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Official Report

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Tuesday 12 March 2013

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 12 March 2013

[The Deputy Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Colette Fagan, training co-ordinator in child protection, Roman Catholic diocese of Motherwell.

Colette Fagan (Training Co-ordinator, Child Protection, Roman Catholic Diocese of Motherwell): I would like to share with you some examples of giving in recent and not-so recent history. The example in the latter case is of course Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for all: for those who do not believe as well as for those of us who do.

There are other examples of people who excelled in giving. Father Maximilian Kolbe, who was a Franciscan priest, gave up his life in Auschwitz to save the life of a young married father. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a Lutheran pastor and a fierce opponent of Hitler and the Nazi party, was killed because of his outspoken Christian beliefs. Mother Teresa of Calcutta loved and served the poor in India. She wrote,

“I have found the paradox, that if you love and give until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love.”

Last but not least, Professor William Barclay, the Church of Scotland theologian, gave his life to the service of Christianity in his prolific and beautiful witness and writings.

In my young days, all those people were an inspiration of love and giving. Not all of us are called to such exemplary giving, but we share an ability to give something. All of us are called to it and to loving our fellow human beings, even if it is in small ways. A commitment to a hundred small daily givings in every country around the world could become a tsunami of love and giving if only we could truly believe in the power of human goodness and its ability to change the world.

Marvin Olasky said that

“Giving generously and giving forgiveness are at the root of knowing God”—

and, I would add, to knowing ourselves.

So what can we do? To name but a few things, giving a good example, giving ourselves to others, and giving our time, our forgiveness, our love and encouragement, our acceptance, our honesty, and our non-biased support and judgments.

I will end with a quote from Albert Schweitzer:

“I cannot accept life and its happiness as a matter of course, I must give something in exchange for it.”

Each of us must decide what is it that we can consistently give and give to all as and when we can. Will we be a part of the tsunami of giving? I hope and pray that we are.

Thank you for giving your time to me and I ask God to bless each and every one of you.

Topical Question Time

14:03

College Student Numbers

1. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reported decline in the number of college students. (S4T-00279)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The latest figures from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council tell a positive story about what is being achieved in our colleges. We have exceeded our commitment to maintaining full-time equivalent student numbers; retention and attainment are increasing; and record numbers of 16 to 24-year-olds are undertaking full-time, economically relevant courses that will significantly enhance their employment prospects. Those are important indicators of what we are building in the college sector—focused provision leading to improved attainment and creating better life chances.

Those achievements should not be obscured by a fixation on head count. I have explained on many occasions that head count is a volatile measure that fails to take any account of the intensity and economic importance of provision. I shall shortly make clear my priorities for the additional £10 million of investment for the academic year 2013-14.

Neil Findlay: Surely, even by the cabinet secretary's definition, 120,000 fewer students cannot be explained away by citing volatility. Does he think that 120,000 fewer students are just another false concept?

Michael Russell: I have been at pains to explain to Mr Findlay the concept of head count and the fact that head count of the type to which he refers does not reflect what is taking place in colleges. It compares unlike with unlike and lists very short courses of limited economic relevance in exactly the same way as it would list full-time courses of economic relevance.

If Mr Findlay cared to drill into the figures that have been published, he would see some interesting details. For example, the average number of hours of learning per student has increased by 12 per cent in the past year and by 36 per cent since 2006-07, reflecting the decline in very short programmes and an increase in the number of students studying towards more substantial qualifications. That indicates that the student experience is producing employability as the main issue. That will, inevitably, produce a decline in certain types of short courses and a

stability in overall numbers, which is what we have seen.

Neil Findlay: The fact is that there was no increase in learning for the 120,000 students who are no longer in college. Does the cabinet secretary accept that women, adult returners and students with learning disabilities are disproportionately affected in the figure of 120,000?

Michael Russell: There is no figure of 120,000 students who are—I use Mr Findlay's words—"no longer in college". The numbers reflect the fact that many individuals are now undertaking longer courses. I return to the point that to compare a short course of the type that we are talking about with a full-time or largely full-time course that leads to employability is to compare two things that are unlike.

Mr Findlay raises an important issue about those who are furthest from employment and furthest from learning. The purpose of reform is to ensure that everybody is brought closer to employment as a result of involvement in the college system, and that is what is taking place. Where there is need for particular effort through the reforms that are taking place—for example, with those who have learning difficulties—we have worked with and are working with key organisations in that regard. I have discussed with colleges the way in which the money that is being made available now will focus on some of those groups.

It is and has been the intention of reform to make employability the key issue, and I am glad that that has been welcomed by Colleges Scotland in its response to the figures.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The policy memorandum to the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill states that education provision will be

"more responsive to the needs of learners and employers."

Colleges and employers have made the point that there is increasing scope for part-time courses, particularly through local delivery. How does that square with the figures that were announced last week?

Michael Russell: It squares very well with those figures. I visit colleges on many occasions. Indeed, I have been in three colleges in the past eight days. I meet students, the staff and employers. Everywhere I go, there is a focus on ensuring that learning is appropriate, and the regional nature of provision will allow that to be the case.

There is variety in that delivery, but all the employers whom I meet recognise that the changes that we are making will produce a greater

emphasis on employability, and they welcome that. I would be happy for the member to accompany me on college visits to meet some of those employers so that she can see at first hand that the changes are the very things that employers need.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): When I published the results of a freedom of information request last month that suggested a loss of 85,000 part-time places over the past three years, it was suggested by the cabinet secretary's spokesperson that I should "catch up" with the real figures. Now that the cabinet secretary's own figures have not only caught up with but exceeded the figures that I published, what assurances can he give that the loss of the part-time places that were particularly valuable to women learners, adult learners and others will not result in decreased opportunities for those groups?

Michael Russell: A substantial number of part-time opportunities are still available. The suggestion that Mr McArthur should "catch up" probably refers largely to the reforms that are taking place and the positive benefits of those reforms. If Mr McArthur cared to look at the full detail of the figures that were published last week, he would recognise that, for example, college performance indicators are improving year on year.

In 2011-12, 64 per cent of full-time students—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that Tavish Scott does not want to listen to the figures. They are important to college learners and to Scotland, and they are an important indication of the improvements that are taking place.

In 2011-12, 64 per cent of full-time students studying for a recognised further education qualification successfully completed their course, which represents an increase from 62 per cent in the previous year; 69 per cent of full-time students studying for a recognised higher education qualification successfully completed their course, which represents an increase from 67 per cent; 67 per cent of 16 to 19-year-olds successfully completed their course, which represents an increase from 64 per cent; and 68 per cent of 20 to 24-year-olds successfully completed their course, which represents an increase from 67 per cent. *[Interruption.]*

I am very sorry that Tavish Scott still does not want to listen to what are important facts on the changes that are taking place, which are improving college education year on year. If, unfortunately, Liberal Democrats do not wish to listen to information about the improvements, they will be fated to being—as they have been in almost every debate in the Parliament—in the tiny minority of people who will not change and who

will not prioritise good things in Scotland, and the electoral tide will overwhelm them yet again.

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give any assistance to those students with learning disabilities who can no longer access courses at local colleges?

Michael Russell: I have answered that question from Mr Henry and his colleagues on a number of occasions, and I will answer it again in the same way: I have met the organisations that are concerned with those students and have asked them to put forward proposals. I will meet those organisations again shortly, and I am keen that we put their proposals in place. I discuss that issue regularly when I meet colleges. In addition, I hope that the outcome agreements can encompass such issues.

I have mentioned all that in previous answers. All those things are happening, and they all express the concerns that we have that the entirety of those people who are served by colleges are well served.

Scottish Water Horizons

2. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Scottish Water regarding the decision to curtail the activities of Scottish Water Horizons. (S4T-00280)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): Scottish Water has notified the Government of its decision to withdraw from green waste composting activities. Scottish Water has reviewed the business focus of its Horizons subsidiary and has decided to focus more fully on its renewable energy portfolio, in which it considers that it can achieve better returns on investment.

Although green waste will no longer be accepted at Deerdykes, the food waste recycling operation will remain operational, and it will continue to make a major contribution to our zero waste and renewable energy ambitions. Employees who are affected by the changes will be transferred to other roles, either at Deerdykes or elsewhere in Scottish Water. Renewable energy remains a key priority and Scottish Water will continue to focus on wind, hydro and food waste projects.

John Wilson: Will the cabinet secretary outline what the full impact will be on the Deerdykes site in Cumbernauld? Does she agree that Scottish Water's decision raises a number of issues to do with the implementation of green waste contracts that have been entered into with local authorities in the immediate area?

Nicola Sturgeon: As far as the impact on Deerdykes is concerned, although the composting activities will cease, the food recycling activity will continue. I understand that all existing customer contracts will be honoured until they expire in 2014. As I said in my initial answer, employees who are affected by the changes will be transferred to other roles. Some of them will be transferred to other roles at Deerdykes, while others will be transferred to other roles in Scottish Water's wider operations.

I should stress that none of that undermines Scottish Water's ambition on renewable energy. Just yesterday, I visited a very exciting new Scottish Water hydro initiative in Denny, where a particular turbine will produce enough electricity to power 150 homes. Scottish Water is focused on ensuring that it meets its renewables obligations and that it does so in a way that delivers the highest possible return.

John Wilson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response and for her assurances about the climate change targets of the Scottish Government and Scottish Water.

Are any discussions taking place about other subsidiaries of Scottish Water and their future operation?

Nicola Sturgeon: None that are particularly relevant to this question, but I am more than happy to ask Scottish Water to meet John Wilson, if he would be interested in discussing the issues in more detail. When I visited Denny yesterday to launch the project that I have just spoken about, I met the chair and the chief executive of Scottish Water. As I have been in the past, I was impressed by their commitment to renewable energy projects and to ensuring that, as well as delivering a high-quality customer service, Scottish Water is doing its bit to reduce its environmental footprint, to contribute towards carbon emissions targets and to play its wider role in our environmental objectives. However, I am sure that any member who wants to discuss that with Scottish Water in more detail will find it very willing to do so.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary believe that it is reasonable for Scottish Water Horizons not to publish details of the review that it carried out of its waste business before reaching its very significant decision?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am more than happy to discuss with Scottish Water the provision of information. As I said to John Wilson, I am sure that Scottish Water would be happy to discuss the issue in more detail with any member. Scottish Water looked at the Horizons issue very much from a business focus and decided that it was

better for it to focus fully on the renewable energy portfolio, because it considers that that will deliver a better return. It is important to point out again that, as I know members are aware, Scottish Water customers are fully protected from the impact of any activities that are carried out by the Horizons subsidiary. I think that Scottish Water was right to take its decision on the basis and in the way that it has. However, I am sure that it would be happy to discuss further the reasons underpinning the decision with any member who is so interested.

Food Policy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-05892, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on Scottish Government food policy. I remind members to speak through the chair by referring to other members by their full names and not as “you”.

I invite the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead, to speak to and move the motion—14 minutes, please, cabinet secretary.

14:17

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):

Today we are discussing food policy. Given that in taking the issue forward I often deal with the James Hutton Institute, I use this opportunity to say how sorry I am to hear that the institute has lost two talented and valued colleagues in a recent tragic accident, as reported in today's news. I know that I speak for the whole chamber when I offer our condolences to the families and friends of Dr Stewart Rhind and Dr Julian Dawson and to all their colleagues at the institute.

Food is vital to all our lives, our environment and our economy. In the past few weeks, the horsemeat scandal has reminded society of that and has raised awareness of provenance and quality. Consumers are now asking more questions about what is in the products that they are buying and about what is on their plate. That can only be a good thing, because Scottish produce competes with the best.

Retailers and food service companies should respond by sourcing closer to home, adopting ethical purchasing policies and acting more responsibly. This transformative moment in the food debate should change the way that we think about what is on our plate, what we are eating, where it is from and how it was produced. I want, as I am sure the rest of the chamber wants, Scotland to be a good food nation.

In 2007, the Scottish Government started raising awareness of food policy. Back then there was no national food and drink policy and there was no joined-up approach to growing an important industry of huge economic importance. We wanted change, so Scotland's first ever national food and drink policy was published in 2009. Since then, the policy has come alive through partnership working all over Scotland. We have made a difference, and I will pick out a few highlights.

First, the sector's economic performance has been truly outstanding. Food and drink companies

have not been immune to the downturn, but a sector that in 2007 was worth £10 billion is now worth £12.4 billion and has been one of our fastest-growing sectors. It is a sector that relies on Scotland's rich natural environment, of course. Back in 2007, there was no environmental strategy for the industry. Last month, I launched its first ever environmental strategy, which is an important step forward, given the sector's carbon footprint.

While we want Scots to enjoy even more of their own larder, we also want visitors to do likewise. In 2007, there was no focus on food in Scotland's tourism industry. Since then, it has featured heavily in the 2009 homecoming; 2010 was a tourism focus year; and it will be a key theme in homecoming 2014.

We also want our public sector to source quality food from our own country. In 2007, an estimated 34 per cent of food that was publicly procured for schools and care homes was sourced in Scotland. The estimated figure is now 48 per cent across the whole public sector, and the figure is growing all the time.

Those are great strides forward. Of course we cannot be complacent—there is always so much more to do—but let us consider the bedrock of that fantastic success, which is the outstanding produce that Scotland can offer. Our Scotch beef and lamb, for instance, are second to none—a fact which is recognised by top chefs everywhere. The meat is traceable from farm to fork and the Scotch label is a standard for quality.

Our seafood, from our pristine waters, is acclaimed worldwide. Scottish salmon was the first ever non-French product to be awarded the label rouge. Our soft fruit, cereals, vegetables and potatoes are also well known for quality and taste, and our Scotch whisky is a global success—we ship overseas an estimated 40 bottles per second. Why would anyone want to look elsewhere for what we can supply?

Thankfully, local sourcing and celebration of Scottish produce are increasing all the time. I have seen that myself; a food revolution is under way throughout the country. It is under way overseas, as well. A recent trade mission to China and Japan gave us an insight into the massive opportunities in those markets. As a result, one buyer will now supply Scottish salmon to 90 Michelin-starred and other top-end restaurants in Japan, and an agreement with the World Association of Chefs Societies will see 10 million chefs—I repeat, 10 million chefs—worldwide commit to using Scottish langoustine and salmon in their cooking competitions and restaurants.

That international success is borne out by the export figures, which are at an all-time high of £5.4 billion—up 52 per cent since 2007.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): In relation to the promotion of Scottish venison and putting it on a level playing field, can the cabinet secretary clarify the position on single farm payments for Scottish deer farmers?

Richard Lochhead: Jamie McGrigor will be aware that we are currently in negotiation on the allowance for Scotland's venison producers. We have made available £2 million for new entrants over the next two years and we have opened discussions with Scotland's deer farmers. They are at the forefront of our thinking.

In the immensely important international markets that I have just referred to, provenance and quality really count, as does a well-organised industry that can service customers. All that needs well-organised public sector support.

Since 2007, what was a disjointed approach by the industry has changed. The industry leadership body, Scotland Food & Drink, has delivered real results. Since 2007, what was a disjointed public sector approach has also changed. Scotland Food & Drink's partnerships with our enterprise agencies are supporting growth. For example, the United Kingdom market penetration project has since 2011 resulted in an additional £5.38 million of sales for the Scottish companies involved in it.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am curious at how Richard Lochhead can so easily segue from talking about local procurement and the importance of shorter supply chains into an enthusiastic attitude to globalised supply chains and the globalised control of our food chain by large corporations. Has he nothing to say about how to roll back the previous food revolution, in which control over our food system was swallowed up by a handful of corporations?

Richard Lochhead: I will return to some of those themes, but I will say that even 5 million people in Scotland could not consume all the whisky that we produce, so it is quite a wise decision to export 90 per cent of it. We have important export markets that we have to utilise for the Scottish economy. I will return to some of the themes that Patrick Harvie raised.

We could debate endlessly the food system that relies on big retailers. I am the first to challenge them, as I did last summer over milk prices and as I am doing now over the horsemeat scandal. I am also a strong advocate of the new but long overdue groceries code adjudicator, because some retailers do abuse their power—I accept that. I am due to speak to the newly appointed adjudicator very soon.

Supermarkets may not be popular with all politicians, but they are popular with the public and we need to work with them. They sell most of our food and are responsible for around 240,000 jobs

in Scotland. Those are important jobs. Many retailers buy produce from Scottish suppliers and tens of thousands of Scottish jobs rely on those contracts. We work hard to encourage retailers to increase Scottish sourcing. The sales of Scottish produce have increased by 28 per cent—just under £400 million—since 2007.

Of course it is not just retailers who buy and sell food. Food service companies also influence our food supply chains across the public and hospitality sectors. A major food service company recently informed me that it now turns over £60 million-worth of products from more than 100 Scottish suppliers. It sells to customers across the UK and Europe, and it will invest a further £30 million in its infrastructure in Scotland over the next two years.

Retailers and the food service industry provide the products, but we must also remember, of course, that the choices that people make are their own choices, and those choices have a real impact on our environment and our health as a country. That is why educating our children about food is a passion of mine. However, it is not just my passion; whenever I speak to people who are interested in food policy, the first priority that they always mention to me is teaching young people about food.

In 2010, we piloted projects in schools. As a result, we helped at least 800 schools and 55,000 pupils to learn about food, and around 500 teachers received additional professional development. Last year, I extended that programme with a further £2 million-worth of support. Since 2008, the cooking bus has visited 130 schools and community groups and helped 13,000 pupils and 5,000 teachers and community workers to learn to cook healthy and nutritious meals.

That emphasis on community is key to the food revolution. A real appreciation of local food is at its heart. Thriving local food networks are now emerging right across Scotland. Groups such as Savour the Flavours in Dumfries and Galloway, Taste of Arran and Argyll Foods have a business focus and co-operate to promote and sell their outstanding produce. Farmers markets have boomed. They are up 50 per cent since 2007, and sales have increased from £18 million to £25 million. Because local food is fundamental to our reputation, I recently approved the think local project through Scotland's Rural College. That project targets support to local food companies, networks and communities. A £1.5 million community food fund will promote local food tourism, farmers markets, food festivals and other community events.

Communities want to grow their own food. Since 2007, the climate challenge fund has supported

280 food-related projects with more than £16 million, and we will soon consult on allotments legislation to help to inform the community empowerment and renewal bill.

The affordability of food is also crucial. Community Food and Health (Scotland) supports low-income communities, promotes healthy eating and addresses health inequalities. I know that we all realise that that is a massive challenge. Since 2007, Community Food and Health (Scotland) has received £4.75 million and provided grants to more than 250 community projects.

