requests from this Committee, we asked our members, supporters and the businesses we work with what the issues would be for them about the proposal. Some 1,225 members and supporters completed the survey; 70% of responses had negative or very negative views of the proposal.

From our members and supporters, the key findings were that current naming conventions are clear and easy to understand. For example, people can currently buy chicken, pork or veggie burgers and sausages, and what is clear about it is what is in front of the word sausage or burger. The second key finding was that members and supporters said that the foods would be named after shapes rather than ingredients. The third key finding was that the proposal would cause more confusion. When people buy these products, they are looking for the term "veggie burger" and "veggie sausage". Words such as "discs" and "tubes" are not associated with food, and the proposal would lead to more confused shoppers.

We also asked businesses that use our trademarks, and 30 companies responded. The responses from companies generally reflected members' and supporters' views but, in addition, they commented on the cost implications. They said that it would be very expensive to change their marketing, branding and packaging, which are all costly and time consuming. Companies said that they would prefer to use words other than "discs" and "tubes", which could lead to a situation where multiple terms were used for the same product. They felt that consumers could be put off by the new names, and the changes could negatively impact their businesses, particularly if they were marketing to new potential customers.

Finally, both groups showed concern that the proposal would be counterproductive to the Government's environmental aims. For example, one company specifically quoted the IPCC report, saying that eating more plant-based food is one of the biggest things we can do for the environment. If the change puts people off eating more vegetarian food, through confusion, dislike of the term or any other reason, it could impact negatively on our achieving our environmental goals.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Laura.

Mark Banahan: I am Mark Banahan, campaigns and policy officer for the Vegan Society, which is the oldest vegan organisation in the world and the leading authority on veganism globally. We oppose the measures that the EU AGRI committee is suggesting on restricting the labelling of plant-based products.

Several of our vegan trademark holders have contacted us expressing concern about the proposal and the expected impact that it would have on their businesses. Stephan Scherer from Absolute Vegan Empire had this to say: "It would have a high impact on our business if we had to rename our products. We have a lot of meat or sausage alternatives, and changing names and descriptions makes them unrecognisable for our existing and future customers". We have many other statements from businesses that produce plant-based meat alternatives, all with similar worries.

The Vegan Society has written to the AGRI committee, arguing that the proposals contradict many of the EU's fundamental rights, being disproportionate and unfairly impacting on plant-based businesses and vegans as a protected minority group. Terms such as "veggie burger" and "veggie sausage" have been used for decades. Commonly used terms like those are not new, so why the drive to restrict them now? Could it be due to the increased interest in veganism, vegetarianism and meat reduction for ethical, health and environmental reasons, threatening the meat and animal agricultural industries?

We have yet to see any evidence that consumers are confused by these terms. To implement the changes now would create confusion rather than alleviate it. Glamorgan sausages date back to at least 1850 and have never contained meat. Clearly, the sausage part of the name refers to the shape, how they are cooked and what they might be best served with; it has nothing to do with the content, meat or otherwise. It is for those and other reasons that the Vegan Society opposes these poorly conceived proposals.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Mark.

Dr Geoff Bryant: I am Geoff Bryant, the technical director of Quorn Foods, which is one of the global leaders of meat-free food products. Our products appeal to the rapidly expanding group of people who want to reduce their meat consumption, and to people who follow vegetarian and vegan diets. We totally oppose the proposal; we think it is absolutely unnecessary. In over 30 years of making meat-free products, not a single person has complained to us that they were misled.

We think it is disproportionate and contrary to the direction that various public health committees say we should take to reduce meat consumption and eat a more plant-based diet. We also think that it adds complexity to the business and is, frankly, confusing to consumers.

The Chairman: We will have a contrary view at some point as we go through.

Jackie Kearney: My name is Jackie Kearney. I am a chef and the author of four vegan cookbooks. My third book is entitled *Vegan Mock Meat Revolution*, so one of my main concerns is how we would retrospectively deal with the terminology that is already out there. It would not be

possible for my books to be there, as they use terms such as “vegan ricotta”.

I have had a street food business for seven years, since my MasterChef final days. I was a researcher in public health for 18 years, so I have a great passion and interest in public health and well-being. I have been a vegetarian since I was 14, so I have been eating veggie burgers for more than 35 years. It seems as though this is a new turn of events, but in fact it has been around for so long that I think I may have been one of Quorn’s first customers.

From researching my book, I can tell you that, historically speaking, mock meat has been around for 2,000 years. It was first developed in the Han dynasty for the practice of zhai jie, which comes from a Buddhist practice that was intensified by eating plant-based food, and the emperors wanted a mock meat version. It proliferated across Asia, particularly China; we have extensive products in our Chinese supermarkets in Chinatown. One of the areas to consider is how you could regulate those products.

The food research I have done for a number of my books has included a lot of travel in America, Canada and around Europe, and I have seen the proliferation of vegan butchers and those kinds of markets in the States. For example, there was the growth of Beyond Meat; within three months of its shares being released, they were some of the fastest growing in history. This is not a tide that can be stemmed by what seems to be coming from the meat industry.

As discussed by the other representatives, my main concerns are the impact the proposal could have as people change to being flexitarians and meat reducers. Being able to use these terms signifies to people where they would use the products. It is not about trying to convert everybody to veganism; it is about behaviour change, and this behaviour change is important for individual health, public health and the future in a global crisis. I truly believe that it is something that should be supported politically by the UK Government.

The Chairman: Thank you very much for that introduction.

Ruth Edge: My name is Ruth Edge. I am from the National Farmers’ Union, where I am a chief food chain adviser, focusing mainly on areas post-farm gate. As the National Farmers’ Union, we represent all members, whether they grow crops or animals. We have more than 47,000 members, and I represent views from both sides. It is important that we recognise that there is a membership growing plant-based products as well. I should probably disclose that I might be your only witness today who eats meat, just so that we are clear.

