

Date : Friday 18 November 2011  
No : Issue No. 18  
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**If you have any questions about NFU Scotland's parliamentary activity or if you would like guidance on how to raise an issue with your MPs, please contact Sarah Anderson using the details above.**

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## **SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT**

### **ORAL QUESTIONS**

- **NFU Scotland**

**John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met representatives of the National Farmers Union Scotland.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** I met the president and other representatives of NFU Scotland yesterday at AgriScot—and I am meeting the president and his team again today to discuss the proposals for reform of the common agricultural policy. I assure the member that that is just coincidence.

**John Lamont:** The president of NFU Scotland, Nigel Miller, recently called on the Scottish Government to address the mounting threat of cattle scab. Despite its eradication from the United Kingdom almost 50 years ago, the disease has been identified in more than 20 herds in Wales, England and Ireland, with imports from Europe thought to be responsible for its resurgence. How does the cabinet secretary respond to Mr Miller's warning that if the disease is already in some of Scotland's herds the Scottish Government needs to intervene with the necessary restrictions on movement to prevent its spread?

**Richard Lochhead:** My response is to welcome very much the seriousness with which Nigel Miller and NFU Scotland have taken the issue, and I note that the organisation is doing a lot of good work on preventing animal disease in Scotland and promoting animal health.

I listened to Mr Miller's speech yesterday at AgriScot—after all, I was sitting next to him—and discovered that tackling cattle scab was the new priority. Cases of the disease have been identified in Wales and the south of England and, following Nigel Miller's remarks, the chief veterinary officer in Scotland has signalled that he is prepared to look at the issue again. There were discussions last year between the industry and the chief vet at the time, but we have to address a number of complex issues with regard to treatment processes and disease identification and we cannot commit too hastily to legislation or otherwise as we might not be able to back it up with enforcement or other measures. Nevertheless, we are taking the issue seriously.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Perhaps not this afternoon but doubtless at subsequent meetings with NFU Scotland, the cabinet secretary will discuss the report on disease surveillance produced by the group headed by John Kinnaird. As he will be aware, the report highlights the serious concerns expressed by the local farming industry and vets in my constituency at the rundown in recent years of the Thurso vet lab. Given the recommendation by Mr Kinnaird's group of a reduction in disease surveillance centres and the creation of a single central laboratory, can the cabinet secretary assure me that Orkney's interests will be safeguarded in such a model and will he commit to ensuring that any strategic management board that might be established includes representation from Orkney?

**Richard Lochhead:** I know that the member has a long-standing interest in this and I hope that, like me, he welcomes John Kinnaird's report on the future delivery of the veterinary surveillance service in Scotland. It will ensure that we have services appropriate for the 21st century. I am aware that John Kinnaird interviewed around 750 farmers and others across Scotland as part of that exercise. I have already indicated that we will set up the strategic management boards in the very near future.

As Liam McArthur rightly points out, there were other proposals and recommendations in the report about the number of labs that we should have in the future, so a great deal of work must be done in order to identify the way forward following those recommendations. There are, however, a number of good recommendations that we can proceed with in the meantime and I give a commitment to Liam McArthur and to the chamber that we will consult members and the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee as we take this very important debate forward.

- **Animal Welfare**

**John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to protect and improve animal welfare.

**Richard Lochhead:** The Scottish Government will consult on new legislation on the welfare of animals at slaughter that will implement European Union legislation early next year. Other issues under consideration include the use of wild animals in circuses, the regulation of equine establishments, the use of electronic shock collars for dog training and the tail docking of dogs.

**John Pentland:** I remind the minister that, over four years ago, he promised to introduce within two years secondary legislation that dealt with pet dealers, animal sanctuaries, travelling circuses, electric shock collars, pet vending and livery yards, and in the following two years secondary legislation that dealt with riding establishments, cat and dog boarding, dog breeding, the sale of dogs and performing animals. As far as I know, only pet dealer regulations have been introduced. When will the minister address the backlog of animal welfare issues?

**Richard Lochhead:** I know that John Pentland was not an MSP in the previous session, but I well remember discussing those issues with members of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee and other members time and again, and I gave a commitment to consult on a number of those issues, of course.

Legislation has not yet been introduced on electric shock collars, as the results of that consultation exercise were inconclusive and we are awaiting further research findings. There has been no ban on wild animals in travelling circuses, as there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that their welfare is any worse than that of animals in other forms of captivity. We are concurrently considering other mechanisms for dealing with that issue and we retain an open mind.

