



Briefing Note for the Opening of the National Fruit Show, British Produce Futures

22nd October 2020

Rural Policy Group is a visionary think tank shaping the future of the rural economy; established by Mark Lumsdon-Taylor in Spring 2020 it supports economic actors in the rural economy with a programme of knowledge exchange and debate. The group brings together the best minds in politics, economics, business, finance, medicine and science to discuss the big issues of the day and support rural leaders to find and seize opportunities for progress and growth.

We were delighted to partner with Marden Fruit Society to open the first virtual National Fruit Show with a stellar panel of fruit sector grandees and industry experts:

- Lord Krebs, Founding Chairman of the Food Standards Agency
- Teresa Wickham, New President of the Marden Fruit Society Show
- Tom Bradshaw, NFU Vice President
- Gary Marshall, Chairman of the Covent Garden Tenants Association
- Mark Lumsdon-Taylor, Senior Corporate Consultant and CFO in the food production sector

Watch again

A link to the full RED Talk can be found on our website www.ruralpolicy.group.

Summary of insights

The UK's food system is broken. The fruit industry has an opportunity to use coronavirus and Brexit as forces for good. Forces to improve food security, improve public health and respond more aggressively to climate change. The pandemic has reconnected people with food, now the industry and government need to act.

- The food system needs a radical rethink to steer people away from unhealthy choices and towards fresh fruit and vegetables. Public health messaging alone is simply not enough to effect a change in behaviour.
- The rate of innovation and adoption of new technologies needs to speed up to cope with the demands of productivity, sustainability and climate change.
- The grocery sector is still dominated by four big supermarkets, but the new entrants changing the structure of the market and the wholesale sector seeking ever more quantity of premium product may go some way to mitigating the imbalance of power (and profit) felt by growers.
- Helping people to make the connection between good food and good health and encouraging higher levels of fruit and vegetable consumption as part of a healthy diet is a huge growth opportunity for the fruit sector.
- The lack of certainty around Brexit is unnecessarily threatening Britain's immediate and longer-term food security.

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- Large retailers selling food below the cost of production should be stopped; it is unfair to the producers, inhibits the development of a network of local food suppliers and has disrupted market forces.

The following sections summarise the briefings we received from our main speakers and responses to the questions posed by delegates. To find out what was said in full, please watch the [recording](#).

Opening from Lord Krebs

As a child I was often sent out to the family's orchard to pick apples, a wonderful array of traditional varieties such as King of the Pippins which I do not see on sale today. This is undoubtedly because breeding technology has created varieties which are better suited to the market; apples which are more productive, disease resistant and sweeter. It is a shame that most people will never get to appreciate the huge diversity of texture and flavour of the traditional varieties.

Many years later, as the first Chairman of the Food Standards Agency my interest in fruit took a different turn as we had responsibility for public advice on nutrition and health. Nutrition is an area with claims and counterclaims about what is good for you and it is tricky to work out what you should believe. Cut down on red meat and dairy? Do fish oils make you smarter? Can tea and apples prevent heart disease? Nevertheless, there are a few results which stand out as robust and reliable. Eating lots of fruit and vegetables is good for your health. Scientists do not know what the magic ingredient is however we do know that eating more fruit and veg is associated with a lower risk of several chronic diseases including certain cancers, stroke and cardiovascular disease. When I was Chairman the FSA launched the now famous "Five a Day" campaign. Sadly, 20 years on we can see the campaign has failed. The National Diet & Nutrition Survey shows we have not increased our intake of either fruit or vegetables. Only 25% of people eat five a day, amongst the poorest households it is less than 20% and amongst teenagers it is under 10%.

***The UK food system is stacked against people eating a healthy diet.
It needs radical change, and the fruit industry has a part to play
in encouraging an increase in fruit consumption.***

There is a real opportunity and a real challenge for the fruit industry. The opportunity is to encourage people to increase their fruit consumption and improve their health. The challenge is how to do it. The food system in the UK is stacked against people increasing their fruit consumption and eating a healthy diet. Food manufacturers and retailers spend in the region of £300 million per year on advertising and a miserly 3% is spent on advertising fruit and vegetables. In many areas, particularly deprived areas, the only places to buy food are fast food outlets. Consider that healthy food costs about three times as much as junk food. The poorest would have to spend 75% of their income to follow the governments own healthy eating guidelines in which fruit and vegetables make up nearly 40% of the diet.