As the NFU, we wish to see customers not misled in any way, shape or form. We want to see clear and unambiguous labelling, and that is a clear policy that we use right across the board, whether it is to do with country-of-origin labelling or something like this. In relation to the

specifics of the regulation and what it proposes, we welcome the ambition of trying to add clarity, but we feel that in places it goes too far. An example would be the burger and sausage area. While we understand where that is coming from, for us it is about the descriptors, as I think was mentioned by one of the other witnesses. Where the word "burger" or "sausage" is used, we would want it to be very clearly used with a descriptor, whether it be "beetroot burger" or "Quorn sausage". For us, the way the label is presented is the key aspect.

That is more on the processed side. We feel much more strongly that on the non-processed side of things, labels need to be protected where you have a specific cut of meat, such as steak, or where a particular protein is mentioned. We have seen products come to market with names such as "chicken-style nuggets". We feel that there is more concern in those kinds of areas, with those products being brought to market.

We are aware that this is a growth area, as has been said this morning, and an area that customers are starting to buy into. More than 38% of main meals now are meat free. That movement is inevitable, and we see it coming from consumers. We are not trying to stop it, but we want clarity of terms, particularly when retailers are moving towards putting meat-free products in their meat aisles, which is a real change from when they were in designated sections of the supermarket. Now the products are interspersed in the meat aisles, which is why we need more clarity.

Q2 The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed for your opening statements, and for being so brief. When we looked at the history, we found that the process was very different on the dairy side, with milk and so on. There was a legal process in the European Court of Justice. The ECJ came out with the fact that you could not use milk as a descriptor, and that you had to be very careful in that area. I was trying to grapple with that because, if this ever went through the same legal process, why would it be any different from the solution around dairy and milk? What is the fundamental difference?

Mark Banahan: First, the dairy regulations have been in place for a long, long time. A lot of products have been developed and made popular in the light of that ban. The first EU regulations were in the late 1980s, and the UK was a bit slower to adopt them than some other countries, maybe because we thought soya milk was already a commonly used term. There has been more recent clarification, with the 2017 ruling. The popularity of those things has grown up in the context of a ban; there have never been any sort of restrictions on mock meat. A lot of those products have been developed and become popular without a ban at all, so the context is quite different.

Ruth Edge: I guess for us, as Mark said, it was clarified in the EU ruling of 2017. The real concern we had about dairy products was around words such as "cheese", "cream" and "milk", which were protected in relation to that ruling, because those products historically were used only for dairy. You did not see innovative products coming through until fairly recently. The other side of that is that, when you looked at the presentation of the

products that were coming through, very often they would just say "milk". It might be a misspelling—"mylk", or it might just say "milk" and then, in very small descriptive terms underneath, "oat" or "soya", or whatever it might be. That is why this is quite different for us. It was almost as if, in that instance, the products were being passed off as milk, as opposed to being very clear about the descriptive term, as I talked about in my introduction.

Jackie Kearney: Coconut milk has been around since I was a child, and I am approaching half a century this year, so I do not think the use of the term is necessarily recent.

I challenge the idea about confusion. I have never seen any evidence from the thousands of people I have served food over the years that they were confused about the terms being used. There is always the preceding word "vegan" or "veggie", and more recently the use of terms such as faux fish or mock meat. The word "mock" is used across Asian products, so it is very clear to people. I would like to see actual evidence of somebody mistakenly purchasing something they thought was something else. Otherwise, we are basing a decision on conjecture and not on evidence.

Dr Geoff Bryant: Yes, I think it is quite different; with milk, it was quite specific, extrapolating into the future and making sure that people were not misled. What we can do is to look into the past. These words have been around for 30 years. As I said, we get thousands of consumer contacts per month, and not one person in 30 years has said that they bought a Quorn sausage, Quorn burger or Quorn mince thinking that it was animal meat. The change is totally unnecessary.

Q3 **Lord Cameron of Dillington:** I totally sympathise and I agree that it seems very unnecessary in the British language. I wondered whether there was a continental European or other language problem going on, which is driving the agenda in Europe. To what extent have any of you communicated with your continental counterparts to get a better feel for what the problem seems to be? Like you, I come to it from a British perspective, and there does not seem to be a problem, so what is all the fuss about?

Mark Banahan: We are in contact with a number of partner European organisations and they all say the same thing as us; there is no confusion in German or French. It has primarily been led by a group of French farmers who want to protect their industry, and, presumably, some lobbying from meat and agriculture counterparts as well. Ruth, have you anything to add to that?

Ruth Edge: Yes. We are a member of Copa Cogeca; I am the vice-chair of the food chain working group of Copa Cogeca, which is the EU representative union for farming unions. It has been very strong in this area and would actually go much further. While we take a position on a national basis, Copa Cogeca will go much further to support the Bill that has been put forward. France has brought in regulation already; it was

brought in last year¹. We have tried to find out how it has gone, with limited success. There does not seem to have been mass uproar in the media about the implementation, or about the costs in the supply chain of implementing it.

I do not think there is a language issue; it is purely about protecting those terms. We probably need to think about how the products might be slightly different in different countries and have different traditional connotations. In Germany, obviously, the sausage is a national dish, perhaps in comparison with some of the other countries.

Q4 Lord Rooker: The meat industry is a very closed industry, with not many PLCs. It is worth at least £6 billion in the UK, so it is huge across Europe, but it is not an open industry. If that is where the genesis of this idea comes from, I wonder how the industry is going to cope in future when laboratories now working on it have made in vitro meat, which is grown in a laboratory and does not come from an animal. How is the industry going to cope with the descriptor for that protein?