Those are just a few of the achievements of the national food and drink policy. A key theme is our high standards of provenance. That is the platform on which our food and drink success is built, and it has never been more valuable—as we have learned from the horsemeat scandal that has rocked Europe.

Food fraud in any country is totally unacceptable. Since the food policy got under way, I have stressed that we should know where our food comes from, value what is on our own doorstep, and see that food is central to our wellbeing, our environment and society at large. The horsemeat scandal has brought the discussion to the forefront. People are stopping, thinking and questioning where their food comes from. The scandal has challenged those who control our food sources to step back and think, as they must now do. Tesco's recent announcement about more UK sourcing is just one example that shows the renewed importance of provenance—although we are right to ask why it did not source closer to home in the first place.

The Government acted to restore public confidence and ensure that we did not get complacent. We have worked with the Food Standards Agency, announced the consultation on the new food standards body, and commissioned expert groups.

Last week, ministers met local authority representatives to discuss school meals. School meal standards, which were set by legislation in 2008, are high, and those standards must be met before any tender is considered. Across the Scotland Excel contract, which covers most councils, the total value of frozen processed red meat that was used in 2012 was £792,000. Members should compare that with the £3.7 million that was spent on fresh meat. We can strive to do more, of course, but we should take confidence in our school meals, the uptake of which has risen for three consecutive years.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary consider altering the balance between finance and quality in respect of the meat products contract for school meals?

Richard Lochhead: There are a number of important issues in that regard that will no doubt feature in others members' speeches.

The hungry for success initiative, which was launched in 2003, heralded a revolution in school meals. A still hungry for success working group will meet this week to start to refresh the policy. All members will no doubt have the opportunity to put their views to that body.

The horsemeat scandal has made us all pause and think. In my view, provenance is the underlining factor. It is a matter of knowing where food comes from and taking assurance from high standards. Scotland's high standards are internationally renowned, and there will be even more to work with in the future.

The year 2014 is just around the corner, and the eyes of the world will be on Scotland. The next homecoming, the Ryder cup and the Commonwealth games present fantastic opportunities for business. I have committed funding of £1 million to ensure that food and drink will be a key theme of homecoming 2014 and other events.

From international attention to community food networks, food is at the heart of our lives. We must understand more, challenge more and expect higher standards. There is much excitement and vibrancy among those who produce food in Scotland. Food producers have high standards and are justifiably proud of them. I urge all Scotland to back our food producers, and I urge consumers to ask more questions about their food. People who provide and sell food should source from shorter supply chains and promote high-quality local food.

There are challenges ahead. We will set up a new food council in summer to support our work over the coming years. However, there is much of which we should be proud. We are fuelling Scotland's food revolution through education, grow your own and local food initiatives. Our £12.4 billion food and drink industry is a real Scottish strength, and we are supporting the industry like never before.

From global to local, Scottish provenance is known for quality and trustworthiness, and 2014 will capitalise on that. We should back the people who do it well—and that means backing Scotland. The horsemeat scandal has taught us the value of those words. Let us make Scotland a good food nation.

I commend the motion to Parliament, and I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the significant achievements of the national food and drink policy and looks to build on this progress through increasing the number of consumers at home and abroad who enjoy and

celebrate Scotland's famous larder, especially in the run-up to the Commonwealth Games, Ryder Cup and Homecoming in 2014; notes the growing interest in food and drink reflected in the many initiatives underway throughout the country that recognise the different ways that the sector impacts on society, and believes that there remains much untapped potential to promote the high standards of sourcing and provenance in Scotland's £12.4 billion industry that makes an enormous contribution to Scotland.

14:31

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): In September I was pleased to bring to the Parliament a members' business debate on the Fife diet manifesto. I hoped to start or encourage discussion about our relationship with food, how we eat and how we grow and trade food. The need for such discussion has, if anything, intensified in the wake of recent food scandals, and it is unfortunate that it has needed a crisis to bring us to this point.

I doubt that any member disagrees with the cabinet secretary when he says that Scotland produces some of the world's finest food and that our food and drink industry is a vital part of the Scottish economy. However, although we recognise the contribution of our farming sector and our fishermen and although we welcome initiatives that promote the best of what Scotland has to offer, the stark reality is that food banks are on the rise, the demand for food parcels has doubled and, according to Save the Children, one in six children goes to bed hungry every night.

In the debate in September, members discussed a food sector that is dominated by a few companies. In recent weeks, we have seen how such companies influence the food chain. The horsemeat scandal magnified the issue, implicating large companies that many people considered to be reputable, safe and trustworthy, such as Findus, Birds Eye, Tesco and Asda.

It is right that we challenge supermarkets about their supply chains and that we identify the need for more European Union action on labelling. However, the Scottish Government has responsibility for regulation and implementation in Scotland, and recent events force us to ask whether our system is robust enough to be able to restore consumers' confidence and trust. The restoration of trust would benefit industry as well as consumers.

We await final results from DNA testing and, given the weekly reports of a new company or product being implicated in relation to food fraud, it seems that we have not yet resolved the problem. It is important that we ask the hard questions. We can acknowledge the strong approach to traceability in Scottish farming and the positives of our food sector, but we cannot be complacent.

Since the cabinet secretary's statement on the horsemeat scandal, we have learned that two large catering companies, Brakes and Sodexo, which supply the public sector, have been supplying adulterated meat products. Questions about who supplied the companies with those products remain unanswered. Has the cabinet secretary been told who supplied the meat? If so, will he inform Parliament and consumers? If we are to aim for a transparent food chain and full traceability, we need to know where the processed meat originated. If we are to restore consumer confidence, we must ensure that all information is available and that there is full traceability to where the horsemeat originated.

In his statement to the Parliament, the cabinet secretary told us that food and drink contracts are awarded with regard to a balance between price and quality. We were told that quality is vital in the awarding of a contract and that the lowest price will not necessarily win the contract.

It has since been revealed that the Scotland Excel contract for school catering is awarding a weighting of 65 per cent to price compared with 20 per cent to quality. Cost is therefore given more than three times greater weighting than quality. That is not a balance. Was the cabinet secretary aware of the 65:20 ratio weighting when he made the statement to Parliament? Does he agree that it would have been better to have greater clarity for members and parents?

Recently, it was announced that the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment would join the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning in hosting a school meals summit. We now know that the average cost for a school meal is as low as £1.68. Although we can point towards local authorities such as East Ayrshire Council and its focus on local food sourcing, it is evident that local authorities have been encouraged towards national procurement contracts as a means to deliver best value.

Parents and carers should be able to send their children to school in confidence that the lunch that they eat is healthy, nutritious and exactly as described. For some children across Scotland, the school dinner is their only meal of the day. Transparency, traceability and quality must be higher on the agenda. We look forward to hearing more from the cabinet secretary on the outcomes of the recent summit.

We will probably never know how much horsemeat was in the food chain prior to the breakout of the scandal or how long the adulteration of food had been taking place. It has been clear throughout that the complexity of the supply chains and the relationships between companies have been difficult for people to understand. If the Food Safety Authority of Ireland

had not found traces of horsemeat DNA in beefburgers on 15 January, there is every chance that the recall of contaminated products would not be taking place.

The Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals believes that there are 70,000 horses unaccounted for in Northern Ireland. Through the close working of the USPCA and the Scottish SPCA, we know that Scottish ports have been used in the transportation of maltreated horses with fake passports. Was the cabinet secretary aware of the conviction and subsequent fine of a horse trader from Northern Ireland in November 2012 at Stranraer sheriff court for transporting maltreated horses with no or fake passports? In the current circumstances, that recent conviction is concerning. Did any information sharing take place on that conviction? Of course, hindsight is a wonderful thing, but we can perhaps now recognise that there is a greater need for agencies to share information. Sometimes the connections are not easy to identify.

A national debate started because of the horsemeat scandal, but that has grown into a much wider examination of food standards. Waitrose withdrew a product that was contaminated with pork at its Shettleston plant, which is a major concern for halal customers. There have also been more recent reports that banned mechanically separated meat is being used in the UK to count towards meat content. Only last weekend, questions were raised about the reliability and accuracy of meat dish labelling in restaurants.

Although many of the cases are about mislabelling, there are also public health concerns. George Fairgrieve, the food safety adviser at the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland, recently said:

"A worrying impact of the reduction in the number of inspections being carried out is that the opportunity for fraudulent activity increases and law-abiding traders are disadvantaged There are other vital areas of public health that must also be considered, for example preventing or dealing with outbreaks of E-coli O157 and Legionella."

The latest revelations show once again that it is the average customer who is being let down.

The FSA Scotland's consultation launch last week was welcome. We must take that as an opportunity to review what is working and what needs to be improved.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Does the member agree that cuts in the FSA—the cuts emanated from the previous Labour Government in London and the coalition Government has made further cuts—have made it more difficult for testing to take place, and that that

affects people as much in Scotland as it does in the rest of the UK?

Claire Baker: Since 2008, under the Scottish National Party's watch, we have seen a reduction in the number of meat inspectors and environmental health officers. Under the Scottish Government, cuts have been passed down to local authorities. We see the pressures that they face and, if we work in a light-touch regulatory system, those are seen as easy areas to make reductions.

Last week my colleague, Dr Simpson, asked questions about the FSA's funding. Although commitments were given on the stability of FSA funding, the new body will have additional responsibilities that will need to be fully supported.

To go back to Rob Gibson's comments, the debate should give us the opportunity to ask whether we have things right and to recognise where there are mistakes in the current system. Regardless of where those mistakes emanate from, the debate gives us a chance to ask whether we have the regulatory system right and whether we are delivering the best interests of the consumer.

A recent Unison Scotland report raises concerns about the drop in food sampling by a third, the reduction of meat inspectors by 50 per cent and the drop in the number of environmental health officers in local authorities. Some 56 per cent of environmental health officers say that their teams have had major cuts. A further 10 per cent describe cuts as severe and one member said:

"We have not submitted any samples for food in ten months!"

The issue is not only the reduction in staff numbers but the way in which the system operates. Random testing, unannounced visits and a system for whistleblowing are needed if we are to have integrity in the system.

A combination of lighter-touch regulation and financial pressures has resulted in fewer checks and balances. Professor Andrew Watterson of the University of Stirling described the risks:

"Declines in meat inspector numbers and local authority food safety officers, along with reduced food sampling, must contribute to a weakening of public health standards and the possibility of criminal abuses in the food system."

Of course, I recognise the FSA's work in recent weeks and the additional inspections that have been carried out. However, those are all after the event and I imagine that, even if there had been any problems, the premises would have got their houses in order for preannounced visits. Given what we now know, we need a robust assessment of whether the system provides us with confidence.

Food is a complex issue. The Parliament has been bold in other areas of public health, but our food policy is defined primarily by export levels and quality products. Those are both positive outcomes, but our food policy must work for everyone in Scotland. It is important for our economy, our health and addressing inequalities.

The Government motion does not address the challenges that we face in relation to food, the growing inequality around food and the crisis that has engulfed the sector throughout Europe. Those are the matters that the Parliament needs to address.

I move amendment S4M-05892.3, to leave out from “welcomes” to “policy and” and insert:

“supports the promotion of local produce and sourcing while recognising the need for affordability, particularly as the demand on food banks rises; notes the recent food scandal, including the adulteration of products with horsemeat, which has affected products sold throughout Scotland and, in learning lessons from this, believes that a robust regulatory regime is necessary to ensure the highest standard of food labelling and food safety to restore consumer confidence and trust; expresses concern that a school in Scotland was supplied with adulterated food through a national procurement contract; calls on the Scottish Government to outline what action it will take following the school meals summit; highlights the recent members’ survey by Unison that raises concerns over staff cuts, reductions in food sampling and the future of the meat inspection service and calls on the Scottish Government to outline its response to this; recognises the progress that has been made through the national food and drink policy but believes that there is no room for complacency as it”.

14:42

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I fear that Claire Baker is right that both this debate and the debates on food that are going on in different forms throughout the country have come out of yet another food scandal.

I used to be involved in agriculture daily. It was a source of some regret to me that the only time that politicians got really interested in food debates or fishing was when there was some big scandal going on. Therefore, I hope that this debate will be not only about the constructive points that members of all parties want to put to the minister about his food policies, public procurement and other aspects of the industry—which is really important for Scotland—but about taking a much more mature and reflective look at the wider picture that Claire Baker painted.

It is important that the debate not only concerns the export trade, important as that is—I pay tribute to the Scottish Government for the way that it has stepped up on that point—but encapsulates food in its widest possible sense, from the school plate right through to a whisky bottle that is sold in Japan.

There can be no greater illustration of that wider debate than the *Sunday Mail* report this weekend on the substituting of lamb with beef that it is claimed is widespread in Indian restaurants. I suspect that, if anything would bring home to most Scots the issue with the food that we eat, it would be the thought that the lamb on the menu of their local restaurant or takeaway of an Indian persuasion is, apparently, not all that it might be. That is the kind of issue that is strongly in their minds.

In that report, Professor Hugh Pennington, whom many members have come across in the past, went on to describe what needs to be done and to point out the gaps that currently exist. That only illustrates the point that the sector does not stand still and that the regulatory environment and the measures that are in place to protect the consumer and enhance the consumer’s experience need constantly to be refined and reconsidered.

Before I discuss local food procurement, I will raise one particular measure, which concerns fish. Fish is a healthy part of a balanced diet. Mackerel and herring are notably rich in omega-3 oils, which are extremely good for human health. That also applies to salmon. Therefore, food policy for Scotland should include a heavy focus on fish.

Right now, white-fish prices, for species such as haddock and cod, are at very low market levels. There are increasing white-fish imports from northern Europe—and indeed from across the world, to take Patrick Harvie’s point about food miles. Sixty per cent of all fish that is eaten in Scotland is bought in fish and chip shops, and yet those shops are buying from the Faroes, Iceland and Norway. Less than 10 per cent of fish caught from Scottish waters is used in Scottish fish and chip shops.

We need a net-to-plate strategy that stimulates Scottish and indeed UK demand for home-caught product. The Scottish Government should promote the provenance and quality of Scotland-caught seafood in the way that it is rightly doing with beef and other products.

Why is Seafish—a quango that is responsible for promoting fish as a healthy part of the diet—spending advertising money on promoting fish from Iceland and the Barents Sea? There is a leaflet, which some members might have seen, in fish and chip shops the length and breadth of the country in which Seafish highlights fish from Iceland and the Barents Sea. It must be pretty tough on the Scottish industry, which watches Iceland break international laws and catch mackerel illegally, to find that an industry promotion body that is based in Edinburgh is helping to sell Icelandic fish into our markets.

I ask the cabinet secretary to look into that. With the other devolved Administrations, he appoints the chairman of Seafish and approves the board. The position cannot be filled unless he agrees with the appointment, so the Scottish minister has great power to wield on behalf of the industry in the promotion of food policy. However, does that not serve to illustrate that too many people across all the numerous Government agencies and quangos are not pulling for the industry? Will he undertake to fix the issue and therefore help the Scottish white-fish industry?

The new Scottish food policy and procurement approach for schools and hospitals should include fish to a far greater level than before. That would mean more locally caught fish on more dinner tables and in work canteens, schools and hospitals; fairer prices for our boats; traceability for food contracts, including North Sea Marine Stewardship Council caught haddock, from net to dinner plate; and economic benefits from that approach to Scotland and indeed the UK.

I have raised in successive weeks at various question times the sourcing and procurement of frozen food by 28 of the 32 local authorities from Brakes, the company that Claire Baker mentioned earlier. Mince for school dinners comes from that company, but—I asked Michael Matheson specifically about this a fortnight ago—no minister has been able to tell me from which farm that mince is sourced.

Michael Matheson said that the Scotland Excel contract includes traceability as a criterion, so I am at a loss to understand why mums and dads, teachers and pupils as yet do not know where the mince comes from. They know that it comes from Brakes, but they do not know which farm it comes from. As the company is a Kent-based conglomerate, it is fair to assume that it sources from widely across this country and no doubt Ireland as well.

If the minister can tell the Parliament more about that when he winds up, that would be genuinely helpful. Scottish farmers must comply with the most exacting traceability standards in the world, and promotion bodies such as Scotland Food & Drink and Quality Meat Scotland use that positively, and rightly so. Surely farmers have every right to expect that, in return, their children in local schools will know where the mince in their school dinners comes from. They do not know that at present. When will that change?

I finish with a point about the statement that the Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities issued after the summit last week. It is a little disappointing that Mike Russell, the education secretary, is not here, as I am told that he was part of that. The statement does not mention sourcing or local produce. I hope that,

when he winds up the debate, the minister will take some time to go into what was achieved at the joint meeting, particularly on sourcing and local produce. It was right to have the meeting, and I agree with him about the need for it. However, what changes can be expected in schools, hospitals and the public sector, and will that work drive local food and local procurement?

I move amendment S4M-05892.1, to insert at end:

“, and further believes that reform in public sector food procurement is needed to place a greater importance on procuring quality produce from local suppliers.”

14:49

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Shelter, warmth and food are the basic things that keep us alive. According to psychologist Abraham Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs, just above those basic physiological requirements for life is the need for safety and freedom from fear. Food scares therefore affect some of the most basic needs that we have come to expect to be fulfilled in our modern, rich western society. A safe, secure supply of food is an essential prerequisite for a stable society, and Governments quite rightly place agriculture high up the list of priorities.

In this context, the recent horsemeat scandal has shocked us, not only because some horsemeat found its way into some products that are advertised as beef but because retailers and producers seemed to be entirely unable to guarantee the safety of their food, because they genuinely did not know where it had come from.

The meat processing industry is dominated by large companies selling meat as a commodity. In some cases, that is done with scant regard for the animal itself while it is alive, and little desire to ensure that it can be traced. Retailers and customers have no way of knowing where much of their processed food has come from, because tracing back through the convoluted supply chain would, quite frankly, boggle anybody's head.

That glimpse into the murky corporate meat industry is deeply unsettling and has led, as the Independent and Green amendment says, to some overdue attention. On the retail side, the sector in the UK is highly concentrated. The big-four supermarket firms control three quarters of our grocery market, which means that they can largely dictate the prices that are paid to producers, even if that puts people out of business. We saw a graphic demonstration of that last year, when dairy farmers across the UK had had enough. The supermarkets and other milk buyers pushed prices down and thousands of farmers were going to be forced into the red. Farmers could not find a fair price on the market,

so they were forced to collaborate and protest. Short-term goals to prevent price cuts were achieved. The challenge that we face is to stop a small number of players dominating the market and jeopardising the rural economy and the welfare of animals, and putting people out of business unnecessarily.