There have been a number of consultations and there are a number of other issues in the pipeline. As the member correctly said, we have, of course, already taken action on a number of important animal welfare issues.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** The Government recently made much of its success in negotiating with the European Commission for a more proportionate electronic identification cross-compliance system for Scottish sheep but, in response to a question from George Lyon MEP, the Commission confirmed that it is not in a position to approve a precise accuracy requirement. In essence, that is entirely the responsibility of the Scottish Government. Why has the cabinet secretary been misleading the industry about sheep electronic identification over the past few months?

**Richard Lochhead:** If it is not the disallowance of agricultural funds in the European Union or sheep ID, Jim Hume and his colleague-in-arms George Lyon MEP mislead farmers throughout Scotland on a range of other issues. They scaremonger and put inaccurate information into the public domain to try to get publicity, which is a real pity, as I would much rather have a mature debate. In particular, I would like to debate the fact that sheep EID, which is a big challenge for the sheep sector in Scotland, was introduced and agreed to by the Labour-Lib Dem Administration a few years ago. I will continue to remind the industry in Scotland of that fact.

I know that many sheep farmers in Scotland welcome the concessions that have been achieved by the Scottish National Party Administration to try to ease the pain of the introduction of sheep EID. We will continue to work closely with the sector in Scotland, and we are taking a proportionate approach to compliance. As long as sheep farmers maintain their paperwork as required by the regulations, we will do our best to maintain that proportionality in applying the compliance regulations.

- **Common Agricultural Policy Reform**

**Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding reform of the common agricultural policy.

**Richard Lochhead:** The Scottish Government has regular interaction with the UK Government on the common agricultural policy. Most recently, I met the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Caroline Spelman, and the Minister of State for Agriculture and Food, Jim Paice, ahead of the agriculture and fisheries council meeting in Brussels on Monday of this week.

**Nigel Don:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his continuing interest, which I know very well and the farmers know very well. Farmers around me tell me of particular concerns about new entrants and the fact that Scotland, of course, has far more less favoured area than the rest of the UK. Those are particular concerns in negotiating with the UK, and therefore with the European Union. Does the cabinet secretary feel that any progress is being made on those issues?

**Richard Lochhead:** Scotland is making progress on achieving some of our key principles in the new common agricultural policy. We all accept that there is a long way to go and much more to achieve. The member rightly highlights the need to ensure that Scotland's voice is heard, because whereas 85 per cent of Scottish land is of less favoured area status, it is exactly the opposite south of the border, where it is around 15 per cent. Therefore, we have distinct needs that have to be recognised in the new common agricultural policy. One of those, of course, is the fact that, because Scotland has been stuck with a historic payments regime, anyone who entered farming over the past few years—indeed, most of the past decade—has been excluded from current supports. This Government is arguing, and I know that we have the support of the chamber, that those who are actively, genuinely farming but are currently excluded from support should receive support from day one of the new common agricultural policy regime.

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** In the on-going discussions that the minister has with the UK Government on CAP reform, will he do everything that he can to ensure that the change of support from the historical basis that he just mentioned to an area basis, which will come about as part of the reform, will not impact unduly on farmers in the south and west of Scotland, which it could do without considerable Government intervention?

**Richard Lochhead:** The member raises a good point and highlights Scotland's diverse agricultural profile. That is one reason why there is sometimes a contradiction in arguing for a simple common agricultural policy while asking for a policy that is tailored to Scotland's regional needs. There can sometimes be a tension in that.

The proposals on the table allow for basic area payments and lots of other payments for different types of activity. Such a system would be complex, and there are lots of negotiations ahead on

what it would finally look like, but it gives us the opportunity to ensure that those who are generally active in agriculture, whether in the dairy or another sector, can in some shape or form continue to receive a reasonable level of support, as they deserve.

- **Food Safety (European Regulations)**

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it monitors compliance with European Union food safety regulations.

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** Compliance with food safety legislation by food businesses is monitored and enforced by local authorities, the Food Standards Agency and the Scottish Government. The Food Standards Agency is also responsible for auditing food law enforcement activities for which it is the competent authority.

