

Written evidence submitted by The British Egg Industry Council (LS0052)

15th October 2021

Contact: EFRA Committee
Email: efracom@parliament.uk

Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry: Labour shortages in the food and farming sector

Introduction

The British Egg Industry Council (BEIC) was set up in 1986 to represent the UK egg industry. Its members are the 11 major organisations concerned with the egg industry, these are: the British Egg Association; British Egg Products Association; British Free Range Egg Production Association; National Egg Marketing Association; Northern Ireland Poultry Federation; Pullet Hatcheries and Breeders Association; Pullet Rearers' Association; Scottish Egg Producers Retailers Association; Ulster Farmers Union; National Farmers Union; National Farmers Union Scotland. It is funded by voluntary subscriptions from egg packers and producers.

The BEIC owns the Lion Quality Trademark and runs the Lion Quality Scheme for egg production, which accounts for over 90% of UK production. BEIC funds a marketing and promotion programme for Lion Quality eggs and egg products and funds the British Egg Information Service. It also funds research and development. The principal function of the BEIC is to represent the interests of its Members (the UK egg industry) in discussions with Government, MPs, devolved institutions, and other bodies. The BEIC is recognised by Government and Parliament as the representative voice of the UK egg industry.

Does the Government need to take further steps to support the food supply chain?

The BEIC, in partnership with the NFU and several other stakeholders throughout UK farming and the food chain published the report *Establishing the labour availability issues of the UK Food and Drink Sector* in August 2021. The report has several key recommendations that are fully endorsed by the British egg industry. The first and immediate step the UK Government should take is to implement a 12-month COVID-19 Recovery Visa to address the severe labour shortages faced by our sector, which would enable the sector to recruit for critical roles such as HGV drivers, as a short-term response. The UK Government must also invest in the DVLA to clear the HGV driver examination backlog, as well as clear the backlog in applications for license renewal. As well as making it easier to recruit foreign labour through prioritising work visas for HGV drivers, in the long-term there must be more investment in HGV infrastructure and facilities on major motorways and at services to encourage UK nationals into these roles.

Second Floor, 22 City Road, London, EC1Y 2AJ. Telephone: 00 44 (0)20 7608 3760, Fax: 00 44 (0)20 7608 3860 Email: mark.williams@britisheggindustrycouncil.com Website: www.britisheggindustrycouncil.co.uk www.egginfo.co.uk
Registered in England No. 2022235. Vat No. 432217682. Registered Office: Second Floor, 22 City Road, London, EC1Y 2AJ, UK

The BEIC urges that the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) holds a review on the impact of ending free movement for labour in the food and farming sector, in the same way that it has done so for adult social care, and potentially healthcare.

What is the extent and nature of labour shortages currently being experienced in the food supply chain?

We have collected input from our members on how the labour shortages are impacting their daily operations, one of the revelations we have found particularly shocking is that managers in several packing centres have been working 7 days a week to carry out duties usually done by packing centre assistants and machine operators. On farms, the industry is struggling to find catchers for end of lay hens, which could be detrimental for bird welfare. In general, bird welfare on farms could be put at risk by labour shortages. Whilst industry continues to invest in automation, it should be noted that farms cannot be fully automated, with the eyes, ears and nose of stockmen and women being the most important in ensuring bird welfare.

According to industry data, egg consumption in the UK has risen every year since 2006. During that period, we have seen the number of eggs consumed grow by 3bn, an average growth of 260m eggs per year. This has meant that per capita consumption has grown from around 171 eggs per person per year to around 200 eggs per person per year during that time. The egg industry is worth £1bn per annum to the UK economy. To be able to meet consumer demand, and to continue providing the population with a healthy and affordable British food product, it is vital the British egg industry has access to a constant and reliable supply of labour, thus strengthening the food security of the nation.

What are the factors driving labour shortages in the food supply chain?

According to industry data, over 10,000 people are directly employed in egg production and packing, and a further 13,000 indirectly, by the many ancillary businesses that are economically dependent on the British egg industry. Of those employed in egg production on farms, industry data shows 30% are EU migrants, and of those employed in packing centres 50% are EU migrants and can be as high as 60% in certain areas. Most working in our industry have been employed for many years, and as such migrant labour is essential to the operation of the egg industry.

The British egg industry has always had difficulties recruiting staff, as the work involves long hours, often in rural or semi-rural locations, with transport and poor connectivity being detrimental for recruitment. The UK's withdrawal from the EU has been a significant factor in driving the shortages in the food supply chain. This has been exacerbated by the lockdowns to control the COVID-19 pandemic, and its economic aftermath. While domestic sales of egg and egg products continued to grow during this period, there was a considerable fall in sales in the food service and hospitality sector. Unlike other sectors agricultural sectors, there are no peak months or seasonal demands for eggs or egg products.

What measures has the Government taken to alleviate the problems being faced by the food supply chain this year? To what extent have they been successful?

The impact of the UK Government's Seasonal Workers pilot scheme has been of limited benefit to the British egg industry. Our industry operates all-year-round, and there are no 'peak-production' months, therefore seasonal labour is not as important to us as in some other agricultural sectors. We would like to see the UK Government devise an immigration policy that offers British farms and packers/processors with flexible solutions for recruiting permanent / long-term overseas workers, not just seasonal – guaranteeing the British egg industry has access to a

reliable workforce so that British consumers can continue to enjoy British Lion Quality eggs, arguably one of the country's greatest agricultural success stories.

If you require any further information, please let me know.

Yours faithfully.