Scotland's food and drink policy should be focused on supporting small and independent businesses to play a greater role in our retail and supply chain. In the supply chain, that is not a seismic shift. The current food policy document recognises that the supply chain is dominated by small firms with one to 10 employees. Supporting those businesses must be the core of our policy. What the milk protests demonstrated is that to do that we need to support more diversity in the processing and retail sector.

We learned today that Diageo plans to restructure its global supply chain, risking thousands of jobs in Scotland. A sector that is based largely on small businesses provides resilience against large-scale job losses in such situations.

Of course, the picture is complicated and there are different issues for different parts of the industry. We are not selling a panacea, but it is clear that the dominance of a few prevents the maximum number of people in Scotland from benefiting.

I have mentioned the Soil Association's food for life scheme in the chamber previously. The Government's support for the scheme is welcome, with one in 10 schools in Scotland being assured of the provenance of the healthy food that they provide for school dinners. Procurement in East Ayrshire Council has led the way in Scottish schools. Others, such as those in Edinburgh, are attempting to catch up. The Soil Association is working with Currie and Buckstone schools, Clovenstone care home, St John's hospital in Livingston—which serves 1 million meals a year—and the University of Edinburgh's Pollock halls, to get them buying local. Indeed, Pollock halls achieved the bronze award in January—my congratulations to those involved.

Our food policy should ensure that buying local is the default choice for public sector procurement and the easy choice for others. In Copenhagen, 75 per cent of food that is consumed in public kitchens is organic and locally sourced. We should make organic conversion and maintenance one of the Scotland rural development programme's national targets when the consultation comes out in the spring. Among many other benefits, such a target would help to address serious concerns about the health of honey bees and other pollinators.

There is a huge amount to learn from the transition movement, which is equipping people with the know-how to reclaim spaces in the city, grow their own food, cook affordable and healthy meals and enjoy doing so. The community garden in the Royal Edinburgh hospital has become a huge success that is enjoyed by many groups. It is encouraging to see movement in NHS Lothian towards replicating that success, with Midlothian community hospital garden now open, too. For hospital staff, the links between food and health are easy to see. The gardens teach people what eating healthy, nutritious food can do to improve health and wellbeing.

The Independent and Green amendment talks explicitly of food policy playing its part in reducing obesity and improving health. Manufacturers have a huge amount of power over our diets and they should be doing more to cut down the amount of salt, fat and the additive content of processed meat products, among other products.

It is not fair to just encourage people to buy better-quality cuts of meat. That excludes large numbers of people who simply cannot afford to do so.

Top of the list on the excellent Fife diet's manifesto is the soup test. Fife diet would like every child to leave school able to cook a cheap, nutritious bowl of soup. Who here could disagree with that?

Our food policy should have at its heart the provision of nourishing people in Scotland, not an export strategy. It should promote a food and drink sector based on small independent companies to ensure that production remains on a human scale and provides the resilience and sustainability that we need to have true confidence in our food again.

I move amendment S4M-05892.2, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"recognises the scandal that has hit the food industry across Europe in recent weeks and welcomes the overdue attention now being paid to the nature of the modern globalised food chain; considers that the growth of an industrialised and corporately controlled food chain has contributed to a fundamentally unhealthy and unsustainable food culture; believes that Scotland's food and drink policy must recognise this crisis and begin to break the domination of multinational companies in the food system, ensure that small and independent businesses play a greater role in Scotland's food and drink supply chain, rebuild the knowledge and skills related to growing and cooking food that have been undermined in recent years and ensure that affordable, nutritious and locally-sourced food is available to buy across the country; recognises the important role that healthy food could play in improving Scotland's health and reducing obesity, and congratulates the multitude of community-driven initiatives underway throughout the country promoting affordable, healthy and sustainable food."

14:55

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

It is a long time since I have spoken in a debate involving food and farming issues. In fact, my background as a rabid, running-dog capitalist dairy farmer in the 1980s and 1990s left me in a position where some of my views on food markets and their regulation may not be entirely popular with other members of the Parliament or of the farming industry. Let us brush over that, however, and start to consider where we are today and what we need to say about Scotland's food production and the quality that it can provide.

As we have discovered, ministers come and go in the Parliament under various Governments but, amazingly, in the field of agriculture and environment, we have had only two ministers in the entire history of the Parliament. One was Ross Finnie, who quickly established a reputation for himself as someone who understood what was going on in the rural economy and the farming industry. Subsequently, following the change of Government, the arrival of Richard Lochhead delivered a young man with a certain past reputation, but one who was well able to establish himself as a spokesman for Scotland's food and farming industry both at home and abroad.

It is important that we recognise the contribution that the Parliament has made and the responsible view that successive ministers, and indeed spokesmen from other parties, have taken in ensuring that we do all that we can to promote the food and farming industry to the best of our ability. However, that is occasionally challenged. The recent problem associated with the contamination of beef supplies with horsemeat has served to focus our industry. In this country, we have a tremendous record as exporters of high-quality food and produce. The minister mentioned the whisky industry, and I am now aware of a new fact: exports amount to 40 bottles a second, which is an extraordinary sum and is despite the fact that Jamie McGrigor and I are working as hard as we can to keep as much of it at home as possible.

The issue of how we exploit our produce should and does remain a concern at Government level and at party level. My party has had a number of eat local campaigns, not least the one that was sponsored by John Scott, the gentleman who is now occupying the chair, during his time as party spokesman on food and farming. He promoted the eat local campaign, on which we worked very hard. The Government has pursued similar projects, and the think local project is a key element of policy.

We must never forget—I remind certain members who have already spoken in the debate—that the global influence of Scottish food and produce is equally important. Scottish farmers

currently enjoy a higher price for their product because it has a quality and a reputation, and it can therefore command a premium in international markets. Even in areas in which we do not sell directly into commodity markets across the world, prices for commodities such as grain are higher in Scotland today because of markets being influenced by countries such as China. The global commodity market, regardless of whether we sell into it, has a key role in determining high or reasonable prices for Scottish product.

That must be balanced against the need for affordability. Just a few days ago, a story appeared in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* relating to information that had become available about the cost of preparing a school meal. I understand that Aberdeenshire Council disputes the figures that were used, but the suggestion was made that a school meal in Aberdeenshire costs £1.68 to prepare and present. In this day and age, with prices as they are, I have serious concerns about how a meal can be prepared for £1.68. I will pursue that matter with Aberdeenshire Council. The question remains: can it be done and can it be done legitimately? My concerns remain.

However, the issue of horsemeat and its inclusion in beef products in this country does not require us to take radical or excessive action in terms of regulation. I doubt that more regulation is required. Regulation is already very strong and has been very effective in keeping high-quality produce in the marketplace and on our supermarket shelves here in Scotland. The problem is not the regulation itself but the failure to enforce and police existing regulation properly.

The problem that we face with the horsemeat scandal is one of criminality, whereby produce has been moving across borders unregulated and included in products that have come to this country but which should have been properly policed in their country of origin or country of production. Therefore, the effective implementation of regulation is more important than simply throwing the baby out with the bath water.

It concerns me that in debates in the chamber opportunities continue to be taken to talk down the quality of Scottish produce and food. Sadly, I find it repetitive that the Green party seems to think that this is another opportunity to do that.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I am coming to the end of my remarks.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Alex Johnstone: The idea that somehow buying better-quality cuts of meat might be an

answer to this problem shows a misunderstanding of how the beef industry works. Of course, the best-quality cuts of meat and some of the poorest-quality cuts of meat come from the same carcasses. That realisation is the reason why McDonald's—a chain of burger restaurants that some members might be acquainted with—decided some years ago to take advantage of the opportunity to ensure that its product contained the best-quality meat available. That is why McDonald's has not been implicated in any of the recent problems.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be closing, please.

Alex Johnstone: I believe in high-quality produce from Scotland at cost-effective prices. I believe that this Government, if it is careful, is still steering the correct path.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excellent. Thank you.

15:02

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): The county of Angus is very much at the centre of Scotland's flourishing food industry, from soft fruit to smokies to popular preserves. The part of the country that I am fortunate to represent contributes in good measure to that success story. However, in keeping with the Scottish Government's ambitions, there will be no resting on laurels—the plan is to do even better, whatever challenges might arise.

Angus has a longstanding reputation in traditional forms of agriculture, but increasingly in recent years it has come to the fore as the focal point of Scotland's burgeoning soft-fruit sector. At the heart of that lies the Angus Growers organisation, which has 18 members growing about 1,000 acres of strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries. Recently, it began planting cherry trees, which will begin to bear fruit in a couple of years. Although based in Arbroath, the organisation has members in Aberdeenshire, Perthshire and Fife as well as Angus. It has involvement from Oldmeldrum down to Crail and west to Blairgowrie.

The growers have more than 200 people working for them all year round and up to 2,000 seasonal workers between March and November. All told, they sell over £30 million of fruit a year, all packed into punnets ready for sale locally on the farms themselves or through five major UK supermarkets through their marketing agent Angus Soft Fruits, another Angus-farmer-owned business.

Angus Growers members are very much at the forefront of research and plant breeding, having

developed their own new premium variety of strawberry, the Ava Rosa, which is being introduced to the market in commercial quantities this year. They also work closely with the James Hutton Institute on research in looking to ensure that Scotland's soft fruit sector continues to progress in the most appropriate way. They have for example developed the Good Natured Fruit brand, producing and selling pesticide and residue-free fruit that is grown on the farms using biological control of pest and disease techniques that have been developed in house. They have done that principally because it is the right thing to do for the environment, but the other driver is need, given the declining bee populations, which Alison Johnstone touched on earlier.

To maintain pollination, Angus Growers members are actively planting suitable habitats around polytunnels that will encourage bees to remain in the area and breed. They are asking local beekeepers to bring in their hives and they are buying in bees.

Without bees, growers suffer not only a reduced yield but unevenly shaped berries. The soft fruit sector is on the case but, at the same time, it is—understandably—taking a keen interest in developments such as possible EU restrictions on the use of neonicotinoids and how the Government will respond to that. As I have suggested, the leading part that Arbroath is playing in the growth of Scotland's soft fruit industry is perhaps not as widely recognised or appreciated as it might be, although I know that the cabinet secretary very much understands the situation, as he has visited the set-up in Arbroath.

Another contribution from the town of Arbroath to Scotland's food industry that is perhaps not fully understood comes from preserves. How many members are aware that the well-known Mrs Bridges line is manufactured in Arbroath by Mackays? Mackays makes jams and marmalades using traditional copper pans that are sourced from Dundee. The strawberries, raspberries and blackberries that are used in its products come from farms in Angus, Perthshire and Fife. Products that sport the traditional Mackays tartan brand are to be found in three supermarket chains in the UK and five chains in Scotland.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I am disappointed that Graeme Dey has not yet mentioned the famous Forfar bridie, which I would have thought was the most important thing to get on the record. That is a fantastic product that is made with local produce.

Graeme Dey: I must tell Bruce Crawford that I am being entirely parochial, and Forfar is not in my constituency.

Beyond these islands, Mackays exports preserves to 50 countries worldwide.

Of course, from our neck of the woods comes perhaps the most renowned foodstuff of Angus—the smokie. It is generally referred to as the Arbroath smokie, but it actually hails from the nearby coastal village of Auchmithie, which is about 3 miles north of the town. Local legend has it that the smokie came about because of a fire in a store one night, which destroyed barrels of haddock that was preserved in salt. The following morning, the locals came to clean up the ruin and discovered that haddock that had cooked inside the burned barrels was not only edible but quite tasty. That might be a romanticised version of how the smokie came about, but I prefer that version.

Arbroath's connection with the smokie comes from the end of the 19th century, when the local fishing industry was in terminal decline. Arbroath town council offered the fisher folk of Auchmithie land in an area of the town that was known as the fit o the toon and the use of the harbour. The offer was too good to turn down and, all these years on, a number of businesses that are located around the harbour are producing Arbroath smokies and making them widely available through major supermarkets in the UK and worldwide via the internet. Since 2004, the smokie has enjoyed protected status.

I recognise entirely that I could be accused of making a largely parochial contribution to the debate, but I hope that I will not be the last member to highlight the role that their area plays in the success story that is Scotland's food and drink industry. The industry is as nationwide as it is wide ranging in nature. From almost every corner of our country comes a contribution. From the Parliament should come the message today that we welcome and will continue to support those contributions. The horsemeat scandal has focused attention on food and served to remind us all of the importance of having the appropriate safeguards in place, but we should not for one minute lose sight of one simple fact—when it comes to food and drink, the made in Scotland branding is respected the world over, and with good reason.

I conclude by highlighting the work of the Royal Highland Education Trust. The cabinet secretary mentioned the importance of educating young people about healthy food and where food comes from. In Angus and across Scotland, the RHET does fantastic work on that. I hope that members will join me in congratulating it on that.

15:08

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I, too, am glad to take part in the Scottish Government's

debate on food policy, not least because food production is an important part of the economy of Dumfries and Galloway and because the link between tourism and local produce is increasingly being realised. Dumfries and Galloway produces a fifth of Scotland's beef cattle and a sixth of our sheep. Our mild and—admittedly—somewhat damp climate is greatly suited to rearing high-quality livestock.

The cabinet secretary mentioned savour the flavours—a project that is partly funded by the Scottish Government and the European Community through the LEADER 2007 to 2013 programme. I and others who represent Dumfries and Galloway have spoken in debates about its success and I make no apologies for doing so again.

Savour the flavours supports Dumfries and Galloway's food and drink industry through working with producers, chefs, manufacturers, farmers markets, events organisers, schools and consumers to raise awareness of local produce. Dave Smith, who runs the Buccleuch Arms hotel in Moffat, revived the organisation in 2009. Since then, Dave, his project manager Liz Ramsay and the savour the flavours committee have facilitated events, festivals and work with young people to promote the region's fine produce. Savour the flavours is in its last year of LEADER funding and I hope that further funding can be identified to support this worthwhile project—that is a bit of a hint, cabinet secretary.

The horsemeat issue has presented an opportunity to our local producers, retailers and outlets to promote their products. Savour the flavours issued a press release last week launching its “Neigh horse meat here” information campaign and I was one of the politicians from across the different parties who supported its Twitter campaign to commit to purchasing locally produced meat.

That commitment was not difficult for me because I already purchase locally produced meat. I live within walking distance of a busy farm and farm shop where I can purchase free-range beef, pork and lamb that is reared on the premises. Indeed, if I wished, I could undertake a farm tour to visit the belted Galloways, blackface sheep and spotted pigs that I might consume at some point in the future. I have no need to fear that any equine has found its way into my mince or sausages and I can be sure of the quality of the food that I am buying. The products are around the same price as the products that I would buy in a supermarket.

I sound a note of caution on that point about prices, because I would be buying the top-of-the-range products in the supermarket, too. I can afford it on an MSP's salary and my husband and I

like food and we like cooking, so we are happy to pay the premium in order to get the best. However, not everyone has the luxury of being able to afford to do that. During the horsemeat scandal and during discussions about the research that was published last week on the health risks of consuming too much processed meat, some commentators have seemed to blame the poor for the food choices that they are forced to make, for the deceit that has been perpetrated by some parts of the international food supply chain, and indeed for the consequences for their own health.

I can peruse the range of top-quality products that are offered by my local producer or by my supermarket, but that is not true of all my constituents. What about the family that is about to be hit by the bedroom tax next month, the disabled person who has lost the disability living allowance and has not been transferred to the personal independence payment, or the working parent who has lost their tax credits due to rule changes that disallow those who work fewer than 27 hours a week?

The Scottish Government's 2009 national food and drink policy quoted figures from some years ago—from 2005-06—that indicated that the poorest decile of UK households spent 15 per cent of their income on food and non-alcoholic beverages and that the second poorest decile spent 17 per cent of their income on those items. I can only imagine that the proportion of their income that is spent on those items by such households today is significantly higher.

The other criticism that is levelled at consumers concerns the use of convenience foods and pre-prepared meals. I heard a rather posh-sounding older man on the radio the other day who made me shout at the radio—he said, “Young women nowadays don’t know how to cook!” I do not understand why it is the responsibility of women to cook. Also, people use convenience foods because they are time poor and sometimes because they are cash poor. Home cooking can be perceived as time consuming, expensive and difficult. That perception is reinforced by many of the television cookery programmes and competitions, in which ingredients are expensive, recipes are complex and the presentation is a work of art.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I am grateful that the member has taken an intervention.

I agree that too many cookery programmes show meals that very few people will ever learn anything from. However, does the member accept that most people these days do not know how to cook? The skill has been lost through the generations. I am not commenting on whether

women should be doing the cooking—most of us have not been taught how to cook.

Elaine Murray: Along those lines, I would like to see greater concentration on the cooking of healthy but inexpensive dishes—dishes that can be frozen for those whose time is under pressure. My time is often under pressure, but I freeze food. We need to concentrate more on that or on how to make good food go further, so that the higher-quality but more expensive products can be afforded by those who are on lower incomes.

The cabinet secretary spoke of the importance of children being educated about how their food is produced and cooked—that emphasis is welcome. I saw an excellent example of that when I visited the Scottish Agricultural College in Dumfries with pupils from Annan academy.

What young people see at home has the greatest influence, and I think that more needs to be done to support and enable all our people to enjoy a quality diet—a diet in which local produce plays a strong part. There is a message that we need to get out there, and doing that is not just the responsibility of Government. We need to make good food accessible to everybody. That is an equalities issue, as well as a quality issue.

15:14

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I was delighted to hear that the Government had chosen the subject of food policy for today’s debate, and for a number of reasons.

First, I am one of those privileged individuals who is lucky enough to be able to say that I live to eat rather than eating to live. I am a self-confessed foodie, a bit like Orson Welles, although I am perhaps not the same shape yet. He once said:

“Ask not what you can do for your country. Ask what’s for lunch.”

JRR Tolkien also said:

“If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.”

I get where they are coming from. In fact, I am pretty jealous of people like Richard Bath and Ron Mackenna, who are food critics, and I get a real buzz out of going to food shows whenever I get the chance.

Secondly, and more important, I am hugely excited about the Scottish food industry’s potential and the fact that today’s debate gives us the chance to celebrate the fact that Scotland has the best quality food store in the world.

Thirdly, I frankly want to boast about the truly fantastic food businesses that operate in and around the Stirling area.

Fourthly, the debate provides us with the opportunity to recognise that, although Scotland is blessed with quality food products, it is not acceptable that in the 21st century in this rich country of ours food banks are needed to feed our poor. That need is increasing and it will be made worse, as Elaine Murray said, because of welfare reform.

