

Supplementary written evidence submitted by Anonymous A2 (LS0092)

EFRA Committee

Labour Shortages inquiry: supplementary evidence

We have faced labour market conditions which have left us short of the required number of people to operate our plants, and therefore process all our birds. In our previous submission we explained the extensive and comprehensive actions we are engaged in to minimise this shortfall. Currently we estimate the overall shortfall as [around 500] people.

We could be processing about [about 750,000] birds more if we were able to secure the people.

Consequently, at one of our factories we have just taken the extreme action of stopping processing birds, despite investing millions in this factory over recent years, in order to transfer our employees to another area of the factory so we have sufficient labour in that area to process an uplift in production to produce BBQ products. There are a few specific points to draw attention to in relation to this.

This demonstrates the seasonality of our business. There is a case for the poultry industry to have access to a seasonal workers scheme (i.e. the highly successful Poultry Visa scheme), but whereas the turkey producers require this in the run up to Christmas, chicken producers need it in the BBQ season. During the period from the end of February, through Easter and over the summer season, we have a greater demand for certain products that require a greater number of employees. We are unable to recruit people onto temporary contracts of employment to service this demand, rightly people do not want to leave permanent roles whatever the hourly rate is.

There are impacts across the supply chain. Without the required number of workers, we have to reduce the number of birds, which has an impact across the supply chain, for example on the farmers who supply our birds, and also the feed mills which would have been supplying the feed for those birds.

The Poultry Visa Scheme was invaluable in the simplistic fact that we were able to source additional labour on a short term basis.

We are leading the way in reducing our dependence on labour intensive activities and tasks wherever possible, we have invested in continuous improvement methods and efficiencies with existing and emerging technology, along with £30 million investment in the site over the past 5 years. If we had not been persistently pursuing these improvements, based on our advances over the past four years, we would not have been able to produce the volumes we do today without an additional 600 people, which would be in addition to the [around 500] vacancies we now have. Therefore without the investment (if we had done nothing) and our current labour shortages, that site could have been [around 1,100] people short and this precise moment.

The Poultry Visa Scheme in November / December 2021 saved Christmas for the turkey industry and consumer. Our ask is for a Poultry Visa Scheme that recognises the chicken industry needs and will support temporary workers during the end of February to September.

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