**Gordon MacDonald:** Will the minister ensure that Scottish egg and pig producers will not be undermined by imports of illegally produced eggs and pig meat from non-compliant EU producers when the EU welfare of laying hens directive comes into force at the beginning of 2012 and the EU ban on sow stalls comes into force at the beginning of 2013?

**Michael Matheson:** My colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment remains committed to protecting the interests of egg producers who have invested significant sums of capital to comply with the ban on conventional cages from January 2012. He and his officials are working closely with the UK Government, which is maintaining pressure on the European Commission and non-compliant member states to ensure that eggs from conventional cages are not freely traded in EU markets. It is in our interests to help the Commission to find a solution to the issue, particularly as the agreed approach is likely to set a precedent for the sow stall ban, which will come into force in January 2013. The Government recognises the need for a level playing field in the area and it will continue to work to achieve that.

3 November 2011

- **Farming Tenancies (Compensation for Investment)**

**Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether tenant farmers relinquishing their tenancies have a right to compensation for investment made in their farms and, if so, whether the Agricultural Holdings (Amendment) Scotland Bill will alter this.

**Richard Lochhead:** Tenant farmers who quit their holdings can already make statutory claims against their landlords, including for certain investments. Depending on the tenancy, that can include improvements that qualify under the terms of the lease or net assets that the landlord gains from, for example, future tree cropping. The Agricultural Holdings (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, which the Government introduced on 31 October, will not amend the statutory provisions on waygoing and other compensation claims.

**Elaine Murray:** May I ask the cabinet secretary for some advice on behalf of a tenant farmer in my constituency who wishes to leave his tenancy because of ill health? He has a 1944 lease, I believe, and he has invested some £200,000 in his farm over that time. The factor for the landowner has basically said that they cannot afford—[...]I am asking the cabinet secretary for his advice. Does somebody in that situation have any right to compensation, or can the landowner just say that they cannot afford it and tell them to go away?

**Richard Lochhead:** I am sure that Elaine Murray will be aware that I am not familiar with the detail of 1944 leases. However, if she wishes to write to me in more detail about the 1944 lease I will do my utmost to investigate the circumstances. A tenant with proper records of what he or she has invested over the years should have little difficulty in justifying compensation.

**SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT COMMITTEE ON RURAL AFFAIRS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

- **Scotland Rural Development Programme**

On 9 November 2011 the Committee held a discussion on the SRDP. For a full transcript of the debate, please follow this link:  
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=6541&mode=pdf>

- **Forestry and Land Use**

On 26 October 2011 the Committee held a discussion on forestry and land use. For a full transcript of the debate, please follow this link:  
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=6481&mode=pdf>

## WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Tuesday 15 November

- **Scotland Rural Development Programme**

**Jim Hume:** To ask the Scottish Executive whether the decision to suspend the Axis 2 Management of Hedgerows option in the Scotland Rural Development Programme Rural Priorities scheme is a result of budgetary constraints caused by spending reductions in 2010-11.

**Richard Lochhead:** The decision to suspend the “Management of Hedgerows” rural priorities option was taken following discussion with stakeholders over how to target agri-environment support most effectively. This was driven by the need to ensure that the balance of spend among agri-environment options reflects priorities, in order to create the maximum benefit for the natural heritage. Some agri-environment options have been more popular than others and the “Management of Hedgerows” option attracted high uptake, with contracts worth over £33 million supporting the management or creation of 2,600 km of hedgerows to benefit biodiversity. Because this support has already secured a significant benefit, the option was temporarily suspended in January 2011 in order to focus spend towards other agri-environment projects where support is more critical.

Thursday 10 November

- **Health & Safety**

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (Scottish National Party):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the Health and Safety Executive and National Farmers Union Scotland with regard to reducing workplace fatality rates in agriculture.

**Richard Lochhead:** The Scottish Government is committed to a significant reduction in the rate of fatalities amongst Scotland’s farming communities. Scottish Government officials met recently with the Health and Safety Executive and the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives.

This meeting identified ways in which government farm inspectors could further support and enhance the safety message to protect our rural communities.

Furthermore, I specifically raised the issue of safety at the National Farmers’ Union Scotland AGM earlier this year. Improving safety is a key issue for this Government, and for Scotland’s farmers and farm workers.

- **Scotland Rural Development Programme**

Jim Hume: To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answers to questions S4W-02363 and S4W-00597 by Richard Lochhead on 22 September 2011 and 17 June 2011 respectively, how much will be spent on the programme in the current spending review period, broken down by delivery scheme.