Lastly, as has been so vividly demonstrated by the enough food for everyone if campaign, Scotland must play its part in ensuring that the 800 million people who live in hunger on this planet get enough to eat, and in ridding the world of the shameful statistic that more than 2 million children die each year simply because they cannot get enough to eat.

I will get back to the main reason why we are here today, which is to celebrate our fantastic food products, and the fact that the sales of Scottish food have rocketed in recent years. Of course, that has not happened by accident. As Alex Johnstone did, I commend the Scottish Government and Richard Lochhead for showing the leadership that has grown our reputation for quality around the world. Wherever around the world consumers see Scotland on the label, they are seeing the stamp of quality.

I also like the way in which we promote our products by playing to our key strengths at home and abroad on premium, strong and internationally competitive brands, on our reputation for naturally healthy food, and on the provenance, quality, authenticity and trustworthiness of Scottish products. The fact is that when quality and consistency are essential, Scotland delivers. For example, our farmers are renowned for producing some of the finest red meat—beef and lamb—products in the world.

We are leading the world in the export trade, and also domestically. The Scotbeef plant on the outskirts of Stirling has impressive state-of-the-art slaughter facilities and processes approximately 2,500 cattle or 15,000 lambs a week. On Saturday, I was pleased to pay a visit to a fantastic local butcher in Cambusbarron in my constituency. It is run by Michael More, and the purpose of my visit was to demonstrate my backing for Scotland's independent butchers and farmers and the quality of their produce.

The big supermarkets are now scrabbling to do all that they can to demonstrate the traceability of their meat products, but the good local butchers have been carrying out that good practice all along. Michael More sources the majority of his beef and lamb from Caledonian Marts, which is a local farmers co-operative in the Stirling and Oban areas. Again, on Saturday—and I am about to allude to my diet and what I said earlier about the Forfar bridie—I purchased one of Michael's

famous steak pies in the sure and certain knowledge that I was buying a premium product of the highest quality and, my goodness, I was right.

If there are colleagues in the chamber who, like me, like nothing better than a good pie—members will notice a certain theme in what I am talking about—they should know that I recently lodged a motion to recognise the success of Cameron Skinner from Kippen at the recent 14th world Scotch pie championships. If anyone is ever passing near to Kippen, I assure them that stopping off to purchase Cameron's pies or sausages will be well worth the effort.

As I said earlier, I like to go to food shows, and when I am there I always try to buy the fabulous products of Edenmill Farm, which is run by the Gibson family from a real butcher's shop and smokery near Blanefield. Of course, the Stirling area has many other producers of top-quality products across the range of foodstuffs, but I have had time to highlight only a few of those today. The Deanston and Glengoyne distilleries—both are in my constituency—also contribute to our remarkable export record as a whisky area, and because of that I am quite delighted about what they do.

However, I would not like to miss the chance to recognise the Mhor group, which is a unique family-run business based in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park. From the establishment of the fabulous Monachyle Mhor hotel 20 years ago on the banks of the stunning Loch Voil—known as "The Daddy Cool of the Trossachs"—to the creation of Mhor fish, Mhor bread, Mhor farm and Mhor to your door, the company has simply continued to produce the finest food and hospitality that Scotland can offer.

In closing, I want to recognise the fantastic efforts made by the members of Forth Environment Link to promote and encourage local food growing and consumption. I admire their work hugely and I know just how hard they work at getting their message across. How do I know that? I was involved in setting up one of Scotland's first ever farmers markets—in Perth—when I was a council leader. I know how hard it was to get that established and put on a firm footing, but such markets now happen across Scotland and I am delighted by that.

I will close with one quick quote. I began by quoting some historical figures and I will end with a contemporary quotation:

"What I've enjoyed most, though, is meeting people who have a real interest in food and sharing ideas with them. Good food is a global thing and I find that there is always something new and amazing to learn—I love it!"

So says Jamie Oliver, and so do I.

15:21

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I add my condolences to those of the cabinet secretary on the deaths of the researchers from the James Hutton Institute, the Macaulay part of which is in my constituency.

I am delighted that today's debate seeks to highlight how important the production of food and drink is to the Scottish economy. The food and drink sector has grown since the SNP Government made it one of the key sectors that Scottish Enterprise should focus on in order to grow the Scottish economy. We should recognise both the success that has been had to date and the progress that can still be made.

The north-east makes a big contribution to that effort. According to Grampian food and drink forum, the region contributes 14 per cent of Scotland's agriculture output, 26 per cent of its cereal value and 11 per cent of total Scottish food and drink employment. In particular, we should praise the contribution of the primary producers, such as the farmers who in all weathers—it has, let us face it, been pretty grim recently—produce high-quality beef cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry, fruit and milk. Without them, none of this success story would occur.

There is still some work to do to convince hill farmers and crofters that it is worth their while—and their bank balances—to increase stocking levels. I know that in the beef sector, for example, McIntosh Donald in my constituency can process all the cattle that it can get, mainly for sale to Tesco. On that subject, I thank the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth for all their help in securing a new buyer for that and other parts of the Vion business.

However, I will focus my remarks on the contribution that fish and fish products make to this success story. Aberdeen city and shire remains the most important fishing region in Scotland and the UK, with more than £100 million-worth of fish per annum landed at the port of Peterhead. Others may focus on the farmed fish market, but I will concentrate on the fish brought to our shores—again, in all weathers—by our fishermen. In recent years, the fishing sector has experienced a lot of pain, with quotas, cuts to days at sea and the decommissioning of vessels. Traditionally, the fishermen have landed fish and expected the merchants to buy their produce and find markets for it. Now at last, I think, we are beginning to see more collaboration and co-operation between the harvesters and sellers. However, as Tavish Scott mentioned, the prices at the quayside can still be very volatile.

Only last week, those of us who attend the North East Scotland Fisheries Development Partnership were informed by John Wallace of Peterhead harbour of the rock-bottom prices for white fish at the port. That is partly because of the large amount of cod and haddock in the traditional fishing grounds, which seems to herald a return to the stocking levels that we have known in the past. That is good news if we can deliver security of supply, given that the Norwegian fishing industry, backed by its Government, is making a concerted effort to grab much of the supermarket market in the UK and our markets abroad. Our merchants are fighting hard and successfully to retain those markets.

Today, much store is set by adding value, and I would like to highlight the success story of Joseph Robertson (Aberdeen) Ltd in my constituency. Joseph Robertson used mainly to bread fish, but now it does that and much more. It supplies Christmas party food, among other foods, to Morrisons and other supermarkets. This year, it has been selected as one of 35 businesses to take part in the Asda supplier development academy 2013, which is backed by Scotland Food & Drink. Ten of the companies that participated in the programme in 2011 have seen their sales go up by up to 330 per cent, so the selection of Joseph Robertson to take part in the scheme is a great accolade, and I wish it every success.

Aberdeen's contribution to the growing food and drink market includes the contribution of the Rowett institute of nutrition and health, which has been working with Marks and Spencer, among others, in creating nutritious, healthy ready meals.

As Elaine Murray said, following the horsemeat scandal, last week the focus turned to the dangers of eating too much processed meat. As I listened to "Any Questions?" at the weekend, I was horrified that the only alternatives to the full English breakfast that the panellists could come up with were muesli and porridge. There was no mention of kippers, Arbroath smokies, kedgerie made with smoked haddock or even scrambled egg with small pieces of smoked salmon. It is clear that we have a huge education task to undertake on the variety of breakfasts that we produce, never mind the other meals in the day. The good thing about fish is that there is very little waste.

As someone from Banffshire, I cannot fail to mention the contribution that whisky makes to the success of Scotland's food and drink. Whisky exports reached a record high of £4.23 billion in 2011, which represented an increase of 23 per cent from 2010 and 50 per cent from 2007. New distilleries are being opened and existing ones are working at full pelt. As a youngster, I was always made aware of the value of the whisky in the bonds around Keith, which, when taxed, was

higher than the value of the gold in the Bank of England—that was before Gordon Brown sold off most of it.

We may moan about our weather, but the temperate climate and the abundance of rain for water for whisky and grass for our milk cows—milk being the raw ingredient for ice cream, in the production of which we in the north-east are so successful—mean that we are in an excellent position. Our excellent reputation for a clean environment and for producing high-quality foodstuffs can only be built on further.

I support the Government motion.

15:28

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

Last week, in a restaurant that is situated just off the Fife coastal path, I tried beetroot ice cream. I admit that it will not be my first choice for a cone when the weather improves, but it was locally sourced and well made. Although that seems flippant, there is a serious point behind the story. I recognise that I am lucky in having the opportunity to try such food. That taps into the spirit of the Scottish Government's motion, which is very much a celebration of Scotland's famous larder.

It is true that Scotland's food is excellent. Diverse producers continue to produce high-quality and innovative food. The Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Bill that is making its way through the Parliament has emphasised the importance of our food and drink industries to the economy. While it is undeniable that events such as the Ryder cup and the Commonwealth games will be opportunities for visitors from around the globe to enjoy and appreciate that food, the motion could just as easily be one about Scotland's tourism industry. I recognise the Scottish Government's wish to be seen publicly to support our food industry, especially in light of the meat supply chain scandals that we debated only recently in the chamber, but today's motion ignores many of the important developments in the past few weeks and months. As my colleagues have outlined, it is those developments that Labour's amendment seeks to highlight.

The Scottish Government's 2010 policy leaflet from the conference on Scotland's national food and drink policy, the apparent success of which policy the motion welcomes so warmly, states:

"It's our profound belief that every single person in Scotland should be able to access healthy, affordable and sustainable food."

Those are wise words, but I believe that that statement sums up the problems facing many of our communities today—that is, too many people are not able to access healthy food that is affordable and available in their neighbourhood.

I have spoken previously of my visit to the food bank in Dunfermline. Since September 2012, the 40 volunteers there have distributed more than 1,750kg of food. That is a lot of food going to many people who simply cannot afford to eat. We must face up to the reality that many of Scotland's consumers have difficult decisions to make when doing their weekly shop. When they buy food either to feed themselves or their whole family, they must be able to trust what is on the label, whatever their budget.

The recent Unison members' survey rightly highlighted concerns about the future of our food safety services. Environmental health officers and other food safety officials have seen their numbers drop over the past few years; in the case of meat inspectors, their numbers have been cut by half. In the current climate, after the horsemeat scandal, it seems fairly obvious even to a lay bystander that any scheduled inspections in the meat processing and food industry will not find major flaws. Random sampling and random inspections of food production facilities should be kept up as much as possible. I look forward to hearing the Scottish Government's response on that issue.

The question about trust is repeated when we look at the procurement contracts that are in place. The food that reaches the Scottish population through many of our care services, schools and hospitals is one step removed from the marketplace. In such circumstances, the consumer is not able to go into a shop, look at the label and make their own decision about the produce on offer; they are presented with a finished meal that they must hope is from good-quality correctly labelled produce. It is therefore vital that the public services that source their food through procurement contracts are able to make decisions on more than just a cost basis. The quality of the produce on offer should be weighted against the price; if possible, the economic benefits for the wider community, such as local supply chains, should also be considered by the purchasing body.

It is clear that food access and affordability is a complex issue. As part of the development process for the Scottish Government's food policy, the leadership forum's report in 2009 noted:

"There is a real danger that a food and drink policy looks like an attempt to lecture or coerce communities."

It seems to me that in today's debate there is a real danger that the Scottish Government is forgetting those communities who would welcome the opportunity to be able to access a healthy diet for themselves and their families at a price that they can afford. We should certainly celebrate Scotland's international reputation for high-quality food and drink and the huge contribution that it makes to the Scottish economy, but that should

never be at the expense of ignoring the difficult day-to-day reality facing families, schoolchildren, hospital patients and care residents in accessing quality, affordable food.

15:33

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): Since the beginning of time, two key items have sustained mankind: water and food. Both are basic to life on this planet and more and more we have to ensure that, first, we have plenty of each, and that each of those important resources is fit for human consumption.

Scotland's key food and drink sector is vital to the Scottish economy, producing quality food, supporting jobs and promoting Scotland abroad. As I have previously intimated, I worked in the grocery trade for some years. When the customer buys food from any shop or supermarket, they should be confident that all the food that they buy is what it says on the tin or the packet purchased. We should have confidence in what we eat, but the past few weeks have knocked customers' confidence in the food that they eat.

I do not intend to go into the debate of who is to blame, but as a consumer I now expect every retailer and food supplier to check exactly what they are supplying to supermarkets and shops, in order to regain customer confidence. I know that all supermarkets in Scotland intend to supply quality products and I am sure that they are looking at their supply chains—and rightly so.

Sourcing food locally is a way to ensure that you know what you are buying and what you are feeding your family, and it should be encouraged. In every town or village there is a local butcher and a local fruiter, and there are local suppliers of excellent Scottish produce, as has been stated by Graeme Dey and Bruce Crawford.

In my village of New Stevenston, near Motherwell, we have an excellent local butcher, John Morrison and Son, who supplies excellent Scottish beef and butcher products that you can be confident have been locally sourced and meet customer requirements. Bruce Crawford should sample John Morrison's steak pie, which is excellent—I will bring one in for him.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I want to highlight the importance of local butchers. I saw a statistic that in the UK in the past 20 years, the number of local butchers has dropped from 30,000 to 6,000. Does Richard Lyle agree that it is vital that the Scottish Government and anyone else do anything that they can to help increase that number?

Richard Lyle: The Scottish Government has done well with the small business bonus. I encourage people to shop at their local shops.

Supermarkets are, of course, where most people do their shopping and they now need to ensure that they are sourcing products that customers require—major stores should take note. Food tastes have changed over the decades and the general public enjoy many products from overseas. Supermarkets must ensure that they know fully what is in those products. Supermarkets should also pay farmers a fair price for their produce, to ensure that farmers are encouraged to stay on the land and produce the amounts of food that will be required in the coming decades. Fair pricing is also crucial in the food industry.

Scotland's red meat and fisheries sector continues to grow and grow. In 2011, turnover in Scotland's food and drink industry grew by 6 per cent. Gross value was up by 9 per cent and exports hit an all-time high of £5.4 billion—a 10 per cent increase compared to the previous year.

I compliment the food industry in Scotland and I compliment the cabinet secretary who, to my mind, has been a major supporter of the Scottish food and drink industry. Richard Lochhead believes in the food and drink industry and it certainly shows at any function that he and I have had the opportunity to attend.

The Scottish food industry has an annual turnover of almost £12 billion and supports almost 114,000 jobs in Scotland. The output from the beef, sheep and pig sectors has grown for the fourth year in a row. In 2011, beef production was the largest sector of Scottish farming, the sheep sector grew by 7 per cent and the pig sector grew by 15 per cent. Nearly £250 million-worth of Scotch beef was sold last year. Scotch beef and lamb and specially selected pork brands are currently underpinned by six quality assurance schemes, which cover areas including farm feed, haulage, auction markets and primary processors.

The success of the Scottish fisheries sector over the past few years is also impressive and we should also support that industry. Aquaculture production and salmon and freshwater fisheries are estimated to be worth £650 million. Scottish fisheries employ more than 2,000 people and support around 4,000 upstream and downstream jobs. Scotland is the largest producer of farmed Atlantic salmon in the EU and it produces more than half of the UK's farmed trout.

Scotland is, I suggest, an excellent producer of quality food, both farm and sea. We lead the world in quality products and we should take every advantage to promote our quality products throughout the world. I note the cabinet secretary's and the Minister for Public Health's recent

announcements on future food quality standards and the food agency, and I support those proposals.

Our food production should be regularly tested and quality assured. I am sure that it will be and that everyone will be confident that all Scottish food is exactly what it says on the packet or the tin: quality Scottish produce. I support the motion.

15:39

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I draw members' attention to my membership of Slow Food International, the Soil Association and the Scottish Crofting Federation.

I note that the motion makes it clear that we should build on

"progress through increasing the number of consumers at home and abroad who enjoy and celebrate Scotland's famous larder".

That does not mean that they all need to eat fillet steaks; rather, it means that they need to know that they can trust the food that they eat and that we have much to offer here. That means that our Government must ensure that Scotland gets the best deal that it can from the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. The convergence criteria for an independent Scotland would allow us to spend more money on supporting those industries in this country. That is why our food policy would benefit from independence.

Obviously, sustainable economic growth has a contribution to make through exports, which are very welcome. They fund growth in the home market, which is the life-blood of how people live in Scotland. Healthy activity, healthy diets and food security all flow from a food policy in which we encourage the highest-quality produce.

I will dwell on a couple of problems. I am delighted that there will be a new Scottish food body that will be a key regulator in future. It is essential that it takes up where the splitting up of the Food Standards Agency south of the border leaves off. The new body will deliver the functions that are currently carried out by the UK-wide FSA on food and feed safety and standards, nutrition, food labelling, meat inspection policy, and operational delivery.

The horsemeat scandal has left us with a labelling problem. Scotland wants to feed strongly into how the EU covers labelling and sourcing. We should be aware that there are forms of labelling that are far too lax and that the horsemeat issue is a labelling scandal. There is also a question about how genetic modification has been partly accepted in the EU and the threat that it could be to the

natural produce of Scotland—that must be taken on board.

I will make a couple of points about the importance of the development of food. Some of what I have just said was mentioned in a previous debate, but this was not. There are safe, conventional alternatives in the market to potatoes, corn, soya and many other products that can be grown around the world without our putting huge amounts of gold into the pockets of the biotech industries and reducing the range of products that are available for local farmers to grow. For example, the Sarvari Research Trust in Bangor in north Wales has Hungarian strains of potatoes that are non-GM and blight resistant, but because it does not have the money that Monsanto and the like have, it cannot get them to an industry level. Although gardeners benefit from those potatoes, it is not the case that we can all benefit through the supermarkets.

It is important that supermarkets are waking up to the problems that we face. Tesco had a two-page advert in *The Observer* on Sunday in which it talked about us counting our pennies, our questions of trust, the need for quality, and its wanting to change. However, it will not change until it has a clear policy to support the producers of excellent food and does not reject food that is the wrong shape. I am talking about food that is good to eat and should be widely available but is not. We cannot blame the people who buy the food for being told by the supermarkets that the price delivers for them. That does not deliver the best.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: No. I am sorry, but I do not have time to do so.

There are problems with labelling, GM and the supermarkets, but the ombudsman that is finally being set up by the UK Government to deal with supermarket questions must consider the origins of many products. We look forward to hearing what Christine Tacon finds out about them. She should look into the horsemeat mislabelling scandal. We look forward to her getting heavily involved in that.