The cost to society, the economy and the NHS of an unhealthy diet and associated diseases such as obesity and heart disease are massive. Two thirds of adults are overweight and 20% of children aged 11 are obese. Obese adults are more likely to die younger from chronic disease and end up in intensive care if they contract coronavirus. The cost is estimated to be £27 billion per year. This is why the select committee I chaired on Food Poverty, Health and the Environment has called for a radical re-think of our food system to steer people away from junk food and towards a healthier diet with more fruit and vegetables. In our report "Hungry for Change: Fixing the Failures in Food" we made nearly 50 recommendations covering the whole food system from farm to fork including a comprehensive action plan to include the demand for and consumption of fruit

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and vegetables. The government response, to put it diplomatically, was insipid. However, the Agriculture Bill which is now in its final stages has been an opportunity for me to get a firm commitment from government. The government has now formally committed to producing a national food strategy within the next year or so; a strategy which will ensure everybody has access to healthy, sustainable and affordable food, and will build on the strategy being delivered by Henry Dimbleby.

***Change requires education, regulation, taxation and technological innovation,
not only make healthy food more accessibly priced for everybody
but to combat the effects of climate change.***

It is not enough to tell people to eat healthily. To bring about change we certainly need public health messaging and education. Alongside that we also need regulation of food manufactures and retailers as well as taxation. The soft drinks industry sugar levy shows how quickly you can bring about change with the right regulations. This will not be quick and easy but doing nothing is not an option.

On 20th October, the House of Lords yet again passed two amendments to the Agriculture Bill to ensure the government will not allow imported food of lower standards to undercut our home-grown products. The fact that the government does not want to commit to this in law tells you something. The Commons will almost certainly overturn the Lords amendments as they did last time but those of us who believe in the high standards of British producers will carry on doing what we can.

Moving on to technology and innovation, the technology director of a major supermarket gave an example of how the British strawberry has season has gone from six weeks to six months through a combination of newer varieties and innovation in growing techniques. Novel storage techniques mean apples and pears are no longer seasonal and harvesting robots may replace human labour. I suggest the pace of change will need to accelerate in the decades ahead because of the need for greater productivity, greater sustainability and resilience in the face of climate change. This is as true for the fruit sector as it is for the whole of agriculture both in the UK and globally. In the future we will have to do more with less. Grow more food to feed more people with fewer resources. As a result of climate change the south east will probably suffer severe water shortages in the second half of the century so we need more resilient crops and develop more efficient ways of using water. Climate change is also making our weather more extreme and more unpredictable as we have routinely seen over the past few years. We know that soil quality and quantity has declined over the past century and this must be halted and reversed. The use of pesticide-caused decline in pollinators and other wild species means new ways of treating crop diseases must be found. The government in partnership with industry must find funds for the research and development to underpin innovation.

There is also the question of what is acceptable to the consumer, as a scientist I support novel technologies as long as they are carefully regulated. As the GM debacle of the 1990s show, science and regulation is not always enough to reassure the public. One of the lessons of genetically modified food is that you need to bring people with you. Early on during the passage of the Agriculture Bill the government announced it would set in train a public consultation with a view to changing the law on gene editing. The European Commission decided gene editing should be subject to the same regulations as gene modification. For a scientist this is nonsensical because gene editing is quite different. Gene editing may not be a panacea, but it could help fruit growers achieve higher productivity, better disease resistance, better drought tolerance, better eating properties and so on. If we embrace new technologies, we need to engage in a public debate about those technologies.