Richard Lochhead: Delivery Scheme	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities	62.900	54.700	60.900
Rural Development Contracts – Land Managers Options	18.000	18.000	18.000
Leader	10.500	10.500	10.500
Skills Development Scheme	1.000	1.000	1.000

Food Processing, Marketing and Co-operation Grant Scheme	9.000	9.500	10.000
Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Scheme	2.000	2.000	2.000
Less Favoured Area Support Scheme	65.500	65.500	65.500
Technical Assistance	0.300	0.300	0.300
Land Management Contract Menu Scheme	2.000	0.000	0.000
Agri-Environment Legacy	3.000	2.500	1.500
Farm Woodland Legacy	3.500	2.700	2.400
Forestry Legacy	0.100	0.100	0.100
Total	177.800	166.800	172.200

*Agri-Environment Legacy schemes include Organic Aid Scheme, Countryside Premium Scheme, Rural Stewardship Scheme, Habitats Scheme.*

*Farm Woodland Legacy schemes include Farm Woodland Scheme, Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme – Farmland Premium.*

*Forestry Legacy schemes include Woodland Grant Scheme and Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme.*

## UK PARLIAMENT

### HOUSE OF COMMONS

- **Fuel Prices**

On 15 November the MPs debated fuel prices. For a full transcript of the debate, please follow this link: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm111115/debtext/111115-0002.htm#1111159000004>

- **Welfare of Laying Hens**

**Glyn Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions she has had with her (a) Spanish, (b) Italian, (c) Polish and (d) French counterparts on likely levels of non-compliance with the welfare of laying hens directive from 1 January 2012; what data her Department hold on such levels; and if she will publish such data; [79133]

(2) what discussions she has had with her (a) Dutch and (b) Belgian counterparts on likely levels of non-compliance with the welfare of laying hens directive; what information her Department holds on likely levels of non-compliance; and if she will publish any such information. [79521]

**Mr Paice:** All member states were asked by the Commission to provide the level of progress at 1 April, a forecast for December 2011, and more recently an update on the level of conversion as at 27 September 2011. The UK has submitted these returns to the Commission as requested. Likely levels of non-compliance were discussed at a recent meeting in Brussels. The Commission to date has not published these data.

However, at a European Parliament debate in October, the Commission acknowledged for the first time that Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Poland, Portugal and Romania did not expect to be fully compliant. Another five other member states, including Spain, had also failed to provide any data to the Commission.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman), wrote jointly with nine other concerned member states to the European Commission in September. They urged the Commission to act quickly to protect those producers across the EU who will have complied with the ban, from the risk of competitive distortion in favour of those who will have maintained illegal production after 1 January 2012.

Discussions at an EU level are ongoing and the UK is fully engaged with the Commission and other member states in finding a practical enforcement solution.

14 November

- **Agriculture and Fisheries Council**

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mrs Caroline Spelman):** The next Agriculture and Fisheries Council is on Monday 14 November, in Brussels. I shall represent the UK on agriculture matters, accompanied by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs responsible for environment and fisheries my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) will be representing the United Kingdom on the fisheries items. Richard Lochhead MSP, Michelle O'Neill MLA and Alun Davies AM will also attend.

The Council meeting will open in its fisheries formation with a discussion of the only substantive fisheries agenda item on external aspects of the proposals for common fisheries policy (CFP) reform. The debate will focus on engagement with regional fisheries management organisations and the EU's external fisheries agreements.

On agricultural business, there is one item on the main agenda: discussion of the common agricultural policy reform proposal on direct payments. The presidency has posed questions about the overall structure of the direct payments proposals and explicitly on the proposed reallocations between member states.

There are four items under any other business. The first is an update from the Commission on compliance with the welfare of laying hens directive. It is not clear how much discussion is expected on this item. The second and third AoB items will see the presidency reports back on two recent forestry meetings (the forestry for climate and biodiversity conference and EU forestry and nature DGs meeting) and on the regular meeting of paying agency heads. And finally there is a request from the Hungarian presidency to discuss the prolongation of sugar regime to 2020.

Finally, there is a ministerial lunch scheduled during which heads of member state delegations will discuss the greening aspects of the CAP reform proposals.