In my final minute and a half, I would like to dwell on procurement. In my area in the Highlands, we are seeing a major change in the approach to procurement. I point out to members who lodged amendments that most food businesses in the Highlands and Islands are small businesses. Most of Highlands and Islands Enterprise's account-managed companies are food and drink companies, and most are small. Companies must collaborate if they are to sell at regional, national and international levels.

This week, the Highland Council is developing its policy in that regard. As we heard, Dumfries and Galloway has done well on co-ordination, as has Fife in relation to the Fife diet, but those are much smaller geographical areas. We need to ensure that we can promote the Highlands. The Highland Council is attempting to do so, by contributing to this year's Highlands-themed Royal Highland show, and in the context of food for the Ryder cup and Commonwealth games.

Above all, the food and drink sector provides local jobs. New distilleries are opening in small places, such as Thurso, Stornoway, Harris and Ardnamurchan. That is how we can ensure that more people take part and that—in my area—crofting, croft employment and local spending power are enhanced. A food and drink policy ought to take such matters into account, and the Government's policy does so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I have a little time in hand for interventions.

15:46

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I very much welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate, partly because I want to address issues to do with food safety and nutrition. Food safety is vital, and I acknowledge the progress that has been made.

Some members will remember Edwina Currie and the salmonella scandal. That scandal is a thing of the past; eggs are now safe, although—

Alex Johnstone: Is not it the case that the greater part of the scandal was that eggs were always safe?

Dr Simpson: It was certainly an example of the media becoming overly concerned about something, although there was a problem with salmonella in eggs.

The work that the Food Standards Agency in Scotland has done on campylobacter in chickens, which was another area of concern, is welcome. E coli, however, remains a concern. Professor Pennington, whom I mentioned in an intervention, says that we have one of the highest rates of E coli in the world. The combination of high E coli rates and the UK chief medical officer's remarks about antibiotics this week should result in a call to action.

On food hygiene, following Professor Pennington's report into an E coli outbreak in Wales, the Food Hygiene Rating (Wales) Act 2013, which received royal assent last Monday, has made mandatory the display of food hygiene ratings in food businesses in Wales. Will Scotland follow that example? When will the minister

introduce such a measure, which seems to be eminently sensible?

Martha Payne's website is interesting and demonstrates how social media can be used in the debate about food. During the past year, David Payne has expressed frustration that the site receives regular correspondence from schoolchildren in Scotland who say that they are still forbidden to take pictures of their school meals. How does that fit with the aim of transparency? Surely we should engage our children on food issues, as part of an overall anti-obesity strategy. Social media are vital tools in reaching the young. I hope that the cabinet secretary and his colleagues will ensure that the clear message goes out that we welcome input from schoolchildren.

Will the cabinet secretary and his ministerial colleagues in education and health guarantee that no industrial hydrogenated fats—or trans fats—are served in any of Scotland's schools? The hungry for success initiative, to which the cabinet secretary referred, started 10 years ago and led to the prescribing of minimum nutritional standards for school meals in 2008, including maximum values for fats and sodium. I welcome the review that the minister announced and the restoration of the hungry for success group. I hope that the group will look carefully at the balance between cost and quality in the context of contracting for school meals and all public procurement. I raised that issue in an intervention. The balance is 50:50 for dairy products but 72:28 for meat products. Given that we have such fantastic sources of meat in Scotland, I do not understand why we do not accord more importance to quality when it comes to procuring meat.

I welcome the fact that a number of local authorities, including Stirling Council, are signed up to the Soil Association Scotland food for life catering mark. I hope that the Government will encourage all other local authorities to follow them.

A role of the Food Standards Agency in Scotland is to tackle food mislabelling or misdescription on food labelling. However, legal standards do not apply to all foods. Practices of substitution with cheaper ingredients, such as mixing cheaper rice with premium rice, or extending products with fillers, such as adding offal to meat cuts, are legal here but not throughout much of the continent. We must address that.

The Food Standards Agency in Scotland was working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on a related surveillance programme. How will that be progressed with an independent food standards agency in Scotland, particularly in a climate in which environmental

health officers, whose numbers have been cut, are under such pressure?

I am particularly concerned about the growth in nutraceutical products. A variety of health claims are made about such products. Although health claims are controlled under article 13 of the EU nutrition and health claims regulation, it is a rapidly growing area and the clever advertising and marketing claims that are being made about the products are a source of considerable concern. I urge the minister to work with colleagues in considering that because I am not sure that the Advertising Standards Agency is the right body to deal with the advertising of such products.

I will now deal with food labelling, which is an important issue that a number of members have mentioned. I very much welcome the late conversion of Tesco to the traffic light system. The money that was spent by producers and retailers against the European Parliament's traffic light system proposals was an obscenity. I am glad that we will have that system in Scotland. I took the opportunity to check products in a couple of my local supermarkets the other day. Although many of the products have traffic lights on them, many do not. When will we have a traffic light system alongside GDA—guideline daily amounts—on almost all products? That is important.

It is clear from the Sainsbury's marketing information—I have had discussions with Sainsbury's—that the traffic light labelling system has moved their consumers to lower-calorie and lower-fat products. However, the claims that are made by producers about there being X per cent less fat in their products, although correct and therefore not legally challengeable, are meaningless if the level of fat was already high.

Salt labelling is particularly important. It is staggering that 72 per cent of women and 89 per cent of men exceed the salt intake limit. I hope that the minister will press the FSA to push ahead with the new salt standards and get the figures down. A recent report showed that there has been almost no movement in salt intake levels since 2006.

I regret that my trans fat bill was ignored. Its principles are now supported by the medical fraternity and backed by Which?, the consumer organisation. I hope that we will return to that because it is important to health inequalities that trans fats are addressed.

15:53

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary and Maureen Watt did, I start by expressing my condolences to the families and friends of Dr Stewart Rhind and Dr Julian Dawson, who were recently killed so tragically on

the A90. As the local MSP, I want to assure members that I will not stop campaigning to reduce the risks on that stretch of road. I also commend the work of the James Hutton Institute. The loss of their colleagues will leave a hole. I encourage all the institute staff; they are doing a good job. In the context of the debate, what they are doing is extremely important for the future of Scotland and we wish them well in their work.

I want to turn to local food issues in North Angus and Mearns—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Don, you must speak into your microphone.

Nigel Don: I apologise, Presiding Officer.

I assure Bruce Crawford that the Forfar bridie is, indeed, mine. I, of course, share it with some regional MSPs, but I will claim it as my own because Forfar is in my constituency.

I represent a constituency that has some of the finest land and products in the country. I commend McCain Foods Ltd, which produces potatoes. Potatoes are a staple diet for many of us. McCain's products are for consumption around the world, but it grows its crops close to home in Scotland, which is a fine place to grow seed potatoes.

I also commend Usan Salmon Fisheries Ltd, which works off the coast of my constituency. It produces Scottish wild salmon, which is now a protected geographical indication—an EU-protected name—and one of Scotland's finest products.

Many members have talked about the basic issue of buying locally. It has the obvious advantage of minimising transport and is one of the ways of addressing the dominance of large organisations. Big businesses can easily be competed with by local producers and retailers, who simply minimise the costs and maximise the quality. That really is where we should be going.

I also commend Alison Johnstone for her mention of allotments, community gardens and the transition towns movement, all of which I am well aware of. They are potentially an enormously important part of the Scottish economy and the food chain. In fact, we get to the point at which there is not really a chain because we grow, process, cook and eat the food ourselves. That may seem a bit primordial, but it seems to me to be a good place to go back to.

I am grateful to Dr Elaine Murray for mentioning cooking skills. I know perhaps rather more than I should about the issue because it is one of my wife's research interests. It is genuinely the case that, through the generations—there is no point in blaming anybody—we have lost many of the

cooking skills that our grandparents would have taken absolutely for granted.

Members should reflect on the situation—I do not have to make this up—of a young student who does not know how to cut up a cabbage. If they are looking at a cabbage in the supermarket or the grocers and do not know what it looks like inside, they literally do not know what to do with it and are not likely to buy it. All they have to do, of course, is ensure that it is clean to start with, cut it up and boil it. It is a wonderful addition to the diet and has lots of good things in it—we will not have a nutrition lecture now—but if they do not know what to do with it at all, they have a problem. We genuinely need to address that issue.

I also commend Bruce Crawford. I gather, now, that he is the man who created farmers markets. Thank you again, brother. I am all in favour of farmers markets. I have many in my constituency and I am sure that we have many throughout Scotland, but we are beginning to see the disadvantage of their being outside and only temporary. The outside is often cold and, if the markets are only there on a Saturday, that does not make them a regular shopping place.

Rob Gibson: If we are mentioning Bruce Crawford, we should also mention John Scott and his wife, who were strongly part of the farmers market movement. Parliament and many others should thank them for that.

Nigel Don: I endorse Rob Gibson's comments and acknowledge his mild chiding.

It is pretty clear to me and some others around me that if we could get farmers markets into slightly more permanent locations under cover—that should not be strange; it is common in England—we could establish them as normal places where people go to shop rather than just somewhere where they shop on the occasional Saturday morning if they happen to be there and it is not too cold. There is an opportunity there with which the Government could perhaps help, and not necessarily with huge sums of money.

I turn to labelling, perhaps in a slightly different context from some of the other speakers, although I endorse many of the comments that were made, including much of what Richard Simpson said. I have before me the "Beef Labelling Guide for people and organisations selling beef in Scotland: Guidance on the compulsory beef labelling system and the beef labelling scheme (the approval system for other labelling claims)". I am sure that it is sensibly put together, but it runs to 20 pages and seems to imply that it is really difficult for the local butcher to say, "This beef came from such-and-such a farm." I suggest that, if that is the case—that is my understanding—we have probably missed a trick. I understand that the rules

need to be pretty comprehensive and that we need to ensure that there are no loopholes that people can get through, but it might be a little bit easier for local suppliers to say, "I genuinely know where this came from. It came off the lorry from such-and-such a place," and be able to label things accordingly in an individual shop.

I suspect that that would be helpful to the general industry. It might well be that the guidance needs just a little bit of working on.

16:00

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. Scotland is slowly throwing off its "sick man of Europe" tag. Through education and increased awareness of the importance of healthy eating and active lifestyles, we are making progress. Choosing a balanced diet that is high in fresh produce is one of the best choices that an individual can make to improve their health. It is sometimes argued that local produce is more expensive than goods that are imported from overseas. That can certainly be true, but there is no substitute for quality.

Whatever the complex reasons behind Scotland's poor health record, it is certainly not caused by our lacking high-quality produce from our land and seas. As the cabinet secretary alludes to in the foreword to "Recipe For Success—Scotland's National Food and Drink Policy", it is a strange paradox that this nation should have such a poor diet-related health record. Scottish produce is world class. Our seas are abundant in many key stocks and, despite the clear need to improve the common fisheries policy so that we get a fairer deal for our fishermen, just under 5,000 fishermen on 2,100 vessels landed £501 million-worth of fish in 2011.

In my constituency of North East Fife, fishing plays a major role in the local economy. Communities such as Pittenweem land hundreds of tonnes of fish each year and the industry supports about 165 jobs in fishing, and more in the connected supply chain. In Anstruther, we have a fish and chip shop that is known all over the world.

Back on dry land, we certainly have a rich larder. Scotland produces some of the finest beef, lamb and pork in Europe, and with our more specialised products such as venison and haggis and our enormous variety of arable produce, which is made into everything from whisky to jam and porridge, it is fair to say that we are extremely well endowed with natural produce. The value and potential of Scottish produce is enormous, so it is clear that we must capitalise on our assets by supporting policies that encourage a rich and sustainable production chain.

Some time ago, I was a little surprised to learn that it is primarily the Mediterranean region and not Scotland that consumes most of the langoustines that are caught in Scottish waters. Indeed, as the cabinet secretary mentioned, 10 million chefs are committed to using Scottish langoustines in cooking contests and restaurants around the world. We should be proud of our strong export levels, but we should perhaps also be a little sad that so much of that delicious product is shipped overseas and away from the Scottish palate. I believe that there is a willingness among consumers and the supply chain to redress that imbalance. We need strategies at both national and local levels that promote the economic, environmental and health benefits of eating Scottish produce.

I turn again to North East Fife and Fife as a whole, where there are several independent organisations that promote local produce. The Fife diet, which Claire Baker and Alison Johnstone mentioned, is a consumer network of people who are passionate about local food. It began in 2007 as a project to encourage people to commit to eating food from Fife over a year. Participants monitored their progress and were encouraged to share details of their experience. It is well known that the project has won several awards, including the best green campaign award at the 2012 Scottish green awards, and it has become a large network of people who are fighting for increased sustainability and more local sourcing of food.

As well as consumers' improving their diets, producers are looking at new ways of bringing produce to a wider market close to home. Many members have mentioned the revival of once-popular farmers markets; they are now booming. The number of farmers markets around the country increased by 50 per cent between 2007 and 2012. St Andrews and Cupar in my constituency hold their own markets and attract at each event about 30 stalls selling local cheeses, meats, ales, fruit and vegetables and specialist products. That is to be welcomed.

I do not have time to mention all the local community organisations that work hard to promote local produce, but there are many of them and they deserve our support. Anything that we can do to shorten or simplify the supply chain is worthy of serious consideration because it benefits everyone.

The Scottish Government's acceptance of the Scudamore review recommendations is to be welcomed. The review recommended an holistic approach to food safety, labelling and nutrition, and I am pleased that the Scottish Government accepted all the recommendations, has set about trying to implement them and has commenced a consultation of interested parties.

Random testing clearly has a part to play, but the case for an open and transparent standards agency in Scotland to monitor production and supply, as well as to advise on nutrition, has been well and truly made. We should certainly be grateful that we have not followed the example of the rest of the UK in our approach to food standards in recent years.

Whatever the final position in relation to horsemeat, local butchers have reported a significant boost in their business, thanks to their reputation as quality suppliers. Long may that continue.

As Tavish Scott did, I congratulate the Scottish Government on the improvement in export performance in the food and drink sector. Long may that trend continue, too. The Scottish Government's aim to increase the value of exports from the £5.4 billion that was recorded in 2011 to £7.1 billion in the next four years is ambitious, but there is no substantial reason why that cannot be achieved.

In conclusion, our aim should be to encourage Scottish consumers to access food locally, at reasonable prices. Certainly, food banks should have no place in a fair society—I note Jayne Baxter's comments on that. We need to support our farmers, fishermen and manufacturers across the all-important food and drink industry. That includes promoting the "Scottish" label vigorously at home and abroad. Food and drink really is a home-and-away industry, and it plays a vital part in the Scottish economy.

16:06

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): As Richard Lyle said, the provision of food is, like the provision of fresh water, a fundamental issue for human survival. Water scarcity, political decision making, short-termism, global climatic changes, pollution and, of course, mankind's stupidity and irrational behaviour have all impacted on our ability to feed not only ourselves, but our fellow human beings. Over the years, from the very dawn of civilisation until the present day, food security, food production and commodity trading have been major causes of social, economic and political debate and, often, unrest.

In recent decades, we have experienced BSE, foot-and-mouth disease, bird flu, salmonella in eggs, E coli, listeria and so on. There have been concerns about the use of additives and bulking agents and there have been issues around country-of-origin status, halal status, the substitution of ingredients, school-meals quality, the welfare of animals, the conditions that are experienced by animals due to intensive rearing and, now, the horsemeat scandal. We all enjoyed

the various equine gags on Twitter and Facebook and in the newspaper diary columns, but the reality is that the latest food crisis will certainly not be the last.

In order to change the situation, we need to take on the vested interests that have for years dominated and directed global and domestic food policy. For decades, the EU has operated under the gross excesses of the common agricultural and fisheries policies, which have, historically, provided subsidies that encourage overproduction, which has resulted in food being stored and then dumped on the developing world; intensive farming, which encourages the use of fertilisers and pesticides; and a huge imbalance in EU spending.

At home, the food production lobby is extremely strong, and attempts to deal with as simple an issue as misleading food labelling have resulted in aggressive campaigning and a huge lobbying operation by the multinationals. An attempt to bring in a simple traffic light system—which Richard Simpson spoke about—to alert people to the fat, salt and sugar content of food was opposed by the corporate giants such as Tesco. Richard Simpson said that they appear to have been dragged, kicking and screaming, towards movement on those issues. If that is the case, that is welcome. If we cannot get companies to agree on such a basic step, what chance do we have of dealing with some of the more fundamental challenges in our food-supply chain?

Food production is an area that exposes some of the worst aspects of our economic system. It involves intensive farming to maximise yield, using factory-style methods and subcontracting of different elements of the production process and system in order to extend the supply chain, while cutting the profits of each sub-contractor at each stage. The minister will be familiar with that from his experience of the closure of Hall's of Broxburn.

Goods travel across countries and, sometimes, continents by road, rail and air for processing. At each stage, the business owners take every opportunity to cut costs by using cheaper meats, bulking agents, mechanical recovery, sweeteners, flavourings, preservatives and God knows what else, without any thought for the implications on sustainability, health or wellbeing, and with profit being the motive driving them every time.

Domestically, we cannot get away from the fact that the cuts to local government mean that there are fewer environmental health officers and staff involved in enforcement. That is having a direct impact on food safety.

Public confidence in our food is essential for producers and food businesses. It is clear that light-touch regulation simply does not work. The

horsemeat scandal and the work of campaigners such as Martha Payne have highlighted issues around school meals—in particular, the importance of high-quality school meals at a time when an increasing number of families are relying on food banks. The importance of that cannot be overstated. School meals and hospital food should be valued as major elements of, respectively, a good education system and good healthcare. Our feeding our young people and the infirm with the cheapest foods says something about our values as a society.

As we have heard, there are also some very good things going on in Scotland, but they tend to be at the higher, or premium, end of the market. We can all be proud of premium products such as Scottish seafood, prime beef, whisky and soft fruit, but that is not where our problems lie. The chances of someone who is trying to exist on £56.25 or £71 a week—on jobseekers allowance—experiencing langoustine, venison or premium malt whisky is just a fantasy. To be told by media luvvies to buy free-range eggs or farmers market beef is both ludicrous and patronising.

We would all like to buy locally sourced good-quality foods, but that is not realistic for far too many of our constituents. For many of them, food is very much on the front line of the battle for survival at this time of austerity and welfare cuts, when the price of food has increased by 30 per cent over the past five years.

The picture is not good for all our people, and the Scottish Government would do well to recognise that.