We are not there at the moment, but future production is heading that way. It is a long time down the road, but the laboratories are doing it now, and producing it; it is just about economies of scale, and the science. That will be a real problem, because it will not be meat from an animal. How is that going to be dealt with? Given the fact that we have the knowledge now, in laboratories in this country and in Europe, has there been any discussion about that at all?

The Chairman: Laura, is that something you have a view on?

Laura Sears: We do not particularly have a stance on laboratory meat, so I do not want to say anything about that.

The point was made that European naming might be different in different countries. We have members in 30 different countries across the world but we did not get feedback that there were issues with different languages or names.

The Chairman: Jackie, would you like to comment on Lord Rooker's point?

Jackie Kearney: Yes, I want to respond to that. It relates to an earlier point about using the term "chicken-style". A number of recipes in my most recent book, *Vegan Mock Meat Revolution*, are for dishes that use grain proteins to create a meat-like textured substance. Sometimes with those things, we use a little play on words. Ruth referred to spelling milk using a "y". For example, you might have "chickn", without an e. You might use the term "chicken-style katsu curry" to indicate that it is a chicken-like product. It is still very clear that it is a plant-based product, because the book is a vegan cookbook.

¹ The NFU subsequently clarified that as of 8 July 2019 the measure had not been implemented in France. The initial provision was cancelled by the Constitutional Court, and a bill reintroducing the provision had been adopted by the Senate but not yet discussed by the National Assembly.

I would be concerned about how we could even tackle labelling if we were not able to use a “something-like” product. There are so many terms such as that in the food world. We refer, for example, to Burmese-style cooking. We use those terms a lot, saying “something-style”. To restrict that would be very difficult; things would be very wordy to describe. I am trying to remember all the ingredients. Instead of saying mock bacon, you would say “a wheat gluten shaped smoky paprika-flavoured lump that is sliced thinly”. It would become impossible.

The Chairman: You are not allowed to use the words “like Champagne”, but Prosecco seems to have done quite well despite that.

Jackie Kearney: That is true. But the origin of products is very much not what we are talking about today. We need to be careful about being drawn into that, because I am sure that none of the witnesses here today would want to question the origin of certain products, such as feta or that kind of thing.

I feel very strongly about being able to illustrate to people where they would use a product. For example, there is a product called Spacebar, which is described as a chorizo-style sausage. If the producer was not allowed to use that description, a customer might not know that they could slice it up, fry it and pop it into an omelette or on to their pizza, and that it could replace pepperoni, which is not particularly good for them. We need to support people’s flexible choices towards plant-based eating. I believe that these crowd-pleasing terms are ways to reach such people; it is how we support that behaviour change.

The Chairman: Geoff, on the future that Lord Rooker was talking about, is that something you see getting more complicated as we go on, from a processor or producer point of view?

Dr Geoff Bryant: Projected forwards to five or 10 years’ time, that is absolutely right; we will be able to grow meat in a laboratory. It will still come from an animal originally, but you will not need the animal to live; you will be able to do it in a laboratory. That is a totally different area, outside the scope of this regulation, although it is something that other regulation will need to come to.

The Chairman: We can worry about that when we get there.

Dr Geoff Bryant: To take a general term such as “mince”, Quorn mince or meat-free mince is one of our biggest selling products, and has been for decades. Who owns the word “mince”? It means “chopped up finely”. You mince onions, garlic, or herbs. In fact, inside a mince pie there is no meat; it is chopped-up fruit. The language in terms such as that means that you can be overly restrictive. Stopping the use of the word “sausage”, which is a shape, or “mince”, which just means to chop things up into small pieces, is ridiculous. No one can own that, and it is not owned by the meat industry.

We need to be careful, and the question is where we draw the line, so that we are not misleading the consumer. There is already plenty of regulation in force that stops people misleading the consumer. There is regulation of food information to consumers, which states that on the back of the pack there must be a quantitative ingredient declaration; you have to state all the ingredients, and the allergens and the nutrition. That is enough.

Ruth Edge: To go back to Lord Rooker's point, that is something that will need a lot more discussion about the way the product is placed on the shelf and labelled, and the communication to consumers. As Geoff rightly said, to produce lab-grown meat, you require a large animal input from embryo fluid, which actually comes from an animal. At the moment, there is no synthetic replacement for that, so there is still reliance on animal production to produce lab-grown meat. They are looking at ways of changing that.

It will need a lot more discussion. It will need to be differentiated in some way from conventionally produced meat, so that the two things can co-exist, and the consumer is clear about what they are buying. We may find that one or other, depending on the quality and attributes, becomes more of a premium item as a result.

To go back to Jackie's comments, we are quite concerned about terms. I think you used the term "ripping off" or mimicking terms. We are quite concerned about that, with terms such as "chicken-style". There is a product called vegetarian shredded duck. Is the duck vegetarian, or is it a vegetarian product? What is it? I take Geoff's point that all the information is on the label on the back, but I think you will find that most customers do not turn over the pack to analyse it in any way.

To my mind, there are some fantastic products coming through; 20% of products coming to shelf are vegetarian or vegan, with fantastic credentials, and you are getting customers excited about it. Quite why you need to rip off meat terms, I do not know. You have a fantastic story to tell in your own right, so why you have to relate that back to meat, I do not know. A study has been done of UK and US consumers, where 33% of vegans said they would actually support the Bill, as it is written, and would not want any meat terms used in conjunction with their products.

Mark Banahan: I want to ask Ruth whether she has any evidence or whether there are any studies that suggest that even terms like "chicken-style" are actually misleading consumers. Are people regularly buying the wrong product?

Ruth Edge: It is an area that needs looking into further, and that is not really where our concern about misleading is. It is more about the mimicking. Why does one product need to mimic another? You have a fantastic story to tell. As I said, our members are quite concerned about that. It is an area that needs further research.