- **Welfare of Laying Hens**

Glyn Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make it her policy to ban the import of processed eggs incorporated into a food product where the eggs are from hens housed in conventional battery cages that do not comply with the provisions of EU directive 1999/74/EC in other EU member states from 1 January 2012; [79883]

(2) if she will make it her policy to ban the import of egg products derived from hens housed in conventional battery cages that do not comply with the provisions of EU directive 1999/74/EC in other EU member states from 1 January 2012. [79884]

**Mr Paice:** The Commission is actively working on a practical enforcement solution and the Government will be contributing to ensure that any solution is as tight as possible, to protect our producers.

We are in the process of developing an enforcement strategy which will consider all viable options to protect compliant producers. We are also considering other measures we could introduce swiftly should the Commission fail to find a robust enforcement approach.

- **EU Agriculture Council Written Ministerial Statement (Correction)**

**Mrs Caroline Spelman:** On 7 November I made a written ministerial statement summarising discussions at the October Agriculture and Fisheries Council—Official Report, columns 3-5WS. In the paragraph relating to the AoB item on implementation of the laying hens directive I referred to implementation beginning in 2013. This paragraph should have read:

Under any other business Council heard an update from Commissioner Dalli on implementation of the laying hens directive, which comes into force on 1 January 2012. The Commission was clear that there would be no postponement of the ban on battery cages even though at least 11 member states were unlikely to have complied with the directive by the start of next year. The Commission said it would exercise powers, beginning targeted inspection visits at the start of 2012, and would begin legal proceedings against non-compliant member states. While there was an argument that non-compliant eggs should be destroyed, this would not make political or economic sense. Instead, the use of non-compliant eggs would be limited to production of egg products within the member state of origin. There was no opportunity for member states to intervene.

- **Food Prices**

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of fuel prices on food prices in (a) each of the last five years and (b) the next five years. [78099]

**Mr Paice:** There are a number of factors that affect food prices in the shops, the largest driver being world commodity prices, but with exchange rates and oil prices also having an impact.

Increases in global energy prices increase the cost of agricultural inputs, especially fertilisers, putting an upward pressure on commodity prices. Along the food supply chain, higher energy prices will impact retail food prices by increasing the cost of transporting, processing and marketing.

Recent research modelling undertaken by the university of Nottingham and the university of Exeter for DEFRA(1) showed that the long term effect of a 10% shock to the world price of oil, translates into a 3.50% increase in retail food prices, other factors held constant. However, there will be interactions with other drivers of retail food prices, and the modelling shows that larger persistent shocks have a greater effect than smaller one-off shocks.

DEFRA routinely monitors trends in the affordability of food, looking at both domestic retail food price inflation (as measured by the consumer price index) and changes in the factors that drive domestic retail food price inflation.

*(1) Retail Food Price Inflation Modelling Project—T. Lloyd et al, April 2011*

Monday 7 November

- **Agriculture and Fisheries Council**

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mrs Caroline Spelman): On Thursday 20 October I represented the UK on agricultural issues at the first day of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Luxembourg. I was accompanied by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Minister with responsibility for agriculture and food. On Friday 21 October my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Minister with responsibility for natural environment and fisheries, the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) represented the United Kingdom on the fisheries items. Richard Lochhead MSP, Michelle O’Neil MLA and Alun Davies AM were also in attendance.

The main item on Thursday was a Commission presentation of the seven proposals which make up the package for reform of the common agricultural policy from 2014. Commissioner Ciolos began by stating that sustainable competitiveness, linked to food security, was at the heart of the proposals before going on to say that greater convergence of payment rates within and between member states was necessary. He stated that direct payments should be made up of basic income support (70%), with the remaining 30% available only if farmers met certain environmental or “greening” conditions. Commissioner Ciolos went on to underline his belief that the first pillar of the CAP should apply in a uniform manner across all member states, with the second pillar offering member states flexibility to respond to national priority needs.

Two full table rounds followed giving member states a first opportunity to offer views on the package. Views varied widely with no unconditional support for the package but the UK made it clear that the proposals represented a missed opportunity, doing nothing to move EU farmers towards a situation in which they could be competitive without direct payments. As tabled, the proposals risked rewarding farmers for normal good practice or, worse, preventing them from making the right decisions for sustainability.