16:12

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): As René Descartes said in 1637, "Cogito ergo sum"—"I think, therefore I am." Perhaps the motto for this debate and for Scotland should be, "I eat, therefore I am." Like all of us in the chamber, I am what I eat. When I was a youngster, what I ate was very different from what I eat now. Much of it was gathered in at our own hands. We foraged for wild raspberries, wild strawberries, brambles, blaeberrys, crab apples, sloes and rosehips. We gathered nettles, dandelions, wild garlic and mushrooms. We hunted for and ate—

Neil Findlay: Since the member was that busy, when did he have time to invent the computer?

Stewart Stevenson: The computer was necessary, of course, to manage the complexity of life in a foraging environment.

We hunted for and ate rabbits, pigeons, crows and the occasional hare. We were given bits of

venison—roe deer, largely—and pheasants. We had trout—the sea trout all being caught below the high tide mark, of course. We grew apples, plums, gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries, onions, potatoes, carrots, cauliflowers, cabbage, lettuce and beetroot. My father was a country doctor and, very fortunately, barely a day would go by without his returning with a brown paper bag full of eggs, a pat of butter, a tub of crowdie or some home-made cheese. The link between supplier and consumer was extremely short for us in our family.

There was virtually no sugar in our diet, as it was rationed until I was six years old—even though in Cupar, where I was brought up, there was a huge British Sugar Corporation factory, which turned sugar beet into sugar.

Other members have used their speaking time to talk about local opportunities and I will do much the same. In my constituency, the Rockfish cafe in Whitehills gets its fish from its own trawler—none of that Faroese or Icelandic stuff, although the trawler may have been up that way to get some of the fish. We also have one of the great adaptations of Scottish cuisine: the Scotch pie, filled not with meat but with Cullen skink, which one can get from Downie's, priced £1.60. When my wife says, "I'm going to Johnnie's. What do you want?", she is not going to John Stewart Quality Butcher; she is going to a friend called Johnnie, who happens to be the butcher. He will tell us the field that the beef came from and the name of the farmer who provided it. He has cut the supply chain; he has cut out lots of the people in the middle who take money out of what is going on. We have taken Nigel Don's advice and gone to the farmers market in Macduff, which is held once a month in the old covered fishing market.

I do not despise television chefs as much as some. It was Delia Smith who, rather than concentrating on presentation on telly, actually showed us how to cook things. To this day, I use her recipe for cooking rice—be it cheap rice or expensive rice, it works.

Food is a matter of debate. Why are we at such a pass with the source of some of our processed meat? There are many and complex reasons for that. One of the ways of looking at errors in systems that the American Federal Aviation Administration uses has nine headings for failures. I would like briefly to highlight two of them: one is inadequate leadership, and the other is lack of assertiveness. The FAA found that most of the mechanical causes of air crashes have been eliminated. Planes were getting much more reliable and what was left was two human beings at the front of the plane causing an increasing proportion of the accidents: a greybeard captain with 20,000 or 30,000 flying hours behind him, and a junior officer beside him. The junior officer was

more recently trained and better able to fly the plane but was unable to challenge the old greybeard. A system of cockpit resource management was introduced, which provided a better balance.

One of the things that we are missing in our food industry line in particular is a reliance on the people who are at the front. Jim Mather, the former minister, gave a presentation in 2005 at which one of the quotes that he used—which I think he took from Seddon—was:

"Make the worker the inspector."

The person on the front line knows what is going on, and it is important that they do.

The Food Standards Agency's original goal, which was to minimise risk to public health, should be turned into a more collaborative, positive goal: work with the food industry to increase progressively the volume and value of safe, healthy, nutritious food to improve public health and wellbeing. We must move away from imagining that simply inspecting a process to death will lead to the outcomes that we need. Yes, we need the inspection—of course we do—but we should ensure that those who understand the objectives are equipped to contribute to them and that the people who are working in the industry at every level know why their industry is there. The people on the front line are the people who understand what is going on and can really contribute to improving the industry.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could I ask you to come to a conclusion, please?

Stewart Stevenson: It is certainly the case that if we can shorten the chain we will cut the cost and improve the product.

I end by quoting Rumpole of the Bailey, because today is about quotes: "If you want the recipe for steak pie, don't ask a vegetarian." Let us get the people on the front line to be the people who actually improve our industry.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have had a late bid to speak from Patrick Harvie. I can give you three minutes, Mr Harvie.

16:19

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Thank you for finding the time at the end of the debate, Presiding Officer.

Like Bruce Crawford, I am a food fan. I have a great, passionate love of the quality food that is being produced in Scotland, of which we should—rightly—be proud. I can therefore understand why many of the speeches have focused on people's pride in the quality produce that comes from Scotland.

However, there is a really serious problem if we mistake a debate about food policy for a debate about food manufacture at the quality end and if we ignore the issues about the food that is consumed every day in every community around Scotland. If we forget those issues, we are in danger of failing to recognise that the context is that of a food system in crisis.

I regret that, in the last few seconds of his speech, Alex Johnstone chose to misrepresent the Green Party's record on raising the issues around the food crisis in which we are living. We were the first to raise a debate about green procurement in the Parliament and the first to raise a debate about the overweening stranglehold of a handful of multinational supermarkets that dominate the retail sector. Everybody recognises that those issues should be addressed—and that they should have been addressed more successfully years ago.

It is perhaps more galling that, before he misrepresented our position, Alex Johnstone decided to base part of his argument on statistics that were lifted directly from a Green Party press release. However, I will ignore that barefaced cheek for a moment. The staggering part of his speech was when he used the example of McDonald's as part of the answer to the problems of our food system in crisis. We should be staggered by the idea that the answer boils down to, "Let them eat Big Macs".

Rob Gibson held up an advert that I think was from Sainsbury's—it was from one of the big supermarkets. I hope that, like me, he is a wee bit tired of hearing from the supermarkets' marketing departments about the need to restore trust. As Mike Small of the Fife diet project argued recently, I think that there is a serious danger in simply restoring trust in a fundamentally broken and untrustworthy system.

The supermarkets seem to perceive the situation as an issue of reputation management rather than a problem with the industry's structure. They are part of the problem. Their dominance is part of the reason why we are in food crisis and why we have a food culture that is dominated by the value of nothing and the price of everything—it is dominated by the idea of generating maximum profit from the minimum possible quality of material.

The consequences of the food crisis will be felt in the health of human beings and in the health of the environment that we depend on. It would be a failing of the debate if we did not recognise that it takes place in that context.

16:23

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):
We heard a great deal from the cabinet secretary

about the success of the Scottish food and drink sector—about the increase in turnover and exports and about the recognition that the Scotch label is a label for quality—but also about the possible need, given the present crisis, for a food revolution. We heard what that might look like.

I was pleased to hear that the education programme involved 800 schools and 55,000 pupils, which is really impressive.

There are many community food initiatives across the Highlands and Islands. Those that I have seen in action are impressive. Local people have been supported to grow food and serve their communities by providing local produce. That is all to be applauded and is a really good move. The hungry for success school meals programme will also develop and grow as time goes on.

We recognise the need to promote food and drink in the international market. However, the irony is that local people cannot have a diet of oysters, venison and partridge or whatever, as Neil Findlay suggested earlier.

What irritates me slightly about that is that a local diet is available to everybody. We have to get back to that. The Fife diet does it well, as Alison Johnstone made clear in her point about the soup test and the ambition that every child leaving school will be able to make a good, healthy and nutritious pan of soup. That is just a start.

There is a real misconception that buying cheap means somehow feeding a family cheaply. Sometimes, the cheapest stuff in the supermarket is actually the most expensive, particularly if people buy processed meals: they may say "serves two", but frankly they may be just enough to serve two cats.

There is a real need for education and I hope that our education programme will meet some of that need. Claire Baker and Tavish Scott both made the basic request that we should use our own produce. I expect that we have all experienced buying fish and chips, iconic to locals and visitors alike in Scotland, only to find that it is frozen Icelandic cod. How does that happen? Sometimes the chip shop is on the same street of the port where our own fish has been landed—but the fish is immediately trucked elsewhere. There is something wrong there. We talk about food miles, and the position must be exacerbated if we deliver white fish to foreign ports while importing the same type of fish because it is cheaper, which raises the question whether it is an inferior product.

Buying local produce should be the default position of procurement contracts. Alison Johnstone and others have made the point that if we are genuinely to support our local producers, we must take the lead.

I agree too on the point about supermarkets, some of which have been well supported by Government money to highlight and promote local produce. However, what do we get in return? What control do we have over them? If the large supermarkets and the huge producers are going to be part of our culture in years to come, some Government control over them and real leadership will be needed, so that they are under no illusion that serving local produce is essential if they are to win any of our custom.

Turning to Alex "Big Mac" Johnstone—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are approaching your last minute. Can we avoid any use of nicknames?

Jean Urquhart: Enough said.

Perhaps we are still a nation of small businesses as far as food production is concerned—certainly, that is so in the Highlands and Islands.

In Alison Johnstone's amendment, she asks us to acknowledge that and to ensure that we have the opportunity to engage the nation and educate people about the food that we eat. That approach makes sense, saves energy and food miles, acknowledges the skills of the grower and offers better health to the nation.

I spent yesterday planting tatties with children from Hilton primary school in Inverness. The photographs of the event show the sheer pleasure and delight that they took in getting their hands filthy planting tatties.

I ask members to support the amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Tavish Scott, who has six minutes. I should say that there is no time left to give back to members for interventions.

16:29

Tavish Scott: Bruce Crawford's best line of the day was

"Ask not what you can do for your country. Ask what's for lunch."

I thought for a horrible moment that he was quoting the First Minister—I have never been in any doubt that the First Minister eats for Scotland—but he quickly clarified that he was quoting Orson Welles. It was certainly the best and most appropriate food line of the day.

This debate, inevitably, is one in which local members take the opportunity to mention every possible delicacy from their part of the country. Further to Jean Urquhart's salient point, I quickly add that the Fort fish and chip shop in Shetland, in common with the example that Mr Stevenson gave

from his own patch, does not sell anything other than locally caught fish. As other members have reflected, the point is that not enough of that is going on. There might be an opportunity for the minister in that regard.

There seems to be two main issues in the debate. The first is around public sector procurement, which is something that the Government can do something about; by contrast, although the Government can help the broad spectrum of exporting industries, it does not have the whip hand over them and cannot change things. The second issue is the one that Richard Simpson and others have raised in some detail about regulations and having the right balance. There will always be a debate about balance, whether it relates to trans fats, inspectors in meat plants or the new food body about which Michael Matheson, the health minister, made a statement to Parliament a week or so ago. That balance will continue to be of interest to Parliament.

I want to talk about whether our food procurement and public procurement policy only benefits big business and the large concerns that we have heard much about today from, among others, Neil Findlay, or whether the system and regulations can be altered to help, in particular, smaller businesses and suppliers. That help would very much capture the mood of today's contributions.

It is important that we look at the Scottish Government's study on the issue, which was published last year. The "Assessment of Regional Cross Sectoral Collaborative Approach to Public Sector Food Procurement"—perhaps Mr Lochhead could come up with snappier titles for his studies in future—says:

"This study has reinforced the view that price is still the dominant factor within food procurement decisions and this pressure is increasing".

It does not say that that pressure is decreasing or changing. Therefore—this comes from the Government's own study—there is much for the Government to address around how food could be procured on a regional basis.

The study goes on to say that there is a general reluctance on the part of small businesses to engage in the food procurement system, and sets out a number of good examples of local food procurement in Scotland and across the United Kingdom. It also says that changes need to be made to the current structure of food procurement. There needs to be strong support for small businesses and contracts need to be sized appropriately. That all seems to be at the heart of what needs to change about the way in which food is procured in the public sector, whether for our schools, hospitals or care homes, or more generally.

In a letter from the Federation of Small Businesses—it was, no doubt, sent to other members—the organisation particularly highlights the importance of that proposed change. It says:

“The recent aggregation of Scottish public sector contracts means that a small number of large businesses often win a great deal of public contracts. The food sector is no exception.”

I am sure that the minister is alive to the fact that the FSB is making such observations and that he will want to make considerable progress during the summit that I am sure he will talk about during his winding-up speech.

The minister also mentioned the Commonwealth games and the fact that Glasgow 2014 is working with Scotland Food & Drink to produce a games food charter. Two million meals, served over 11 days of competition, will showcase Scottish food. The Ryder cup should surely follow that example, albeit over three days rather than 11. The point is that the Scottish Government and its agencies should commit to such an approach to food procurement, and that local authorities should do the same; that would be a commendable move.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Tavish Scott: Yes, of course. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could Hanzala Malik’s microphone be switched on please? Is your card in properly, Mr Malik? *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Mr Malik, you cannot speak without a microphone because the official reporters cannot hear you. Could you move down to the desk in front? *[Interruption.]*

Tavish Scott: That is the rest of my speech gone.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but I cannot allow the intervention without a microphone. We will have an investigation.

Tavish Scott: I am sure that the intervention would have been well worth waiting for. I am sure that Mr Lochhead will promote another food debate in a few weeks’ time, and perhaps the Labour Party will give Mr Malik a second opportunity—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Scott, I am afraid that you are approaching the end of your time—we do not have a lot of time left.

Tavish Scott: Can I have a little bit of time for all that? It was not my fault.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Unfortunately, I cannot conjure it out of the air. Please finish as quickly as possible.

Tavish Scott: It was not my fault, Presiding Officer.

My final point is on the debate around supermarkets versus local food producers. Rob Gibson and other members rightly raised the issue with some feeling. Claire Baker and others made the point right at the start of the debate about the choices that people have depending on their income level. One might describe supermarkets as a necessary evil in the context of a debate about where people buy their food. I hope that, in winding up, the minister will address that issue, which is fundamental to many people and is based on their income level.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I am afraid that we really are short of time.

16:35

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Today’s—*[Interruption.]* My microphone is not working either.

Today’s debate is indeed timely. We have had recognition of the crucial economic importance of Scotland’s food and drink sector, which is a very big part of Scotland’s exports. I agree with the sentiments that have been expressed and believe that the sector can become an even more important part of our economy as we go forward. I congratulate the cabinet secretary on his efforts for the food and drink sector.

In the Highlands and Islands, we have wonderful examples of genuinely world-class food producers, from famous names such as Walkers of Aberlour and Baxters of Speyside, as well as the Scotch whisky industry. We have fin-fish and shellfish producers, and producers of delicious cheeses and game products. There are also all the individual farmers and crofters who produce beef, lamb, mutton and pork. In addition, our sea fishermen harvest some of the best white fish available. The high quality of food in some of our hotels, restaurants and cafes is also a big attraction to visitors from the rest of the UK and abroad. I highlight the fish restaurants and cafes of Oban in Argyll, which have improved out of all recognition in recent years. Graeme Dey talked about Arbroath smokies, and I agree with him that they are delicious. Has he tasted Loch Fyne kippers? Maureen Watt talked about those.

My grandmother always told me that the best sausages came from Newmarket, and now I think I know why. Other members have discussed the recent scandal over horsemeat in food products, and I believe that the focus on that issue can help our farmers and crofters, who adhere to traceability systems that are among the best in the world—they are not perfect, but they are trying hard. We should pay tribute to our farmers and crofters for the efforts that they have made in that regard over recent years, and Scottish consumers

should have full confidence in Scottish meat products.

The media must also report issues relating to our food in as responsible a way as possible. I do not think that they have been very good at that lately. Last week's study suggesting that processed meats might lead to increased mortality probably alarmed many Scots who enjoy bacon and sausages. The study also found that small amounts of meat—even processed meat—have real health benefits. We should all be aiming for a balanced diet—surely that is the key. A little of what you fancy does you good.

We support initiatives to increase the profile and availability of local food, which we believe could benefit our primary producers. The Scottish Crofting Federation's crofting charter highlights crofters' belief in the need for a strong local food economy with public procurement opportunities for local producers, which Tavish Scott rightly highlighted. The promotion and encouragement of niche and high-end branding and marketing—for example, for produce from rare and native breeds—are very important. NFU Scotland's campaign called "what's on your plate?" has been running for more than three years and is to be commended as well.

There are lots of other food initiatives. Food from Argyll does a fantastic job in promoting some of Argyll's best produce, including the very tasty Argyll lamb stovies that are found at major events such as Rockness, Belladrum's Tartan Heart festival and T in the Park—they are very modern. In addition, the Highlands and Islands food and drink awards, which are now in their ninth year, are a positive way of showcasing examples of best practice within the sector.

We have heard much—quite rightly—about the high quality of Scotland's lamb, mutton, pork and beef, but I would like to highlight our wonderful venison, which comes from wild and farmed deer sources. It contains less than 2 per cent fat, which is less than skinless chicken does, it is a good source of healthy protein, it is high in iron, and it contains vitamins B6 and B12, potassium, phosphorus, riboflavin and niacin. *[Interruption.]* My colleague Alex Johnstone says that it also tastes quite good. I encourage local authorities to consider using venison.

Stewart Stevenson painted a glowing picture of the diet of his youth and the benefits of his father's country medical practice, which I thought was wonderful. Unfortunately, NHS 24 is not quite the same.

In conclusion, Presiding Officer—I am getting there a bit soon—we recognise the tremendous achievements of Scotland's vibrant food and drink sector and the potential for it to play a big part in

growing Scotland's economy in the future. We look to the Government to work constructively with the industry and to secure the best possible deal for our farmers and crofters and the key primary producers in the current CAP reform process. I wish the Government every bit of luck with that.

16:41

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):

Today in the cafeteria there was salmon and beef, and I stood there and dithered. Sadly, I could not try both, but never mind. There was also a vegetarian option, of course.

We have heard many speeches about how vital it is that we engage with the issues of food sourcing and provision and that we rethink the structure of supply chains in Scotland. The on-going horsemeat scandal has been a significant factor in our debating of Scotland's food policy. As my colleague Richard Simpson highlighted, labelling is extremely important. The complexities of trans-European and global supply chains are daunting to grapple with, and proper regulation is essential.

As the Minister for Public Health told us in his statement to Parliament, the Scottish Government is to set up a food standards agency for Scotland. Although I am supportive of that measure, the question that remains is why it has taken a highly publicised scandal for a consultation to be launched.

As Scottish Labour has highlighted throughout the debate, there is a need for a well-funded and robust regulatory regime to be implemented. In that context, I highlight Unison's survey and the school meals summit with COSLA. I look forward to hearing the cabinet secretary's comments on what actions the Scottish Government has taken as a result of that.

Almost all members have highlighted the issue of local food. Graeme Dey gave an awesome list of foods that are produced in Angus, but the same is true across Scotland. Elaine Murray stressed the value of food to our tourism industry, which I do not think that the motion or any of the amendments stressed.