Mark Banahan: The only research we have found was a study in Germany, from the Federation of German Consumer Organisations, which said that less than 4% of people had ever bought a product mistakenly, whether that was vegetarians who had bought a meat product or the other way around. That is ever, not a regular thing. It does not appear that there is a problem. Unless you have evidence for that, it appears that this is legislation—

The Chairman: We do not really talk across in that way. We run the discussion in a slightly different way. If you could talk through the Chair, that would be useful. We will come back to Ruth, and maybe she can answer some of those questions in a bit. Laura, did you want to come in on this? Then I want to broaden it out again.

Laura Sears: Our members and supporters said that lots of other terms used in the food and beverage industry, such as alcohol-free beer, are not actually the product you would be thinking of when buying your beer. It is the “alcohol-free” that shows what the product actually is. We also thought of other examples, such as beef tomatoes, which do not have beef in them; that is just what we call them. People were a bit confused about why the proposal was specifically for the meat industry and not for other food and beverage industries. We do not think that it should be something that goes out to them, but it is about where that comes into place.

The Chairman: That reminds me of Cornish pasties, which I think Cornish miners back in the 19th century would be hugely disappointed to find are produced as they are. I notice that they are not on the European Parliament list.

Q5 **Viscount Hanworth:** My question might seem to be a non-sequitur, but I think that Ruth Edge touched on it. I have been thinking about the sausages produced by a firm that also produced ice cream. They were advertised with a slogan that declared they were “mighty meaty matey”. They were not; they consisted of a pink slurry bolstered by cereals. How should we prevent manufacturers resorting to the technique of the big lie, and are our current regulations sufficient in that connection? We have heard that listing the ingredients in detail, in small print, is not sufficient to alert people to the constituents of these things.

The Chairman: Geoff, do you want to come in, as a manufacturer, and maybe comment on the previous conversation?

Dr Geoff Bryant: There are two debates. The proposed legislation was driven by not wanting to mislead consumers. Whether we want to mimic meat is a totally different matter. Actually, we actively want to mimic meat; we want people to drive a conscious choice and continue with the same eating behaviours, putting a vegetarian burger in a bun and still enjoying a barbecue with people, whether they want to eat meat or not eat meat. We do not want to encourage consumers to change their behaviour or feel awkward about how they name a product; we want them consciously to shift their food choices away from meat. That is

absolutely fine. What we must not do is mislead them, and there is a distinction between mimicking meat and encouraging that behaviour, because it is ubiquitous, and misleading.

Viscount Hanworth: I am concerned about the manufacturers more than the consumers, in this particular case. That is where the problem originates.

Mark Banahan: The main selling point of companies such as Quorn is that their products do not contain meat. Nearly all their consumers will be seeking them out to be sure that they contain no meat. It does not make business sense to try to blur the lines and confuse people and try to get a few meat eaters by mistake. That is not a good business model; the business model is to be very clear that the products do not contain any meat.

Jackie Kearney: You can bring in numerous examples from supermarkets to demonstrate that labelling is currently very clear. As you said, Viscount Hanworth, you are a meat eater. How often do you actually look at those products? It is not just about the ingredients on the back. The labelling on the front of the product often has “mock” as a preceding word, or “veggie” or “vegan”, very clearly. It might say, for example, jackfruit “pulled pork”, using inverted commas. At the same time, such products have Vegan Society and Vegetarian Society labelling, which is ubiquitous and a very big thing in the UK. It is very recognisable across the board to omnivores, veggies and vegans. The green V signs indicate what the products are. I truly do not think that customers are being misled. To add another product to Laura’s list, courgette spaghetti does not have any pasta in it. At what point will we draw the line?

We need to be very careful not to step into the “why would somebody want a fake meat product?” argument. I am a long-standing vegetarian, and I want a fake meat product. There are millions of us in this country. We have the highest number of vegetarians in Europe, or we did until the explosion of veganism across Europe. I have done a lot of research throughout Europe on what is available, and I have found that France is probably the most resistant to having products available. If you go to Germany and, believe it or not, Finland, and other northern European countries, there is a proliferation of products. In my research experience, Germans readily accept veggie and vegan sausages.

Q6 **Baroness Sheehan:** I want to pick up on the point that Lord Cameron made about the use of language. It seems to me that we are trying, with the language we have been using historically and going into the future, to describe meat-free protein products. That is the indication the consumer wants—that they are eating something with protein in it. It seems to me that burgers, sausages and Quorn mince convey that.

Sticking with language, you mentioned exports, and the Asian market. How is the language that is proposed—discs and tubes—going to impact on imports and exports? I do not know where the balance of imports and exports lies in that market. Perhaps you can give us a bit more

information about that. Secondly, you said that France has moved towards new terminology. What sort of language are they using? My French is okay. Are they using "discs" and "tubes"?

Jackie Kearney: To be honest, I have not come across a great choice of veggie discs or tubes, or vegan discs or tubes, while I have been in France. My father lives in the south of France, and I spend a lot of time eating salad.

To stick to the language issue, Asian food is my background. My business was Asian street food; that is what I was famous for, and what I cooked on MasterChef. There would be an insurmountable challenge in dealing with the kinds of products that are available for sale in this country, and how that would be controlled. The word most commonly used in Asian products is "mock"; it precedes all the products. You can buy tins of mock duck and mock chicken, and I saw a mock lobster in a freezer the other week. It probably tastes revolting, but it was there, and it was shaped like a lobster; it was made to look like a lobster, as were the mock prawns that were in there too. It was very clearly a mock product. Most of the writing is in Chinese, but there is a very clear English label that says "mock". I do not believe that people are buying that accidentally and being misled.

The Chairman: Ruth, you mentioned France. To go back to Baroness Sheehan's point, how has it actually worked there? I was not aware of the fact that France was ahead in the game. Do you know how it has rolled out as regards language, or what it has done, or the effects?