On the detail of the proposals, some themes emerged during the two discussions. On convergence of direct payments, a number of member states had serious misgivings about redistribution of funding between member states with some expressing the view that proposals went too far while others believed it did not go far enough, while the UK, with the support of a number of other member states, repeated opposition to the capping of direct payments.

Proposals for the “greening” of pillar 1 received some support in principle, but the majority of member states questioned the rigid, one-size-fits-all system proposed which appeared to deliver more red tape than actual environmental benefit. This debate led to a discussion of the broader issue of simplification. Member states were of the view that the Commission had promised simplification, but that the package as a whole, with a multi-layered direct payment scheme consisting of various mandatory elements, would increase the burden for both farmers and national administrations.

Few member states had fundamental problems with the proposals on rural development, though all were clearly interested in the allocation criteria for pillar 2 payments for which the UK called for a faster move to objective allocation criteria.

In conclusion to the debate, Commissioner Ciolos stated that, in his view, the proposals had received broad support as the basis for future discussion but that he realised the allocation of payments would be the most contentious issue and that further work was needed. However, he rejected arguments that the package did not deliver simplification for producers and would be writing to Ministers outlining how his package delivered in this area.

Also on the agenda was a discussion of the food for deprived persons scheme. The presidency and Commission together urged the blocking minority of six member states (Germany, UK, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands and Czech Republic) to reconsider their positions and agree to the revised proposal. A number of member states, led by France, intervened to express their frustration that this dossier was being blocked. The presidency then asked members of the blocking minority to confirm that they still opposed the revised proposals. All did, and the UK commented that the revised legal base only confirmed that this was a social scheme for action at a national rather than EU level.

The final agriculture item for discussion on the substantive agenda related to the achieving of an EU common position on four draft resolutions of the International Organisation for Vine and Wine (OIV). The UK remained silent as it is not a member of the OIV and the presidency noted that there remained a blocking majority against adoption of the resolutions.

Under any other business Council heard an update from Commissioner Dalli on implementation of the laying hens directive, which comes into force on 1 January 2013. The Commission was clear that there would be no postponement of the ban on battery cages even though at least 11 member states were unlikely to have complied with the directive by the start of next year. The Commission said it would exercise powers, beginning targeted inspection visits at the start of 2013, and would begin legal proceedings against non-compliant member states. While there was an argument that non-compliant eggs should be destroyed, this would not make political or economic sense. Instead, the use of non-compliant eggs would be limited to production of egg products within the member state of origin. There was no opportunity for member states to intervene.

1 November 2011

- **Food Prices**

**Sammy Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the contribution of market speculation to food price volatility in 2007-08. [73476]

**Mr Paice:** The report 2007-08 Agricultural Price Spikes: Causes and Policy Implications, published by HMG in January 2010, reviewed various potential mechanisms whereby speculation might have distorted markets. It concluded that there was no conclusive evidence that speculation leads to higher or more volatile prices, although we do know that some factors like export bans, stock levels, energy prices and damaged harvests certainly can put pressure on prices.

On 8 April 2011 the UK and Brazil called on members of the G20 to take action to tackle food price volatility, in the face of food price inflation and long-term food security challenges. G20 Agriculture Ministers welcomed the steps which Finance Ministers are taking to ensure appropriate and transparent regulation of financial markets.

31 October

- **Domestic Market for British Produce**

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with (a) the National Farmers Union and (b) other farming organisations on ensuring a strong domestic market for the produce of British farmers. [75848]

**Mr Paice:** The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman), met with the NFU on 15 September where CAP reform was discussed. She also had further discussions on CAP reform with the NFU on 21 September.

She has also met with the Institute of Grocery Distribution's Policy Issues Council on 21 September when ensuring a strong domestic market for the produce of British farmers was discussed.

DEFRA officials have regular discussions with the National Farmers Union via forums such as the Quad partnership (along with representatives from the British Retail Consortium and Food and Drink Federation) and the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB). Discussions are wide ranging covering for example: Public Sector Procurement, Farm Assurance Schemes, Groceries Code Adjudicator, Business Development Manager Programme [and] Land Release for Community Growing.

Officials intend to have further meetings with NFU and other stakeholders in the near future to discuss the new origin labelling requirements for meat.