In summary, there are huge opportunities and equally huge challenges. Our food system needs a major rethink to encourage people to eat more healthily which means, among other things, eating more fruit. I hope much

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of that will be home-grown fruit; the government has to lead on this with its National Food Strategy and it has to take on the business interests selling fat, salt and sugar disguised as food. Secondly, the fruit sector is highly innovative and has deployed a wide range of new technologies in recent decades. However, to grow more with less and become more resilient in the face of climate change the pace on innovation will have to increase even further in the year ahead and we need to bring the consumer with us.

Question: Do you have any ideas on how to bring down the cost of fruit for consumers when the profit margin for growers is already very tight?

Lord Krebs: There is not a quick solution. The cost of health food is an important barrier to eating well for the poorest in the country, particularly given the quantities advised in the NHS's Eatwell Guide. It is difficult to know how to bring the price down other than increasing productivity and using new technologies to make harvest, storage and protection easier and cheaper. There is no quick solution. Food in the UK is already relatively cheap. Cheaper than in many other countries. So, another option would be to make other foods more expensive and use the taxes on unhealthy food to subsidise healthy food. Although we must be aware that raising the price of unhealthy food impacts the poorest in society.

Question: If you could change one thing in British food policy, what would it be?

Lord Krebs: In the select committee report I mentioned earlier we had 50 recommendations. If I had to choose just one, I would probably target the major food retailers who are responsible for the vast majority of food purchases and I would impose restrictions on the promotion of unhealthy foods. As you walk into my local supermarket you walk through a wall of doughnuts, chocolates and biscuits and when you check out you are faced with similarly unhealthy foods. I would tackle that as a major challenge; people are presented with an environment in which they are steered towards making unhealthy purchases. There is no silver bullet though. Change will come about from a combination of measures.

Question: How can growers best lobby government?

Lord Krebs: Lobby ministers directly and give parliamentarians information. Some industry sectors are extremely good at producing briefing notes when there is a relevant debate, the NFU is particularly good at this but the fruit sector as a whole is less vociferous. Ministers come and go but keep the pressure up and help parliamentarians to ask the questions that hold Ministers' feet to the fire.

Question: What input is the NHS having into the National Food Strategy and when will government link the Department of Health & Social Care with DEFRA?

Lord Krebs: When The Lord Gardiner, the Lords DEFRA Minister, announced the government would deliver a food strategy ensuring healthy and affordable food for everybody one of the questions I asked was how we could ensure cross departmental collaboration as it is not the job of DEFRA alone. Collaboration will only succeed if there is a senior minister driving it from the top and we will have to wait and see how the government achieves that.

Question: Do you think educating children is the best way to ensure people value the amount of human effort that goes into producing fruit?

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Lord Krebs: Education is incredibly important. My mother was a domestic science teacher, so I was brought up in a house where an appreciation of food was one of our central values. Not every child is that lucky and education plays a huge role. Practical food skills are important for getting people to appreciate what food is, where it comes from and what goes into it. If you do not cook, you do not think about food in quite the same way as if you are preparing it from the raw ingredient. Sadly, a lot of schools do not have the facilities to teach cooking and this is an area for lobbying.

Teresa Wickham: Lord Selbourne's report delivered a fantastic opportunity for branding British produce and promoting it as the best of the best. We ruined it ourselves as we did not have enough class one produce and began branding class two. We should have stayed small and maintained quality.

Question: Food labelling is going to be paramount should we find poorer quality foods becoming available to the consumer. Is it time to launch a brand-new labelling concept to help consumers identify safe, UK grown and packed products?

Lord Krebs: In the first version of my amendment on the National Food Strategy, which was a cross party amendment, was for a kite mark that goes beyond Red Tractor to help people identify food produced in the UK to high production standards. That amendment was passed in the House of Lords by a significant majority of 62 and was rejected in the Commons. I replaced it with a remarkably simple amendment that simply said we need a national food strategy that ensures healthy, sustainable and affordable food for all without prescribing what was in it. The government accepted that. A kite mark showing food is produced to certain environmental and welfare standards would be helpful although it is not the answer to everything. The real answer is not to import food produced to a lower standard than UK-produced food.