I turn to nutrition and the difficult issue of obesity in Scotland. There is a lamentable lack of nutrition in many people's diets. The complexities and challenges of buying food on a low income can often drive people to make poor food choices. Studies that have been conducted by the Scottish Government and others show a significant link between obesity, deprivation and a lack of education. The Scottish Government's national health survey topic report on obesity states:

"Suggested mechanisms for socio-economic status affecting obesity include the cheap cost and palatability of

poor quality, energy-dense foods appealing to those with limited income, and area-level density of fast-food outlets.”

That is just one extract from the report, but it suggests that improving nutritional education and tackling food poverty must be a priority for the Scottish Government. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will take that on board to an even greater extent following today's debate. The inescapable fact is that some of the most affordable foods—I stress the word “some”—can be of the poorest quality and the lowest nutritional value. That presents families with great difficulties.

I recognise Neil Findlay's global analysis, which I am sure set us all thinking. Importantly, Bruce Crawford highlighted the if campaign to tackle hunger worldwide, and Rob Gibson raised the importance of the issue of genetic modification and the threat that it poses.

On food banks and food poverty, the latter is as serious a concern for many families across Scotland as fuel poverty is today. As my colleague Jayne Baxter and others have already discussed, many communities do not have access to high-quality foods. As my colleague Elaine Murray highlighted, better-quality and healthier food should be made more available and more cheaply. That discussion has been at the heart of the debate, as it should have been. I certainly agree with Elaine Murray that people living in food poverty must not in any way be blamed for not being able to afford many of the healthier, expensive foods. I recently met members of Kirkton church in Carluke in my region who work with other churches in Clydesdale to support increasing numbers of people who are in urgent need of food. Elaine Murray and Bruce Crawford stressed that the welfare reform agenda will make things only shockingly worse for such people.

On health promotion, I want to be a little bit anecdotal, although I am making a closing speech. On Saturday, we had an international women's day event in the Scottish Parliament that was chaired by the Deputy Presiding Officer, Elaine Smith. I met a women's group from Kirkcubbin in Dumfriesshire that runs a lifestyles group to help promote wellbeing. It holds a come-and-taste meeting, for which some of the group cook lunch with fresh ingredients, while others do an exercise class. They then share a healthy lunch and the recipe. There is also a voluntary weigh-in, which has encouraged weight management. What the group does helps to break down barriers to trying new menus, the cost of which is not borne at home if they are not to the group's taste. The popularity of television food programmes is well known but, as Nigel Don highlighted, how many of us actually cook in the real sense of the word? Can the cabinet secretary tell members what the

Scottish Government is doing to support initiatives such as the one in Kirkcubbin?

That brings me on to food procurement itself. It is now becoming increasingly clear that we should encourage the development of a sustainable food strategy. Jayne Baxter has raised the quality versus price debate, but I ask the cabinet secretary whether we can move towards regionally integrated food procurement and, indeed, local procurement where possible. I have been pleased to hear of examples of that from across Scotland. Rob Gibson highlighted how essential collaboration is in that regard.

Like Alison Johnstone and Richard Simpson, I want to draw attention to the Soil Association's food for life scheme, which is quickly gathering pace. For members who do not know, the scheme's aim is to transform food culture across the country by promoting a sustainable supply of fresh, healthy, local, organic and seasonal food. The food for life catering mark is already being used by four local authorities, including East Ayrshire Council. Alison Johnstone argued for local food procurement to be the default position for schools, which I agree with. The food for life partnership in Edinburgh has been working in conjunction with the City of Edinburgh Council, Nourish Scotland and Whitmuir farm in West Linton to develop a sustainable food strategy that has at its heart a commitment to healthy food promotion, environmentalism and joint procurement.

The issue of food miles, which has not been raised much in the debate, is also a significant part of the debate on food policy. Sourcing local food not only ensures that it is fresher, but it reduces carbon emissions through transportation and, of course, helps local communities. According to the Scottish Government's report “Food and Drink in Scotland: Key Facts 2012”, out of Scotland's population, 54 per cent and 49 per cent said that they would buy local to support local producers and local retailers, respectively. Those statistics show that there is certainly a public will for projects such as the food for life partnership. I urge the Scottish Government to do all that it can to promote similar projects. Members have stressed the significance of grow-your-own projects, allotments and the use of empty urban and rural spaces, and I would highlight co-operative models in the context of food.

Scotland has rich food resources, many of which are both healthy and delicious. They must be safely shared by us all as well as exported. The cabinet secretary used the word “transformative” in relation to food. The new food council will have much to take on and I wish it well in its quest.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call on Richard Lochhead to wind up the debate. Cabinet secretary, you have until 5 o'clock.

16:49

Richard Lochhead: It has been an excellent debate, with many good points made from across the chamber. Although I do not necessarily agree with the amendments, I agree with the vast majority of the very good arguments made by members of all parties in the debate, which show that the Parliament wants to go in one direction in making the most of Scotland's potential in being able to produce so much fantastic food. We want all our people, our environment and our wider society and economy to benefit from that.

The debate got off to a good start when Alex Johnstone referred to me as a "young man", which was the first time in a long time that that phrase has been associated with me. I very much welcomed it.

We learned a lot about people's eating habits. Jayne Baxter mentioned beetroot ice cream in Fife and Maureen Watt mentioned the alternative to an English breakfast, which is porridge followed by Arbroath smokies—that certainly got my stomach rumbling. Many other good products were mentioned by members across the chamber.

Members also went to good length to praise the local food and drink businesses in their constituencies, which play a crucial local and national role. If members want to invite me along to visit those businesses to taste the fantastic food and drink around the country even more than I have been doing over the past few years, I will be very happy to take up their offers.

The purpose of the debate has been to reflect on the recent horsemeat scandal and to talk about the wider food debate. The horsemeat scandal perhaps focuses our minds on some of the big issues, but the food policy goes back to 2007 and much has been achieved since then. Some of the achievements span the full width of the policy, from food education through industry growth, to health and the environment—all of which involve a huge range of people and partnerships. I want to use this opportunity to thank all the people the length and breadth of the country who are involved in making many of those achievements happen.

Those achievements would not have happened were it not for the talents of the entrepreneurs, primary producers, fishermen, farmers, crofters, men and women who work in factories of all sizes—some may be multinational, some may be local, smaller factories and business—and the many people who work on the front line to deliver food and give access to good, nutritious food to many communities, particularly people on low

incomes and the vulnerable. They are the people who are driving our food revolution and making our food and drink policy come alive. They are the people who are making our food and drink industry a huge success and by doing so they are helping Scotland's sustainable economic growth. I am sure that all members will agree that there are many dedicated individuals out there, and we owe them a lot.

I hope that today has given us the opportunity to recognise that there is a growing interest in food and drink, which is reflected in the many initiatives throughout the country. I was thinking about how any big agricultural show or event in Scotland these days usually has a waiting list for companies to get into the food tents, which are very popular locations. That is another sign of the food revolution that is taking place.

Of course, the debate has allowed us to discuss the implications of the horsemeat fiasco and raise awareness of the high standards of sourcing and provenance that exist in Scotland today. It is important that we talk up Scottish produce and do not allow the Scottish brand to become collateral damage in a horsemeat fiasco, the seeds of which were sown on the European continent, not here in Scotland. We should not be complacent—of course we should not—but we have to recognise that that is what we are talking about.

Hanzala Malik: I thank you, Presiding Officer, and the chamber for allowing me to come back again—this time with my microphone working.

I want to reiterate what the cabinet secretary said about protecting the Scottish brand, with particular regard to the misleading marketing of products that come from overseas, which damages our economy and puts it at risk. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we need stiffer penalties for companies who mislead people and try to profit from that? Do we need to look at measures such as removing export licences from companies that do that to us?

Richard Lochhead: Once the investigations are complete in Europe, we expect the European authorities to throw the book at those responsible for the food fraud that has been taking place. That is certainly something that I will support.

I listened closely to Claire Baker's speech. She made many important points, which I recognise, although it tended to dwell on the negative when there are so many positive things to celebrate in the Scottish food sector. However, I recognise that the Labour spokesperson highlighted serious issues.

There is local food in our schools and we should recognise that. Still hungry for success is a very important initiative. I mentioned in my opening remarks that the initiative is being refreshed. It is

meeting for the first time this week and I hope that it will pick up—as we expect it to—on many of the themes that have emerged in today's debate.

I should point out that the Association for Public Service Excellence says that Scotland spends more on food content per school meal than anywhere else in the UK.

Even my own authority—Moray Council—has been in the newspapers in the past couple of weeks, explaining how the meat that is served in schools in my constituency is sourced from a butcher in Forres. It is important that we explode the myths about the scale of the issue that have perhaps infiltrated into the media and some members' minds over the past few weeks.

Claire Baker: Following last week's summit, can the cabinet secretary say whether the balance between quality and cost will be reconsidered? Currently, quality is only a third of the balance. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have order in the chamber, please?

Richard Lochhead: As I have said, the still hungry for success initiative will look at how to continue the school meals revolution in the weeks and months ahead. Taking on board any lessons that can be learned from the past few weeks from the horsemeat scandal, sourcing and other factors were discussed at the meeting, of course, but we should recognise that the school meals that are served in Scotland are of quality and are traceable. We should celebrate that in this debate, and not perpetuate any myths that may be out there.

I am, of course, delighted that members have mentioned the food for life initiative, which has been a standard bearer of quality in many Scottish schools.

Alex Johnstone: The minister mentioned the sourcing of materials in Forres. Will he acknowledge that there is a failure in some quarters to understand that the cheapest and most expensive cuts can come from the same carcass, and that, if it is properly sourced, beef can be cost effective and high quality? Companies such as McDonalds recognise and exploit that commercially, but that seems to be beyond the understanding of the Green Party.

Richard Lochhead: A guiding principle should be that things are sourced in Scotland and close to home, and I will continue to support that principle.

On the horsemeat scandal, Richard Simpson mentioned the issue of food safety and quite rightly highlighted the great progress in Scotland in recent years in addressing food safety issues. It is important that we remain vigilant, but we have made progress. The horsemeat scandal is not, in

general, a food safety issue; rather, it is about food fraud in Europe. Twenty-three countries across the continent are now involved in the issue or have been affected by it. As I said before, we do not want the very popular and strong Scottish brand ending up having collateral damage because of debates that have taken place in this country as a result of a scandal in Europe. We should celebrate the Scottish label and brand, and I am glad that some members have done that today.

The new food standards body will, of course, be consulted in addressing some of the issues, and all members will have the opportunity to have their say. I can tell members, as Michael Matheson did, that promoting and safeguarding food safety will, of course, be the central function of the new food safety body.

Dr Simpson: Will the cabinet secretary take forward the Food Standards Agency in Scotland's recommendation that folic acid be a mandatory part of bread, as it prevents neural tube abnormalities? We need to move forward on that issue, and we can support the health service in Scotland on it. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Richard Lochhead: I will happily pass on those remarks to the health minister.

Many members have called for more regulation. We cannot rule anything out at this stage, of course, but we must be careful when we talk about more regulation. We do not want Scottish companies, particularly small businesses in the food sector, being put out of business because of a burden of regulation resulting from criminal fraud on the European continent. That would not do our economy any favours, and it would not do our food sector any favours whatsoever. We do not want to put Scottish businesses out of business, and we must ensure that our response to the issue is proportionate.

Many members have spoken about the value of brand Scotland to our economy. We have a fantastic image in this country and overseas. We have a clean, green image; we are seen to have a fantastic natural environment that produces fantastic raw materials that underpin our globally successful food and drink industry. Graeme Dey and other members have talked that up.

We have also talked up the need to ensure that the common fisheries policy and the common agricultural policy negotiations that are under way protect food security in this country and throughout Europe. It is important that we get a fair deal for Scotland's farmers, fishermen and crofters, who supply the raw materials that underpin our successful food and drink industry.

The export markets to which many members have referred offer tremendous opportunities. When I was leading a food and drink delegation in Japan and China, I heard distributors, chefs and others in those countries saying that the best produce that they have experienced from anywhere on the planet came from Scotland. We should take enormous pride in that. That is fantastic feedback from those very important markets. When we consider that 70 per cent of people in China will be in the middle class by 2030, we can see that there is a big market opportunity for companies in our country.

Members covered many other issues, but I have run out of time. We must recognise that there are many global challenges to be faced. The forecast increase in the global population from 7 billion to 9 billion by 2050 will increase demand on resources. We must safeguard our precious resources in this country and ensure that we can support our food and drink sector in the times ahead.

Food and drink are a passion that I know many members share. That is why many positive stories have been highlighted in the debate, as well as the difficult challenges that we face. If we work together we can build on the success of Scotland's first national food and drink policy and make this nation a good food nation. I urge members to support the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate. I apologise for the technical issue with our microphones, which I am pleased to tell members has been resolved.

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that in relation to the debate on Scottish Government food policy, if the amendment in the name of Claire Baker is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Alison Johnstone falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-05892.3, in the name of Claire Baker, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05892, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on Scottish Government food policy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)

Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 37, Against 63, Abstentions 15.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S4M-05892.1, in the name of Tavish Scott, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05892, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on Scottish Government food policy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

Against

Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 54, Against 61, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S4M-05892.2, in the name of Alison Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05892, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on Scottish Government food policy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

Against

Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)

Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 9, Against 74, Abstentions 32.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S4M-05892, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on Scottish Government food policy, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the significant achievements of the national food and drink policy and looks to build on this progress through increasing the number of consumers at home and abroad who enjoy and celebrate Scotland's famous larder, especially in the run-up to the Commonwealth Games, Ryder Cup and Homecoming in 2014; notes the growing interest in food and drink reflected in the many initiatives underway throughout the country that recognise the different ways that the sector impacts on society, and believes that there remains much untapped potential to promote the high standards of sourcing and provenance in Scotland's £12.4 billion industry that makes an enormous contribution to Scotland.

Crofting

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-04411, in the name of Jean Urquhart, on the role of crofting in the Highlands and Islands. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament understands that there are 18,027 crofts in the Highlands and Islands and across Scotland, housing over 33,000 people; considers that crofters play a key role through the production of store animals for the agricultural supply chain and in maintaining land in remote areas; believes that crofts are a valuable source of high-health status animals for larger agricultural food producers; considers the work of crofters to be vital to Scotland's national food and drink policy and to the continuing success of the sector; understands that most crofters rely on common agricultural policy subsidies to earn a marginal income and that they have to take on second jobs; believes that, by bringing in new inhabitants and because of the economic links that crofters have with the rest of the agricultural sector, crofting has helped maintain population levels in remote communities, considers crofting to be of paramount importance to the environment, food and drink sector and economy, and would welcome the interests of crofters and their communities being championed.

17:06

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):

It is with great pleasure that I open the debate on the role of crofting in the Highlands and Islands. It is timely that members have the chance to put on record their appreciation and support for crofting and the vital link that it forms in Scottish agricultural and rural communities.

Around 8.4 per cent of the Highlands and Islands population live in crofting households, which is the same as Scotland's percentage of the United Kingdom population. Crofting and crofters are fundamental to the viability of some of our remotest communities. Crofting not only supports local business but is responsible for the production of high-health breeding and store stock, which are valued by farms throughout Scotland and are an incredibly important part of our food supply chain.

A large part of Scotland's natural heritage and designated sites lie within the crofting counties. For example, almost 70 per cent of the land designated as national nature reserves and more than 60 per cent of the land designated as sites of special scientific interest in Scotland are in the crofting counties. That compares with an overall proportion of Scotland's area that is designated as NNR of 2 per cent and as SSSI of 13 per cent.

Although those areas of national importance are correctly designated and protected by Government bodies, we must not forget that the management of them is, to a great extent, carried out by

crofters. We must ensure that crofters continue in that vital role and that they are encouraged and justly rewarded for doing so.

The most immediate issue facing crofters is the legislative morass surrounding decrofting. An unintended consequence of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 is that there is no provision for owner-occupier crofters to decroft their land. That has led to the Crofting Commission suspending such applications. Inksters, the solicitors firm, has suggested that until emergency legislation is introduced to fix that, the Government could, under section 1(3) of the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993, compel the commission to process decrofting applications, as has been done in the past. I urge the Government to consider that measure while it works with the commission to fix the anomaly.

Another practical change that would help crofters would be to change the rate of grants for the crofting counties agricultural grant scheme. Grants through the Scotland rural development programme are paid at a rate of 50 per cent to all land managers, regardless of their location. However, crofters in the Western Isles, Shetland and other remote locations naturally face, as a result of their geography, higher costs than do those in mainland Scotland. The Government recognises that fact when it awards funding for infrastructure projects, such as schools. CCAGS has been underspent for many years, and raising the rate of grants to 75 per cent would help to increase uptake and encourage some much-needed investment in croft holdings.

Positive community development and regulation are fundamental to crofting's future. Highlands and Islands Enterprise is working on a new resilient rural communities policy that will require partner organisations to agree to shared outcomes and activities. I welcome its focus on residency and social and economic development to allow communities to become resilient. The goal is to assist communities with developments that will ultimately generate revenue.

It is clear that the Crofting Commission and HIE need to work together closely for mutual benefit. It would be useful for progress and development to be included in the Crofting Commission's annual report.

Of course, crofting is both a collective venture and an individual one. However, under the current common agricultural policy regime, crofters who work collectively and still use common grazings have found it difficult to access support for the whole area of land that they manage. There has been a significant decline in the use of common grazings and I seek assurance from the minister that the Scottish Government will examine closely

the difficulties that grazings committees face in accessing the support that they need.

I also highlight the work that the crofting connections project is doing to encourage young folk to think about a future in crofting. It has had great success in reaching huge numbers of schoolchildren throughout the region. It is a positive, proactive project that the Scottish Government is to be commended for encouraging and co-funding.

I reiterate the point that crofting is important to sustaining the viability of remote communities throughout Scotland and I urge the Government to continue to listen to, and engage with, the financial and legislative concerns of the crofting community.

At a recent event by the enough food for everyone if campaign, we were informed by a representative of a farmers organisation from Malawi—I do not know where the quotation originated from—that agriculture is the mother of cultures. In the crofting communities, we are talking not only about the culture of husbanding animals or land but much more than that; we are talking about rural communities not only surviving but working well.

Two recent reports have shown a huge sense of wellbeing and happiness in the Highlands and Islands. I ask that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government acknowledge that and try to understand some of the source of it.

I suggest that crofting, which is often considered the bottom of the food chain in Scottish agriculture, is the key to much that we respect, admire and regard as the future of life in the Highlands and Islands. I also suggest that, for little money, we could make a huge impact on many livelihoods.