- **Pesticides**

**Mr Mark Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she has taken any enforcement action in respect of the incorrect use of a pesticide product containing aminopyralid in each of the last five years. [70720]

**Richard Benyon:** The Health and Safety Executive's Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD), as the pesticides regulator, has considered a number of incidents where the herbicide aminopyralid has been reported as causing a problem in manure. CRD has not been able to determine any breach of pesticides legislation in any of the cases investigated, so no enforcement action has been taken.

**Mr Mark Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the Health and Safety Executive's Chemicals Regulation Directorate enforcement of restrictions on the use of pesticide products containing aminopyralid. [70721]

**Richard Benyon:** More stringent restrictions for the use of aminopyralid products were set in 2009 following earlier reports of crop damage caused by the use of manure from animals grazed on land treated with aminopyralid. These restrictions are designed to minimise the risk of contaminated manure being used.

The Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD) continues to monitor the situation closely and reports to DEFRA Ministers on a regular basis. Reported incidents have declined since the restrictions were tightened and there appears to be a reducing problem. CRD follow-up reported incidents and, to date, have not uncovered evidence of breaches of pesticides law that would lead to enforcement action.

- **Health & Safety**

On Wednesday 9 November NFUS President, Nigel Miller and Chief Executive, Scott Walker gave evidence to the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee on Health & Safety. To read a transcript of the meeting, please follow this link: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmselect/cmselect/uc1344-iv/uc134401.htm>

## **HOUSE OF LORDS**

Monday 14 November

- **Food Prices**

**Lord Knight of Weymouth:** To ask Her Majesty's Government what measures are being taken to assist families in the United Kingdom to cope with increasing food prices.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Taylor of Holbeach):** My Lords, the impact of rising food prices is of concern to the Government. While it is not the Government's role to control food prices, we understand the need to monitor the impact of price increases on households. I hope it reassures the noble Lord that the Government provide a nutritional safety net to extremely low-income families through the Healthy Start scheme, which offers vouchers for essential foods. As the noble Lord will know, we also take into account food prices when benefits rise annually with consumer price inflation.

**Lord Knight of Weymouth:** My Lords, according to the latest statistics from the OECD, UK food consumers face the second highest increase in food prices of anywhere in Europe-ironically, after

Hungary. What are the Government going to do about it? Why are British food consumers so hard-hit relative to others in Europe? This is an urgent problem for family budgets-what is the Government's response?

**Lord Taylor of Holbeach:** My Lords, the House will know that food supplies and volatility in food price markets have been a feature of the past 12 months. We cannot doubt that in this country we have the most efficient food supply chain in Europe. Our supermarkets are extremely price-competitive, as anyone here who has shopped in other countries will realise. I think that the noble Lord was talking about increases rather than absolutes, but I am talking in absolute terms. Of course we are concerned. I think that the secret lies in increasing food production and producing a great deal more self-sufficiently in this country-a policy that was abandoned by the last Government but which this Government are determined to take up.

**Lord Howe of Aberavon:** I dare say that my noble friend will not recall that my first appearance in the Cabinet was on Guy Fawkes Day 1972, when I was appointed Britain's first Minister for Consumer Affairs-a role described by Sir Edward Heath as the Minister for Keeping Down Prices. Does my noble friend recollect that that task was then taken on by the noble Baroness, Lady Williams of Crosby, and that the most enthusiastic enforcer was the late Lord Cockfield? If there is any lesson to be learnt, it is that we were all wasting our time and burdening the nation to wholly no good. Will he please assure us that that lesson is fully understood?

**Lord Taylor of Holbeach:** I am very grateful to my noble and learned friend for taking me back to my childhood in politics-names like Aubrey Jones and Fred Catherwood and prices and incomes policies all come back to me. Indeed, my noble and learned friend is right to remind us that there is nothing like a competitive market with a strong retail sector to make sure that prices are kept as competitive and as low as possible.

**Lord Pearson of Rannoch:** My Lords, can the noble Lord confirm the previous Government's estimate that the EU's agricultural policy costs each family of four in the United Kingdom about £1,000 per annum in higher food costs and tax? Would he also agree that since these higher food costs fall largely on milk, bread and sugar, they hit our poorest hardest? Finally, would he confirm that there is nothing we can do about this while we remain in the European Union?

**Lord Taylor of Holbeach:** I should inform the noble Lord that in actual fact the world price of sugar is currently higher than the internal European price of sugar. Indeed, the common agricultural policy, despite all the misgivings, at least provides some degree of stability in the huge volatility that there has been in global commodity prices. I cannot share the noble Lord's view.