Grocery Sector Expert: Teresa Wickham

The subject of obesity raised by Lord Krebs is a major problem coming down the track. We need to make the National Food Strategy work this time. So often we have reports to which the government is indifferent and they go nowhere. We must keep the pressure on our local MPs and Ministers. The coronavirus has shown that people who are obese are more vulnerable. The £27 billion cost to the NHS should be enough to spark change at government level. It is incredibly sad to see young children who are obese through no fault of their own and know they are storing all sorts of health problems for later life. It is up to those in authority and those in a position to put pressure on those in authority to advocate for change.

The extended soft fruit season mentioned by Lord Krebs started in the 1990s with the Strathclyde Project. A project which looked at all the foods we imported and questioned why we were not producing them here. Out of all the food groups examined it was the soft fruit industry that really did something to improve its self-sufficiency and reduce the UK's reliance on imports.

***Coronavirus has changed how consumer shop
and the grocery industry needs to adapt.***

Coronavirus has changed our lives. The consumer was already starting to shop in a different way and the grocery industry needs to understand them so we can adapt to their needs. With lockdown online shopping increased from 7% to over 20%. At times it was difficult for retailers to cope with the switch as we have short food chains and operate just in time delivery models but we can be proud that we all, from farmer to retailer,

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made sure there was plenty of food available. One retailer is now doing over 650,000 deliveries per week. Another change because of the virus is that more people are choosing to shop local and visit farm shops. People are starting to think more about their food, they are cooking more at home. As people continue to work from home, they will continue to shop online but have a broader range of opportunities to receive their deliveries. We need to think about how we get local shopping going. It is easier if you live in the country or near a fruit farm but in urban areas there are still street markets and greengrocers although some have been lost. At the end of day, consumers are shopping more online and thinking more about what they are buying.

***The big four still dominate the grocery sector.
However, there are some interesting challengers to watch.***

The grocery industry is still dominated by four major retailers, but their attitude has changed. Tesco is now more of a wholesaler since it bought Booker. Morrison's has always had its own production units and sells own-label products very successfully. Asda has recently been sold to two British brothers and hopefully that will have a good result in terms of British produce. Asda is also putting sustainability right in front of their customers and has recently opened a prototype store which is completely self-service, and you even take your own containers.

In the last five years discounters Aldi and Lidl have really made their mark. They are both German and both family owned. Being family owned they do not have the same financial pressures as if they were serving the stock market. They both have ambitions to grow their stores and both need to develop their online presence. People enjoy shopping in them because they see them as good value. The big four were slow to respond initially but are there now with promotions around comparable pricing. Amazon is coming into the grocery market and although they are small now, they dominate much of our online shopping. M&S has recently partnered with Ocado and are seeking to expand their food business which is now seen as more important than clothing. M&S may seem a more expensive option but if you live on your own or have a smaller household, they cater for you very well. So, the structure of the industry is changing but still dominated by a small number of supermarkets.

Branding produce could unlock greater profits for growers.

It is difficult for growers as the way to succeed is through cooperation and delivering what the dominant supermarkets want. There is a huge opportunity for the fruit industry to work with one retailer to impart more product knowledge and tasting notes on fruit labelling and at the point of sale. Once one retailer is onboard, the others will follow.

NFU Representative: Tom Bradshaw

One million people have signed the NFU's food standards petition; that is one million people who are engaged with how their food is produced. This issue means something to the British public.

The fruit sector is incredibly innovative and we have seen how productivity has transformed over the past few decades with some strawberry growers producing 10 times as many strawberries as previously on the same hectare of land. Innovation is at the heart of the sector and Lord Krebs is right that we need to bring consumers with us. We need society to support innovation and not see it as a threat. It is an exciting time for technologies such as gene editing which is part of the solution to productivity and climate change.

Food insecurity is the result of poverty, not expensive food.

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We have the third cheapest food in the world and I do not believe making food cheaper is the answer to the poorest in society sourcing food. Making food cheaper alone will not extend food accessibility, the government has a critical role to play in ensuring everybody in society can afford to eat. Food insecurity is not a result of food poverty, it is the result of poverty.