Ruth Edge: I am afraid I do not. As I said when I stated that France had moved in that direction, ahead of this session I attempted to find out from colleagues and, unfortunately, was unable to reach them. I am happy to come back with the information once we find out.

The Chairman: I am sure that would be very useful to the Committee.

Laura Sears: We found that some meat companies who make meat and vegetarian versions of the same product were worried. The Bury Black Pudding Company, which makes both meat and veggie black pudding, responded to our survey, and I shall quote that company because it put it across well: "As specialist manufacturers of black pudding, our sliced products would become discs. In this instance, there would be no means of differentiating between our discs from a burger and from the black pudding discs. Both are flat and circular, but their vegetarian and vegan alternatives have texture and flavour profiles designed to imitate very different meat-based products". There is concern from companies that sell meat and non-meat things, rather than just the vegetarian industry.

Mark Banahan: The EU AGRI committee did not actually suggest the terms "discs" or "tubes". That came, I think, from a *Guardian* journalist, who was maybe being a bit tongue in cheek and came up with some potential ideas.

The Chairman: I suspect there is a bit of black propaganda about it, to

be honest.

Mark Banahan: The important thing is that if you get rid of the commonly used terms, a plethora of terms will be used, and then it will not be clear. Some people might use “discs” and some might use something else. That is where the confusion arises; you will have lots of different terms for what is, essentially, the same product, whereas before you had the term “veggie burger”. Everybody understands what it is and there is no confusion.

The Chairman: Yes. There is probably a fair bit of unity around the burger and sausage issue. As the meeting goes on, I would perhaps like to explore the boundary of where it starts to get difficult, or if it gets difficult, which Ruth mentioned.

Q7 **Lord Young of Norwood Green:** I was thinking about “mock”, and it made me think of mock turtle soup, which has been with us for God knows how long. I never actually gave it a thought until you started using the phrase.

It is about boundaries and whether people get confused. Even “chicken-style” takes a bit of interpreting. You are basically looking at the front label, are you not? That is why people do not worry about “veggie burger”, because it is common parlance. Once you start moving into areas such as “chicken-style”, I would start to ask myself what that actually means. I suppose that I could have a stab at it and think that it clearly was not chicken. But then Jackie said, “What if we just take the e out—that’ll do”. That is pushing the boundaries, from my point of view. I am not saying I am right, but I am just saying that I think that is pushing it.

You mentioned inverted commas. That is really pushing it. Come on. If I am walking along a supermarket aisle or going into a shop and see something in inverted commas, what am I supposed to think? I would be unhappy with pushing that as a satisfactory solution, if the goal is to have descriptors that do not confuse and are reasonable. Those are my thoughts on some of the boundaries.

The Chairman: Geoff, perhaps I could bring you in. You are in the practical position of having to decide on descriptors for products that are like beef or like chicken.

Dr Geoff Bryant: Absolutely. As we said, there is already pretty strict regulation on information to consumers. We would never put anything in inverted commas on a label on a supermarket shelf. What you might write about in a book is totally different from what we, as responsible manufacturers, would do on the shelf. That is already covered under current legislation.

The Chairman: Tell us a bit more about that. How do you decide, and how does the legislation at the moment restrict you?

Dr Geoff Bryant: It restricts us to avoiding terms that would mislead the consumer. If there is a perception that it would mislead the consumer, we

would not do it. The regulation can be enforced through trading standards; there are already mechanisms to enforce the current legislation. What the proposed legislation states is that you cannot even use the words "sausage", "mince" or "burger". For me, that is going too far. We already have enough legislation.

The Chairman: I think we understand that, and there is agreement around the table about sausages and burgers. It is the other area that is more difficult, which is the area you trade in.

Dr Geoff Bryant: We do, and we try to find a line that describes the type of meal occasion you might use the product for.

Lord Young of Norwood Green: But would you use "chicken-style"?

Dr Geoff Bryant: We would use "chicken-free", so we have chicken-free deli. A lot of people use the words "no-chicken", which is basically saying that it is not chicken. However, it infers that, rather than using real meat chicken in a curry, you could use the product as an alternative, but you would still make a curry. You want to encourage consumers to use the products for the same type of meals that they would normally cook at home.

Lord Young of Norwood Green: You would not use "chicken-style"?

Dr Geoff Bryant: No, we would use "chicken-free".

Lord Young of Norwood Green: That is your boundary.

Dr Geoff Bryant: I guess.

The Chairman: Ruth, does what Quorn does work generally for the farming industry?

Ruth Edge: Yes. I concur with what Lord Young says about products with inverted commas. I used the example earlier of vegetarian shredded duck, which is a product available on the shelf, from one of Geoff's competitors. Those are the kinds of things we have real concern about.

I think you are right. From what has been said, we are all in broad agreement about the burger and the sausage. Those are traditional items for the UK market, and consumers are very familiar with those terms anyway. Where we have more concern is over primal products, such as primal cuts of meat. The regulation mentions steak, and we would be supportive of protecting the steak term, particularly if you look at the nutritional profiling of some of the products that are coming through in relation to steak. Some 48% of teenage girls are deficient in iron, and one way they can gain iron intake is by eating meat, eating steak. That is something health professionals recommend in that instance. The term "steak" is used for a piece of cauliflower, but it does not have the same nutritional content as beef steak.

Jackie Kearney: It would be very unfortunate if we underestimated the abilities of the consumer to understand that vegetarian duck meant that it was not duck. Linda McCartney, like Quorn, is a brand ubiquitously recognised as a vegetarian manufacturer. People know that is what Linda McCartney's products are famous for, and they know that that is what Quorn is famous for, so I do not think there is actually confusion on the labelling there.

