

**Written Evidence submitted by Scottish Land and Estates (COV121)**

Scottish Land & Estates is the voice of rural businesses throughout Scotland. We are a membership-based organisation representing a wide range of rural businesses, including farmers, foresters, tourism operators, housing providers, leisure companies, and renewable energy providers.

Our members provide a wide range of economic, environmental, and social benefits which are vital to the success and survival of communities throughout rural Scotland. They play a critical role in ensuring sustainable, healthy and empowered rural communities, providing housing, employment and a wide range of economic, environmental and social benefits.

---

**Have the measures announced by the Government to mitigate the disruptions to the food supply chain caused by the pandemic been proportionate, effective and timely?**

In the short term the Government's measures have sought to introduce an element of certainty in supply and to manage demand in response to changing shopping habits and reduction in service and hospitality use. Measures taken to improve retail distribution are welcomed.

The highly integrated nature of supply chains, the use of more centralised hubs and 'just in time' delivery make the UK's food supply chain complex and at times less prepared to pivot to changing habits. When one element of the supply is disrupted through, for example, a lack of capacity for certain types of packaging or the need to increase distance between staff, the inherent fragility becomes clear and the ripple effect can be felt very quickly at the consumer end. With the majority of goods being perishable a reduction in available drivers or correct vehicles such as tankers or temperature controlled then items may need to be discarded. Equally if haulage for remote rural locations tend to operate with return loads to prevent empty runs the closing of other businesses can make it more costly for delivery of key goods or even stop it being economically viable altogether.

There have been cases where the supply chain has been able to adapt to changes in supply and demand. New chains have quickly developed, such as local food networks and home deliveries to help in the redeployment of resource.

However, it can be argued that this redeployment has not been quick enough or responsive enough to market signals. Some dairy producers are seeing the milk price fall significantly as their contracts are directly linked to the food service sector, in which demand has evaporated. The supply chain has been unable to cope with the speed or nature of Government decisions to impose the lockdown.

---

**Are the Government and food industry doing enough to support people to access sufficient healthy food; and are any groups not having their needs met? If not, what further steps should the Government and food industry take?**

This area of policy is largely reserved to Scotland and we feel there is an opportunity for Scottish Government to continue to support local food production networks in their Good Food Nation plan. From a Westminster perspective we would also encourage the refocusing of public procurement to focus on UK produce.

We believe that the Covid-19 crisis presents a clear opportunity to re-evaluate the operation of the food supply chain to meet the needs of consumers more closely. One effect of Covid-19 has been the recognition of the need to further develop direct marketing and the significant re-emergence of local food networks which can cater for those unable to leave their homes. There have been some fantastic examples of this in Scotland. With farm shops quickly moving to local delivery and artisan producers utilising courier services to deliver further afield. This offers opportunities to build local economies and increase local investment.

---

**What further impacts could the current pandemic have on the food supply chain, or individual elements of it, in the short to medium-term and what steps do industry, consumers and the Government need to take to mitigate them?**

The major issue remains the availability of seasonal workers to plant, pick and pack as the season develops. Although we welcome the Government's decision to allow furloughed workers under the Job Retention Scheme to undertake additional paid work, there are no guarantees that this additional labour force can be sufficiently tapped, nor that it will stay in the sector once lockdown is over. To address the shortfall, Government needs to introduce considerably more flexibility in allowing migrant labour to come to the UK to work in agriculture and food processing, while at the same time fast tracking the development of automation in the sector.

30 April 2020