Online shopping has soared through coronavirus and is only going to continue growing. This new way of shopping may make labelling less relevant than having search filters or buttons which allow shoppers to select only British grown and produced food or food produced to equivalent standards.

Coronavirus has reconnected society with food, cooking and feeding themselves. We have an opportunity to make some of those changes stick beyond the pandemic.

The most important thing for me is that people are not eating a healthy diet and are not consuming enough fruit and vegetables. That gives the fruit sector and the wider agricultural industry a huge opportunity to educate people that food is health. We need to make our voice heard and do something to make that message resonate with the public.

We are living in a time of huge uncertainty. The NFU has great ambitions for the horticulture sector but we are not going to realise those ambitions if we do not get the foundations right, and right now many business are making decisions in a setting which does not set us up for a resilient food supply system.

The lack of clarity around Brexit is putting food supply and Britain's food security at risk unnecessarily

The proposed immigration policy which is due to come into effect on 1st January 2021 is not fit for the future of farming. I have grave concerns around the recruitment of seasonal labour; business need to recruit staff for January and they do not yet know whether they will have a seasonal workers scheme to recruit from. Clearly the free movement of seasonal labour from Eastern Europe which has proved reliable will have ended by January and businesses do not know how to plan in an information vacuum. This issue was raised last week by NFU President Minette Batters with the Prime Minister and he knows this is at the forefront of the industry's collective mind and that government is putting food supply at risk unnecessarily. It is in the government's gift to decide to have a migration policy that really does work. The Seasonal Workers Pilot was successful and hit all its KPIs regarding workers returning home and so on so there is no reason not to expand the pilot into a working migration policy. We have an incredibly powerful government, as they have demonstrated by ripping out the Agricultural Bill amendments the House of Lords originally made. The NFU is lobbying, DEFRA is lobbying, and many grower businesses are now writing directly to Number 10.

We do not know what trade will look like from 1st January 2021. Many businesses are importers and exporters and as yet we do not know what the new import and export regimes will entail when they come into effect in less than three months time. Leaving the EU without a deal has very real implications for the sector. Particularly around the global tariffs which can be anything between 2% and 15%. That will have the impact of increasing food prices and as a country we cannot afford rising food prices coming off the back of a pandemic. Rising food prices is not something the government is likely to accept. However, if they do away with the global tariff to keep food prices stable, we lose our negotiating power to get the trade deals we so desperately need. It is a critical time for negotiations with the EU; we need a good relationship with our closest neighbour.

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We need to guarantee supply of fruit and vegetables out of season and allow British farmers to supply them in season.

Climate change modelling indicates the UK with its temperate climate is going to be a fantastic place to produce food despite more weather extremes. One of the cornerstones of a resilient food supply chain is a water framework which can capture water in the winter and make it available to areas of production through the summer. Our government is very keen on national infrastructure projects and a national water harvesting infrastructure should be achievable, particularly given it is critical to life. We have an abundance of water and a water framework is an opportunity to maximise our production and optimise all the associated benefits of a thriving farming sector.

Biodiversity is an undeniable problem. Innovation in plant breeding may be part of the solution to reducing the use of plant protection products (the pesticides referred to in the opening from Lord Krebs). We need to use these products to optimise production while protecting the environment and supplying competitively priced food.

We cannot have resilience in our food supply system unless we have profitable businesses willing to invest in the future.

We cannot have a resilient food supply system unless we have profitable businesses that are able to reinvest in the future. There is a lot of innovation around robotics, science and technology, and if we get it right it will be a very exciting future. First though, we need to government to make the right decisions to give the sector the confidence to reinvest in the future and be able to feed the nation.

Wholesale Speaker: Gary Marshall

When the pandemic started back in March, wholesale markets around the country lost between 70% and 80% of their business overnight as the restaurant, hotel and hospitality supply business had gone. They switched immediately to supplying their local communities via box deliveries, garden stores and local shops which took a phenomenal effort. During the non-stop media coverage around coronavirus and food shortages, the army of independent retailers who kept their local communities supplied was not mentioned. However, it deserved recognition as the produce coming out of the wholesale markets was fresher, delivered quicker and reasonably priced.