Lord Young, what I said about inverted commas and using the word "chickn" is that they are a play on words in my book, which has a very clear title on the front with the word "Vegan". I certainly would not be a manufacturer of it, and I would never expect that to play out in the manufacturing world.

Perhaps we could adopt terms such as mock meat or faux fish to designate something as a product that can be used as a substitute, because that is what we are talking about—substitution. You often see terms such as mushroom steak or cauliflower steak, and there are very clear preceding words. I feel that it could be underestimating the abilities of the consumer; the consumer will be able to figure that out, alongside other labelling.

The Chairman: But is it not also true that we underestimate consumer ability to adapt to changes? To come back to the milk and dairy side, all that has come in, and it has been fairly specific. If I look at a supermarket shelf, I see different types of milk substitutes, if I can call them that, whether oat, coconut or almond. They fill the shelves. It does not seem to have got in the way of the dairy substitute industry in England in any way whatever. Are we too concerned about something that, if it went ahead, everybody would adapt to?

Dr Geoff Bryant: In that instance, the industry adapted to the legislation before it was popular with consumers. But what we are doing is already out there; the complexity and cost of going backwards and the confusion for consumers is totally unnecessary. As I said, if we had had a number of complaints every month, or even every year, that people were actively being confused, I could maybe sympathise with that point, but it has not happened. It is about cost, complexity and confusion.

With the new environmental policies, we should be encouraging people to eat vegetarian mince. By not calling it mince, you actually put a barrier in the way. Our mince has less than 2% fat, compared with mince typically made from meat, which is undefined, because it can have up to 35% cartilage and fat, so the word "mince" itself is a very generic and broad term. Our mince has 10% of the fat and 10% of the environmental footprint of meat-based mince. We should be actively encouraging people to use meat-free mince rather than animal mince. It is good for them and it is good for the planet, so why put a barrier in the way?

Q8 **Lord Rooker:** Some of the documents you have provided for us have an astonishing range of descriptions, such as the vegan wellington and the lentil cottage pie, but they do not confuse me in any way, shape or form.

The pressures of climate change and the environment, and all the other pressures, are all going in one direction. Let us be clear about that. If we take the situation at Defra, not to put too fine a point on it, there is a contradiction. It is the driving force for policy on environment and climate change, but it is still the farmers' ministry, promoting food, and promoting an industry, although farmers are the total source.

What is your view? From time to time, you must have had discussions with officials about the proposal, which started off in the EU. Do you detect that an attitude has been formed about this, or not?

Mark Banahan: Yes, I was going to talk about the environment anyway. To echo what Geoff said earlier, it is coming at a difficult or bad time. The net zero target has just come in, and the Committee on Climate Change says that we need to focus every sector on cutting as much as we can.

Rather than trying to hinder a growing sector, we should be promoting it. There is no dispute; it is much better for the environment to eat Quorn mince than beef mince. Rather than trying to put obstacles in the way—such that someone might want to choose it but they are then put off because, without the commonly used terms, they are confused about what it might be—we should be doing the opposite and trying to encourage it. That goes for health, as well. There are multiple diet-related health crises that put a strain on the NHS. Heavy meat consumption, especially red meat consumption, is a massive contributing factor. We need to think about the health benefits. Ruth mentioned that in specific instances doctors may advise people to eat more meat but, on the whole, people need to eat less meat. That is beyond doubt.

The Chairman: Okay. Ruth, do you want to come back on that?

Ruth Edge: Yes, I want to come back on some of the environmental points. Obviously, it is a huge challenge for the whole industry, coupled with the health challenges we face; farmers have a massive role to play in that, and they want to be part of the solution.

Our president, Minette Batters, made a pledge that she wished to see the UK agriculture industry become net zero by 2040. In the UK, 65% of farmland can only be used to graze animals, so we need to think of the context of the UK versus international data and statistics. In the UK, we have a really good story to tell, and our farmers are already putting measures in place to help to protect the environment. They want to be part of the solution going forward. We need to be careful about comparing UK data with international data.

Lord Young of Norwood Green: I was thinking about what you said. Surely you want to encourage people at least to have a balanced diet. That is really what you want. Then I thought about the food chain scenario. Companies are starting to look at creating insect-based products for animal feed, which probably would offend against vegans but not others, as a reasonable substitute for some of the other food. The food chain itself is changing quite dramatically.

To return to the source of our debate, in a changing environment people will make choices. I start with the premise that we want people to have a balanced diet, so just eating meat without vegetables is not good. Even the fruit scenario is different. I still see people promoting fruit juice, whereas we know that fruit juice is very high in sugar, and not a particularly good choice. Eating raw fruit is a much better choice.

The judgment I return to is that, for consumers, it is about clarity. From most of the stuff I have heard from Geoff, that seems to be the case. I have some sympathy for Ruth's example of the shredded duck, fan as I am of shredded duck. I think that is where the decisions need to be taken. Do descriptions enable a consumer to make a decision? I take your point about adapting. It is quite easy with milk. The descriptors are pretty good. You know that if you see almond milk, it is not milk as such, it is a different type of milk. It is the same with soya and coconut. That is a natural development, but we need to ask ourselves where the boundaries are, and what are the things that tend to confuse people or could confuse people. That would be my analysis of what goes too far.

Q9 The Chairman: One of the things that certainly comes over is that, behind this, there is fear in the farming industry of being marginalised—more particularly, in the meat-producing part of it. Geoff, who are your suppliers? You have a supply chain behind you. Who are your producers of raw materials?

Dr Geoff Bryant: We have an interesting and unique business. With Quorn, we actually manufacture our own protein, which is unique; it is a British invention over the last 50 years. We start with glucose and ferment fungi.

The Chairman: It is chemistry.