**The Lord Bishop of Norwich:** My Lords, is the Minister aware of the rapid growth of food banks around the country-a Christian initiative which is gaining ever wider support? I declare an interest as the patron of Norwich Foodbank, which has assisted 860 families and individuals in just the past three months. What might be done to better integrate this generous voluntary provision with the work of statutory agencies?

**Lord Taylor of Holbeach:** Last week I, like a number of other noble Lords, attended an evening on food waste here in the House. Present at that gathering was FareShare, which, with FoodCycle, offers a facility whereby food that would otherwise be wasted can be made available through charity outlets. I think that that is a worthwhile initiative, and I congratulate my noble friend Lady Jenkin of Kennington on arranging the evening. It was most enlightening and, indeed, encouraging.

**Baroness Trumpington:** Is the Minister aware of the extremely helpful programme going out weekly on the BBC describing British food that is available to everybody but does not seem to be taken up? Can Defra please help the BBC? Cabbages, eggs and everything you can think of are being dealt with most efficiently on the BBC-I hate to give it credit but it is true. It would be helpful if Defra could follow in those valuable footsteps.

**Lord Taylor of Holbeach:** The BBC has pioneered informative broadcasting on agricultural matters, from "Farmer's Diary" to "The Archers" to "Countryfile", all of which I hope inform the public about what it is to produce food and all the elements that go in to making a strong food supply chain in this country.

- **Welfare of Laying Hens**

On Monday 14 November the House of Lords held a debate on the Welfare of Laying Hens. To read the transcript of the debate, please follow this link: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/111114-0002.htm#11111444000177>

Monday 7 November

- **Dairy Farms**

**Baroness Byford:** To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the reasons for British dairy farmers receiving the lowest prices for milk within the European Price League Table.[HL12792]

**Lord Taylor of Holbeach:** British milk producers receive a range of prices for their milk. Those aligned to individual retailers for the supply of fresh drinking milk generally receive the best prices. Non-aligned producers supplying for other markets such as dairy products generally receive lower prices.

The farmgate milk price in the UK and other countries depends on the market price transmission through the supply chains for these products in each country. Historically, UK farmers have received a lower milk price than the majority of their counterparts in Europe. This raises questions as to how the UK dairy supply chain works, the competitiveness of processing in the UK and the product mix for dairy.

The Government, through the Dairy Supply Chain Forum, are challenging senior sector representatives to discuss the health and future of the dairy sector and identify opportunities that should benefit dairy farmers. These include exploring new export markets or replacing imports with products made with British milk to improve our trade balance and therefore demand for British milk supplies.

We have encouraged and supported the industry's development of its own voluntary code of practice on contractual relations for farmers, and the Dairy 2020 project will produce an action plan to secure long-term industry sustainability.

Thursday 27 October

- **Food Production**

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots:** To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to ensure the United Kingdom's food security in 2050, in the light of the Office for National Statistics estimate of a possible United Kingdom population increase of 20 million by that date.[HL12433]

**(Lord Taylor of Holbeach):** The Government welcomed the recent Foresight report on the Future of Food and Farming, which explores the pressures on the global food system between now and 2050. We recognise that in order to feed the predicted increase in population in the UK and the world by 2050, we will need to increase food production sustainably by improving productivity in the UK, EU and beyond. Defra has signed up to an action plan in order to respond to the challenges highlighted in the report.

These challenges could offer real opportunities for our farming and food sector. The Government are taking action to meet our objectives of supporting British farming, encouraging sustainable food production, and helping to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of the whole food chain. This will help ensure a secure, environmentally sustainable and healthy supply of food with improved standards of animal welfare.

The publication of the Foresight report also gives us new emphasis to influence our domestic policy making. In the natural environment White Paper published by the Government in June this year, we committed to begin a project that would look at how we could reconcile our goals of increasing food production and enhancing the natural environment. We will use the outcome of this project to help us shape a more strategic framework for agri-food policy going forward.

Food security cannot, however, be delivered from a narrow, self-interested, national protectionist stance, or by focusing on self-sufficiency. International trade has an important role in providing food security. We are a trading nation in a global market and the UK is a significant exporter

of wheat, lamb, dairy products and breakfast cereals. We are seeking to support our industry in accessing and maximising opportunities within export markets.

Ends