Wholesale markets are a multi-billion dollar sector that is relatively untapped by growers

New Covent Garden Market turns over £650 million per year and employs more than 2,500 people directly. Pre-covid more than 40% of the food supplied to restaurants within the M25 came from New Covent Garden Market. The wholesale market sector turns over billions of pounds a year and is always looking for the best produce. In supplying markets, growers can develop commercial relationships with buyers who are as passionate about fruit as they are and understand the level of human effort involved in production. Markets are looking for premium products of a consistent quality that are packed and prepared properly. Over the course of a season, these products will get a strong response and a strong profit. Wholesale markets are still a relatively untapped source of income for growers and a few early entrants are starting to corner the market. It is worth exploring this option sooner rather than later.

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I would challenge the assertion that fresh produce is the more expensive option. Fresh food is more affordable and tastier when it is bought in season, so the cost of food depends on what the consumer buys. A cabbage is cheap and makes a wonderful addition to a family meal. We are not educating people enough about seasonality and showing them how to cook from scratch.

Selling produce below the cost of production should be stopped

Another problem is that big four supermarkets and discounters will be selling fresh veg at retail price below the cost of production. Markets cannot and will not do that. They base their prices on what it has cost to grow the produce. This is a serious problem that needs government intervention as it is inhibiting the development of a network of small independent retailers who cannot compete at these low prices.

Wholesalers are entrepreneurial, passionate and the backbone of local shopping through their supply to delis, farm shops and independent retailers. Markets need top quality produce to continue bringing their benefits to the economy, local communities and independent retailers.

Business and Finance Speaker: Mark Lumsdon-Taylor

I am delighted to be speaking on behalf of both Rural Policy Group and MHA MacIntyre Hudson.

Raising food prices is not the only way for growers to receive a fair margin for their fruit.

To give some context to the scope of food and farming in the UK, in 2018 agri-food contributed £121 billion to gross value added and employed 4.1 million people while consumers spent £226 billion on food and drink. The rural economy is a not insignificant subset of the national economy. During coronavirus people changed their food habits and from cooking at home out of necessity came the new national pastime, baking. Shops ran out of flour and other essential baking supplies as quickly as they sold out of toilet paper. However, food pricing remains a hot topic politically. People may place a greater value on good food since the pandemic and cooking & eating may be a more important part of peoples' lifestyles but asking them to pay more for it is a different matter. Raising food prices may not be the only way in which growers can receive a fair margin on their produce. Re-evaluating profit shares within the supply chain could also lead to a more equitable distribution of profit amongst all parties involved in getting fresh fruit and vegetables from farm to fork. Horticulture has adopted some tremendous innovations in recent years and there are novel technologies on the horizon to help the sector pick up the pace of change still further; computerised warehouses robotic pickers, gene editing and lights out manufacturing to name just a few. The productivity gains from technology cannot fend off the ravages of an unthought out departure from the European Union.

Check your international contracts prior to Brexit! Someone may have to pay tariffs.

In my role as the CFO for a farmer and food manufacturer, I am reviewing contracts for supply which span harvest year to see whether there is suitable protection as to who bears the cost of tariffs from 1st January 2021. There is a lot of negotiation going on in this area and I urge anyone who has not started reviewing their contract yet to do so.

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Small changes in food prices and the resulting impact on demand creates a butterfly effect which ripples through the industry. All sections of the food supply chain need to get together to make sure these ripples effect positive change. Further, it is the business of professional advisors to the fruit industry such as MHA MacIntyre Hudson to lobby alongside you and brief parliamentarians on the technical points of finance, law, regulation and so on to help you in effecting the changes which will create a resilient food system.

A recent Financial Time quote that resonated with me, “Demand, diet and demographics combined with advances in biotechnology are making food production an appetizing sector”. The FT was highlighting fresh produce as a sector ripe for investment and development.