Dr Geoff Bryant: No, we convert sugar into protein; it is biology. We feed fungi. To make sausages, we blend plant proteins and flavours. We source from the wider food ingredient industry, but we vertically integrate the majority of ingredients.

Lord Young of Norwood Green: You start off with sugar.

Dr Geoff Bryant: Yes, we start off with glucose. Glucose goes in one end, and protein comes out the other end. That is why Quorn is great for the planet.

Lord Young of Norwood Green: I learn something new every day. I did not know that.

Dr Geoff Bryant: Come and visit us, we are in North Yorkshire.

Baroness Sheehan: How do you add the nitrogen?

Dr Geoff Bryant: Through ammonia.

Q10 Lord Selkirk of Douglas: I should mention a past interest. When I was a Minister, the same message was put into every house in Scotland; if

the diet included fruit, vegetables and cereals, quality of life would greatly improve and, in many cases, so would length of life. It was not controversial, and it was a policy that the next Government kept in place.

If legislation is introduced, surely it is in Britain's interest as well as Europe's to have some consistency, a common approach and a meeting of minds on the issue, if at all possible. I assume that legislation would come if a strong view was taken on any of those matters.

Ruth Edge: We completely concur with what you say, Lord Selkirk. We would like to see a repetition in the UK of whatever is done in Europe. Certainly, it would improve simplicity for processors and food manufacturers exporting outside the UK; it would help with the consistency of labelling, and the complexities around that.

I believe it has been proposed by DG AGRI and has yet to be debated in the wider context of the other departments in Europe. The proposal you are looking at has come from a purely agricultural perspective. It is probably worth bearing that in mind as it evolves and in the context of the wording.

Jackie Kearney: Being from the north, I want to pick up on one of the specific products that Laura mentioned—the black pudding companies that produce a range of gourmet black puddings. In my local butchers, their veggie pud product sits right next to the white pudding and black pudding. I decided to ask our local butcher whether anybody had ever, in all the years it has been on the shelf, accidentally bought the veggie pud, and he said that not once had it ever happened. It is quite clever labelling of the product, to label it “veggie pud”. Again, it is the preceding word.

I brought that up because it is a specific example of a product sitting on the shelf right next to its meat counterpart. If there is ever going to be confusion, surely it is in a gourmet butchers. The butcher said that vegetarians and vegans stand outside and ask for it to be passed to them, because they do not want to go in, and he has meat eaters who love it because, when they found out what was in black pudding, they did not want to eat it any more. As the daughter of an Irishman, I love veggie pud because I use to love black pudding, but I choose not to eat it. That is a good example of a product not becoming confused.

The Chairman: Ruth, is this a live subject in the farming industry and the NFU, or is it just something that does not figure in the top 10 things you are involved in?

Ruth Edge: In the current political circumstances, it is probably not in the top 10 we would be focusing on.

The Chairman: That is a very fair comment. You could accuse us of the same thing.

Ruth Edge: Currently, farmers have bigger fish to fry, and more relevant concerns.

The Chairman: Unfortunately, we do not have the Agriculture Bill over here yet; it is absolutely stuck in the other place.

Ruth Edge: Precisely. The Agriculture Bill is one of the things that would be right up there for us, at the moment. It is probably reflective of my position today, in that our position is probably not as developed as it should be—to be honest—because of the context of where we sit.

The Chairman: That is a very fair comment.

Lord Rooker: Attitudes have changed. Because of the jobs I have had in government, I have done dozens of visits to all the abattoirs you can think of—big ones, little ones and for different animals. It has never put me off eating meat, but I try to cut down, because of the environment and health. Attitudes change. In 1997, when I turned up at MAFF, I was invited to open a vegetarian food conference at the National Exhibition Centre. I said I would do it, but I was advised not to do it. The official advice was that it might upset the farmers. That was the attitude then, but things have changed. From that conference, I discovered Swedish Glace, by the way—the best ice cream you can ever get. That was my big discovery.

Going back to something Geoff said about the products, I went to various forums and I could not believe what I was smelling. Things that were not bacon and pork were being cooked, but the smell was the same. I was not being misled; it was quite clearly labelled as vegetarian and not animal. People like that; it is part of the selling point, and I do not see a problem with that at all.

The European Union, basically, is supposed to be evidence and science based, but I know that it moves away from that because of political lobbying. The meat industry has to be watched like a hawk, because it is incredibly powerful, right across Europe and in this country. With Brexit—sorry to use the word—the pressure from the United States and the power of the meat industry there is enormous. As I say, they are not open companies. You have to go back to where the idea came from. Where is the pressure for change? Where is the evidence of people claiming to be misled? That is what I cannot quite get my head around.

The EU moves away from science occasionally, as it did on the pesticide issue, and it has to be watched. The insistence on the change being evidence based is, I would have thought, a comfort blanket to protect a growing sector of the food industry that is to everyone's advantage. Sorry, there was no question. It was the point that attitudes have changed over the years.

The Chairman: Absolutely. We will all look out for the Swedish ice cream.

Lord Rooker: Swedish Glace. It is fantastic.

Laura Sears: We get a lot of anecdotal evidence from people who say that when they first become vegetarian, or they just want to cut down on

eating meat, it is good if they can see something familiar. They think, "Oh, I can eat with other people and I am still kind of eating the same thing". As you say, some alternatives are similar in taste, and that helps people making the transition. It would be concerning if people felt put off. In the surveys we did, meat eaters and flexitarians were the ones who said they hated the name and would not want to buy it because of that. They said that more than vegetarians and vegans.

- Q11 **The Chairman:** Part of the issue is the potential disruption or cost. Geoff, if some form of regulation came in, what would be the costs to the industry? How long would it take, or should there be a transition period? We cannot talk about transition periods these days, can we, let alone a backstop. What sort of impact would it have?