Just in time delivery may also need to be rethought until global trade settles after Brexit. Recently a client of mine had to halt manufacturing for a day because the glucose needed for the process was stuck on the M20 in Operation Brock. For those of you who are not familiar, Operation Brock is the new contraflow barrier being installed on the M20 to keep traffic moving in the event of cross-Channel disruption. The contraflow allows lorries headed towards Folkestone and Dover to be held on the motorway while traffic continues to run in both directions.

There are a couple of things businesses can do to protect their cashflow in this mire of uncertainty:

- Tax credits for projects which “are designed to make an advance in science of technology”. The average tax refund was just under £52,000 and contrary to popular belief the work carried out by farm businesses can qualify. The claim is offset against corporation tax and business can claim up to a 230% deduction. This allows businesses to continue investing in new technology which is ultimately an investment in productivity.
- IHT and agricultural property relief is often put in the too hard basket; we all like to think we have a lot of years left but inheritance planning can secure the family farm for the next generation. Farmers may be able to get relief from inheritance tax on agricultural property including farmhouses.
- Environmental credentials. The role of environmental, social and governance (ESG) is becoming increasingly important to your supply chain, customers and investors. Some routes to market and indeed some markets will be closed to business who have not embedded environmental credential in their business.

Panel debate with Q&As:

Question: Bioscience investment is going to be a challenge. How do you see our incredible global research partnerships surviving in the future?

Tom Bradshaw: There are some world leading scientists in this country and we need to unlock that potential. The question may better relate to EU partnerships where a lot of the research has been done across the EU and we have accessed EU funding. NIAB have already experienced not being included in the future of some of the work they had been doing. The world class institutes we have here in the UK need to know that their research will be valued and utilised. If they believe the UK will be a hub of biotechnology and scientific development, they will be successful. They also need a supportive legislative framework and access to market to thrive.

Lord Krebs: In plant science we have some outstanding centres. The core of the problem is the regulatory environments, access to funding and access to collaborative networks. The UK is already being cut out of collaborative projects with EU partners because there is a lack of clarity around whether Britain can join those EU programmes or receive EU funding. We are the strongest scientific nation within the EU so we get out far

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more than we put in. The government has said it wants a hi-tech future so I hope that we find a way through this extremely challenging time.

Question: How can we make the voice of independent retailers heard and how can they be best supported to raise the quality of diets in produce deserts?

Lord Krebs: Gary raised an interesting point that you can produce a healthy nutritious meal on a tight budget using cabbage as an example. However, when we think of everything that is needed to cook the ingredients themselves, such as salt & pepper, the cost of cooking a meal without a store cupboard to fall back on is estimated to be about £15 which is a long way from the cost of a cabbage. The select committee highlighted that access to food in the most deprived communities in this country is partly in the control of local authorities. Local authorities control what kind of retail outlets open in their community; in some areas there are lots of places to visit to buy fresh fruit and vegetables and in others it would be difficult. One way of supporting the quiet army of indies is through planning application approvals and possibly even subsidy of quality produce.

Question: In the last four years there has been a short European apple crop twice. If the market worked properly, the price of apples should have gone up. Instead it went down both times. What is the NFU doing to address this failure in the market?

Tom Bradshaw: The market is not working properly. I use the covid example. You have a supply chain where the costs for the primary producer have increased by around 15% due to something outside of your control. In a normally functioning market some of that cost would be passed up the supply chain. The fact that growers cannot do that suggests that the grower or primary producer's negotiating power is not working. We have a broken supply chain. Some of these businesses will be within the scope of the Groceries Code Adjudicator but we would like to see the GCA remit widened to include smaller businesses to try and bring more transparency to the way pricing is formulated.

Teresa Wickham: The problem is the primary producer has traditionally been a weak seller unless he has got a cooperation. The other problem is that fruit and vegetables are often seen as a loss leader, particularly at Christmas. In France it was illegal to sell below the cost of production and it would be worthwhile exploring this legal solution. At the end of the day there is a disparity in power in negotiations so supermarkets will buy at the price they want to buy at, no matter how much it disrupts the market.

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