Dr Geoff Bryant: There would be huge cost and complexity. We would have to change all our packaging. Cost is one thing, but it would also tie up the time of the people in our business, who are working hard to grow the business, which is good for the economy. We employ over 800 people, the majority of them in the UK, and we want to employ more people, which we would do by growing the business. What it would end up doing is distracting a lot of people to do all that change, which we do not think would grow the business and, in fact, would hinder the business. We would be putting in all the work and cost for no overall benefit, and it would take years, to answer your question. We would probably need two or three years to transition all our products. It is a total waste of people's time.

Laura Sears: The 30 companies we are associated with which got back to us on this said very similar things; it would be very costly and take up a lot of time, and they think it would hinder their profits, because people would go into a shop and would not be able to see the branding they were aware of. They would have to restart the branding totally, in some cases, if the product was named differently.

Jackie Kearney: Is the labelling going to relate only to things being produced within the UK or in Europe? We are not just talking about Asian products; there is a huge market in America in the production of faux meat products. How would we control the terms on their labelling? Those terms are so widely used now that it feels that it is a long time since the stable door was left open and we could go back in time to control that. Would it restrict the range of products that we have available to people? Would we be limiting the global market for our products? It is not just about what is made in the EU.

Mark Banahan: I concur with what the Vegetarian Society and Quorn have been saying. All the trademark colleagues we contacted were really concerned. Their concerns were twofold. One concern was about the cost of replacement packaging and time. Then they were concerned primarily about future customers. They thought that existing customers would probably be okay. Someone like me, who is aware of the products, would still seek them out, but future customers could be concerned, so it is limiting for growth.

Q12 The Chairman: I am going to start to bring the meeting to an end, but I would like our witnesses to give us one sentence about what they would like to leave with us and what they would like us to do. Hopefully, it will not be exactly the same message.

Ruth, I would like to take up your points about the word “steak” and about boundaries. I get the impression that most people are saying that everything is absolutely fine as it is and we do not need to do any of this at all, that everybody understands everything and it is an area where absolutely nothing needs to be done. That is the impression I get from most of our witnesses.

We have complete unanimity, it seems, on sausages and burgers. But I am willing to explore words like “steak” or “lamb chop”, where what they are is absolutely core. Can I bring you in on that, Ruth? Is there some area where you are not persuaded by what has been said, and there are infringements that might not be right?

Ruth Edge: Yes, you have just summarised it incredibly well. That would be our position in relation to, essentially, meat cut products, where the product is not processed and is not presented under a term that is easily or traditionally recognised as being a vegetarian alternative. Vegetarian sausage and burger we completely accept; we have more concern over “lamb-style chop”. I think we would have slight concern about that. We would like to see “steak” protected in some way. We are going right back to the beginning, but the way that label is presented is almost case by case. We already have regulation in the UK to underpin that; it is just about whether that needs clarity in places for terms such as “chicken-style”, “steak”, “lamb chop-style” or whatever we are looking at.

As all the witnesses have said today, it is very much about the presentation of the labelling—the description term, the branding, the size of the font and all that side of things. It is ensuring that the descriptor is in an easily understandable format alongside the term.

The Chairman: Thank you for that summing up. I shall ask people if they could give us a last message that we can take on board. Ruth, without repeating yourself, is there anything else you would like to say to us?

Ruth Edge: As I started out by saying, it is absolutely core that consumers are not misled, and labels are unambiguous and provide pure clarity on what the product is. That needs to be looked at further and defined. As I said in evidence, we need to ensure that in the environmental aspect, which underpins a lot of the messaging that is coming through, particularly from my associates this morning, we are not comparing global averages with UK production. The two are different. Essentially, that is the ethos of clarity as we go forward.

Jackie Kearney: It is important that we address clarity of presentation, font size and that kind of thing, on the labelling of manufactured products, but I agree with Geoff that those things are well covered by existing consumer laws. To reiterate, my main concerns as a chef are

that meat industry actions could be potentially damaging to crucial behaviour change to encourage people to eat more plant-based food. I make great effort to make my mock bacon smell and taste just like bacon, and I would hate to be hindered in being able to use the term mock bacon, when it is quite clear what it is. I do not see how else we could guide somebody to that substitution, without being able to use terms such as that.

Dr Geoff Bryant: We do not think that there is a consumer case for the legislation as written. We talked about sausage and mince. The legislation would stop us using the words "sausage" and "mince", and we do not think that is necessary. It is disproportionate and confusing, and puts unnecessary complexity into our business and for consumers in general.

The Chairman: For clarity, it is the status quo, absolutely.

Dr Geoff Bryant: We already have good legislation in Europe and, in this country, we have a well-established vegetarian and meat-free market.

The Chairman: I think the answer is yes to the status quo.

Dr Geoff Bryant: Sorry, yes.

The Chairman: That is fine; nothing wrong with that.

Mark Banahan: The Vegan Society urges the Sub-Committee to recommend against the proposal, or anything similar. There is no evidence of confusion at the moment. How the legislation has been proposed would create the same confusion that it seeks to alleviate. As we said, it would be damaging to the growing plant-based industry, and it comes at a crucial time, when we are making good inroads politically on trying to tackle the climate emergency.

Laura Sears: Members, supporters and the businesses we work with all said that they did not think there was confusion. If the confusion is not there, we do not feel that we need to make a change. People said that the naming would put people off buying the products, which we think is detrimental, as we have heard today, especially to the flexitarian market, and to vegetarians and vegans. We also think it is detrimental to the environment.

The Chairman: Okay, good. Thank you very much indeed for coming today and giving us your evidence on the subject. As a Committee, we will debate how to take it forward. Of course, we have a new European Parliament and a new agriculture committee, and our status in that is at the moment unresolved. Our future trade agreement and how these things will affect our industry in future are also unknown. Thank you very much indeed. We appreciate your time and evidence.