I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

17:13

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I thank Jean Urquhart for securing the debate on the role of crofting in the Highlands and Islands.

First, I will comment on decrofting of owner-occupied crofts. I believe that the issue can be solved in a short while and I look forward to the minister helping us to understand it.

Some decrofting is good—for building houses for local needs, for example—but some can be bad. Part of the regulatory purpose of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 was to try to ensure that croft land is used and that absenteeism and neglect are reduced. The Crofting Commission is embarked on that process just now.

The co-operation that existed in the past in crofting is being re-established. Common grazing committees used to work together and people helped each other with their harvests and so on, and the more formal aspects of co-operation are necessary in the context of producing basic foods and getting them processed and marketed. Highlands and Islands Enterprise needs to focus on that with its new resilience policy.

I commend to members the activities of Community Land Scotland, which has helped a huge number of people to make a success of crofting in communities where there are also people who are not crofters. They have taken over some crofting communities that were privately owned and some that were owned by the Scottish Government. I hope that other communities will look to follow their example, although it is notable that many of those communities are in the Western Isles and far fewer are on the mainland—in my constituency or elsewhere.

One issue that crofting needs to focus on is the ability to process cattle for beef. Austria has more than 4,000 abattoir facilities that are accepted by the European Union, while the Highlands and Islands have only about half a dozen. That must be redressed.

I, too, was at the launch of phase 2 of the crofting connections project in Plockton. It is welcome that the project has been extended to many more schools, because it will bring young people into the area.

I finish by commenting on two factors that the crofting commissioners are grappling with. The first is mapping. Mapping is required by the 2010 act in order that we know what resources are available. Where communities have undertaken the exercise, they have a better idea of what their resources are.

The second factor is the duty to report. I had a hand in the amendment to the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill on that. The matter has been taken up by *"The Crofter"* in the form of a report from the grazings committee about the health of the community. The assessors have looked at the matter, and what has come out is an approach that should not be threatening and with which people should feel comfortable. Susan Walker, the convener of the Crofting Commission, said:

"With this approach, there is an opportunity for us to work together to gather the information we need to enable us to raise the profile of crofting with ministers and the Scottish Parliament and to present a clear picture of the state of crofting—its value and contribution to life in Scotland and the threats and problems it faces."

I fully back that approach and I believe that crofters around the country see the positive message in it. I hope that the attempts by other

people to describe the duty as “snooping on neighbours” will end and that that positive attitude to crofting will be reflected by many more people.

17:18

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I congratulate Jean Urquhart on bringing the debate to the chamber. Her speech revealed a real understanding of not just the challenges that crofting communities face but their resilience and their reason for being. This is an opportune week for the debate, given that we had a debate on food policy this afternoon and will debate CAP reform tomorrow afternoon.

Crofters play a vital role in the rural economy. As the motion highlights, they maintain land in remote areas, contribute to securing population levels in remote communities, support the larger agricultural sector and make a significant contribution to Scotland's environment.

I want to cover three areas in this short debate. First, the motion identifies CAP subsidy as a means of support for crofting communities. The process of CAP reform is on-going; we need genuine reform, and there will inevitably be winners and losers, but reform provides an opportunity to direct support to where it can achieve greater multiple gains. Crofting, given the contribution that it makes to sustainable communities and Scotland's environment, has much to be championed.

Crofting agriculture is generally agreed to be uneconomic, but it delivers much more. CAP reform and the move from historic to area payments in Scotland could give us an opportunity to ensure that appropriate support measures are put in place to protect and enhance crofting agriculture. We need to decide what the best use of the funds is to deliver the greatest benefits to vulnerable rural communities by contributing to their vitality and securing them even where the benefits are not easy to measure.

Secondly, I want to refer to Raasay, which Jean Urquhart has lodged another motion about. Although the fact that the lease has been returned to the Raasay community is welcome, it is for only one year and has cost the Government three times what it accepted as a bid for the rights, so questions remain about how the decision was made.

As land reform legislation passed through the Scottish Parliament, the then Scottish Executive introduced the “Estate Charter”, which set out a series of principles that acknowledged the Scottish Government's role as landowner, and the impact that poor decisions could have on the viability of communities. The recent decision on Raasay shooting rights has highlighted the charter. The

Scottish Government has claimed that ministers were not involved in the decision. Even if that were to be accepted, the question remains, why not? This evening's debate is perhaps not the appropriate parliamentary forum for the unanswered questions to be answered, but there needs to be parliamentary scrutiny of the decision and the status of the charter.

The minister will be aware of growing concerns, which have been raised by other members, about interpretation of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. Guidance from the Crofting Commission has informed owner-occupier crofters that they do not have a legal mechanism through which to decroft, and that is creating uncertainty. If the problems are being caused by the 2010 act, steps must be taken to resolve the issue and the Government must provide clarity on how the situation will be resolved.

I thank Jean Urquhart for bringing the debate and for recognising the importance of crofting to the Highlands and Islands.

17:21

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As convener of our Parliament's cross-party group on crofting—a job that I inherited from the true crofters' champion, John Farquhar Munro—I am delighted that the deputy convener, Jean Urquhart, has secured today's debate, and I am happy to participate in it.

It is important that we all continue to highlight the importance of crofting at every possible opportunity. The Scottish Crofting Federation does an excellent job of that, and I also pay tribute to Pam Rodway and her crofting connections team for the good work that it does with young people to educate them about country ways in an enjoyable and informative way.

Jean Urquhart's motion is to be commended. She is entirely right to highlight the importance of crofters producing high-quality, high-health-status animals for farmers elsewhere in Scotland. That was one of the main reasons why I was proud to stand 100 per cent behind our crofters in the two successful campaigns that we have fought since 1999 to preserve the bull hire scheme.

Earlier this afternoon, we debated food policy, and it is clear that the crofting sector has a key role to play in the provision of high-quality food in this country, and that it can benefit from what will be an increased demand for local food and traceable produce.

Although there is genuine political support for crofting across the political parties, crofters want Government to do more to assist them through practical commonsense measures, including

support for crofting housing and new entrants. The croft house grants scheme was not kept up with, but it should be recognised as an efficient way of providing affordable housing in rural Scotland, as it was in the past. The current reform of the CAP is crucial to the future of the sector and we need to ensure that the specific needs of crofters are protected in the reform.

I remain concerned and alarmed at the decline of crofting as demonstrated through continuing reductions in livestock, cropping and the communal management of common grazings. Securing a much better Scotland rural development programme including—of course—the successor to the less-favoured areas support scheme element, is vital to halting and reversing decline.

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): Does Jamie McGrigor agree that the UK Government's decision not to seek additional funding on pillar 2 in the CAP reform negotiations might have long-term consequences for the availability of funds?

Jamie McGrigor: I do not really have time to talk about that this evening, but it is something that we must investigate. We have to get the best possible deal for our crofters and farmers.

Pillar 1 payments offer our marginal areas appropriate levels of support, which is important. It is vital that the SRDP successor offers user-friendly options that crofters—including common-grazings managers and small-unit managers—are able to apply for and that offer practical benefits. There is consensus that the current SRDP simply has not provided those for small producers. I have written to the Government a great deal on the matter. The very small total of approved application cases since the start of the SRDP, land managers options and rural priorities compared with the potential number of smallholding applicants demonstrates that clearly. Too many people are put off applying by the complexity of the forms and the labour or anticipated time that is required, or they believe that the options are not appropriate for smaller-scale producers. We are therefore not making the most of the European funds that can be drawn down for crofting.

A shortage of time prevents me, I think—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It does.

Jamie McGrigor: —from covering many of the other issues, but I wish to mention the recent controversy over the Raasay crofters' traditional shooting and fishing rights.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Be brief, please.

Jamie McGrigor: It is absolutely disgraceful that the crofters who held the let were not offered

it in front of anyone else. Why was it taken from them in the first place?

As I am not allowed to go any further, I will stop—other than to congratulate Jean Urquhart on securing the debate.

17:26

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I, too, thank Jean Urquhart for giving us the opportunity to debate crofting this evening. Some of my colleagues might have seen crofters on the BBC's "Shetland" programme last night, but it turned out that they were from Glasgow, rather than from home, but there we are—we must remember that it is a drama, not a documentary.

Rob Gibson: That is the BBC for you.

Tavish Scott: Do not blame the BBC, Mr Gibson. That is a cheap shot.

The most pressing issue, certainly for owner-occupiers, is the shambles that was created by the Crofting Commission and the Scottish Government over decrofting, and I wish to address that directly. Across the crofting counties, 3,000 crofters are now denied the right to remove crofting regulation from their land by an interpretation of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. I presume that, last year sometime, some bright spark in either the Government or the commission decided to question the decrofting provisions in the act. I cannot find out where else this interpretation has come from.

Legal experts have now pored over the act, and they have created a legal opening that has allowed the Government and the Crofting Commission—which are joined at the hip on this issue—to stop any further owner-occupier decrofting. Worse, there is now legal uncertainty over title to land that has been decrofted since the 2010 act was passed. I have had crofters, solicitors, house builders and others constantly on the phone since this utter shambles emerged via the Crofting Commission website.

The other day, I asked the First Minister to sort it out. When the nationalists were in a self-inflicted hole over the removal of the fishing and shooting rights of Raasay's crofters, Alex Salmond read the internal riot act, and the policy changed within a week. The decrofting fiasco affects far more crofters across the crofting counties. It is a mess that needs to be resolved immediately, as Jean Urquhart, Claire Baker and Jamie McGrigor have rightly said. It is unacceptable for the Government and the commission to state, as they did jointly last Thursday—interestingly, the statement was issued after Parliament had finished for the day—that it is now up to crofters to take their own legal

advice. That is what the Government said last Thursday night.

Paul Wheelhouse: Would the member like to correct the record? When he stood up at First Minister's questions and asked whether ministers had responded to him, I had actually sent him a letter at half past 10 that morning.

Tavish Scott: Mr Wheelhouse may have sent a letter, but he sent it by email. I had not been in my office, because I had been in a committee, serving the Parliament. If he had wanted to have the First Minister briefed on the matter, he could have done so. If he chooses not to send me a letter and actually let me know about it, but instead to do it by email, I do not think much of that at all. More to the point, I do not think much of the way in which the Scottish Government is handling this issue on behalf of the crofters I represent in Parliament. It is about time that, instead of casting blame on others, he stood up and did his ministerial job and got the matter sorted out. That is his job as a minister. Ministers are there to take decisions, not to blame everyone else for the mistakes of the 2010 act.

This is a hole of the Government's making. I expect the minister to use today's opportunity, instead of prevaricating and blaming everyone else, to say how he will sort the matter out. Will there be emergency legislation or will the minister, as Jean Urquhart said, use the measures that Brian Inkster has highlighted? It is his choice to do that. He can wave his pen at me as much as he likes, but it is his job to do that.

The Government need not expect to turn up in Shetland on 25 March for the Highlands and Islands convention and lecture us about how good it is if it does not have this matter sorted out. The situation is entirely of its own making. The minister can tell Parliament how long he has known about it—how long the Government has been sitting on it. Is it four months, five months or six months? How are crofters to get the money back that is now due to solicitors because of the legal uncertainty that has been created?

The minister will also need to tell Parliament and lawyers—the Law Society phoned me about this yesterday—what they are to do with their insurance premiums, which will now go up. The minister is shaking his head. He should speak to the Law Society instead of shaking his head about these things. The Law Society says that the insurance premiums that lawyers face in small legal practices will now go up because of this uncertainty. Those practices will have to deal with the outcomes of this Government's mistakes on the legislation.

There are many crofters across the counties who doubt this Government's commitment to

crofting—no wonder after this fiasco and the changes that Jean Urquhart rightly referred to around CCAGS grants, agri-environmental schemes and the hideous penalties applied to crofters over minor mapping changes. Here is an opportunity to improve that record—no more waffle from the First Minister or anyone else. Crofters want this mess sorted out and they want it sorted out now.

17:30

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I congratulate Jean Urquhart on securing the debate. Crofting is of particular importance in my constituency, where it is the way of life for many and a vital source of food for a great deal more.

The motion highlights the fact that there are more than 18,000 crofts occupied by an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 crofting households, which support a total population of around 33,000. Indeed, crofting households account for around 30 per cent of all households in rural areas in the Highlands and Islands and as much as 65 per cent in parts of my constituency, such as Skye. I believe that there are more than 3,000 crofts supporting around 9,000 people in my constituency of Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch, which of course also takes in parts of Easter Ross, such as Dingwall and the Black Isle, and both sides of Loch Ness. It is difficult to get accurate figures because the information is not held in a way that easily identifies crofts within Scottish constituency boundaries, but it is clear that around 17 per cent of Scotland's crofts are in my constituency, so crofting is an extremely important issue for me.

There is never a shortage of issues to deal with in crofting, as the matters just discussed about decrofting and Raasay indicate. I believe that the minister handled the Raasay situation—a very difficult situation—well and I am quite sure that there is a bright future for the crofters and the other residents of Raasay.

Jamie McGrigor: I do not wish to be discourteous, but if the member thinks that the minister handled the situation well, what would have happened if he had handled it badly?

Dave Thompson: Mr McGrigor knows that when legal contracts have been signed, it is never easy to get out of them. I think that, given the circumstances, the minister dealt with the matter and with South Ayrshire Stalking well. There is a resolution. There was a mistake, which the Government admitted and put right. It takes a big Government to admit its mistakes and put things right.

I recently had the opportunity to speak at a crofting connections event in Plockton. Crofting connections, which is ably run by Pam Rodway, clearly recognises crofting's value, one part of which is described as follows:

"set against major environmental and social challenges, crofting has a unique role to play in inspiring young people to think global and act local."

I heartily endorse that. Crofting connections is a vital programme that facilitates links between crofting and the next generation. Through workshops that it runs, children get first-hand experience of working with the land, which is vital if we are to help the next generation understand the fundamental importance of land, including its ownership and use.

In the modern world, with many people living in towns and cities, it is often taken for granted that there will be food on our tables. Little consideration is given to the production of food or, crucially, the security of supply. If the market was left to dictate that only the most productive areas should produce our food, that would be a disaster for crofting and for Scotland.

One of the difficulties that we have with the common agricultural policy at the moment is that Richard Lochhead, the cabinet secretary, is arguing a case against the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. DEFRA wants to have an unfettered market approach—that is where it wants to get to. If that happened, it would be an absolute disaster, not just for crofting in Scotland but for a lot of other agriculture in Scotland, too. The minister must ensure in his negotiations that the CAP negotiations really do favour the real less-favoured areas such as the crofting areas, as other members have said. We must give special attention to the crofting areas, with a view to ensuring that payment for those areas accurately reflects their disadvantage, so that they can continue to contribute positively to Scotland's environment, economy and food security.

17:35

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I, too, congratulate Jean Urquhart on securing this important debate. Crofting is essential for the Highlands and Islands, not merely because it has a cultural tradition—it has a culture of its own that involves communal working and sharing resources—but because of its foremost role as an economic driver. The motion draws attention to crofting's contribution to food production and the provision of affordable housing. Crofting's ability to fulfil those roles depends on the right social and political climate, given the natural disadvantage of the area in which it operates—a natural

disadvantage that makes crofting an essential part of the area's economic mix.

I will speak about a couple of issues. Others have spoken about them, but they require emphasis. The first is the fiasco in Raasay, which should never have happened. We were told that the decision was taken without ministerial knowledge, but the Government sets the parameters in which officials operate.

The action was along the lines of the worst excesses of absentee landowners, which Raasay had its fill of in the past. People there thought that they were in safe hands with Government ownership. That an official thought that the action would be fine tells us about the lack of appreciation in the Government of crofting and of the wider needs of the Highlands and Islands.

Dave Thompson: Is Rhoda Grant pleased that the Government admitted that it made a mistake and rectified the situation in Raasay?

Rhoda Grant: I am very pleased that the Government admitted to the mistake, but I take issue with the suggestion that it has rectified the situation in Raasay. It has given the crofters a year-long reprieve. I hope that when that period ends, the minister will decide that the shooting and fishing rights should remain in local hands.

Paul Wheelhouse: I know that Rhoda Grant cares greatly about the issue. She assumes that the period is just a year. We have given the temporary measure a year, with a view to reaching a longer-term, community-led solution for the sporting rights on Raasay. I assure her that the year is not a fixed period; if we have to change it to allow more time for negotiations, we will do so.

Rhoda Grant: I appreciate the minister's intervention and the reassurance that the year is only a period to produce a long-term solution that will put the rights back in community hands, where they should be at all times.

The second issue is the ability to decroft land on owner-occupied crofts, which many have raised. One benefit of crofting that we have talked about is the availability of land on which to build affordable housing. However, people cannot secure a mortgage on a house that is built on croft land, so the land must be decrofted.

One stated aim of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 was to ensure that crofters had the same benefits, whether they were owner-occupiers or tenants. However, it appears that shoddy drafting has created the opposite effect. As many other speakers have said, Brian Inkster has said that the minister has powers of direction over the Crofting Commission. The minister needs to exercise those powers immediately to deal with the anomaly. Failure to do so will mean that

crofters will have to go through the courts to protect their rights, which will be difficult for those who can least afford to do that.

The problem is of the Government's making. If it had not pushed the legislation through so quickly, it would not have made the mistakes. Government back benchers on committees have a role in scrutinising Government legislation and not simply pushing through what the Government tells them to.

Committees should lead the charge in ensuring that the Government is held to account and that the legislation that goes through committees is right. That also applies to the Raasay decision—the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee should look at that and ensure that steps are taken to ensure that such a situation does not happen again and that communities have the right to their own land. The Government must learn from its mistakes, not only for crofting but for the rest of Scotland.

17:39

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I thank my colleague Jean Urquhart for securing this debate. I want to talk about the connection between people and the land, which is difficult to put down on paper the world over, whether we are talking about native Americans or aboriginal Australians. It is incumbent on legislators to shape policies that recognise that link to the land, whether with regard to the older people of north-west Sutherland not wishing to be institutionalised and coming up with models that will retain them in their own area, or with regard to crofting. Legislation on land reform has helped, but parliamentary draftspeople are not always capable of capturing the very essence of that relationship.

As a native Highlander and former police officer, I give the poaching laws as an example. Highlanders have great difficulty recognising that someone who is resident in London for 50 weeks of the year, or a multinational from the Netherlands, can own wild fish or wild deer, so it is important to remember that things have to be relevant.

The Highlands have a troubled history connected with land, and women have played a significant role in that history, for example Màiri Mhòr with her role in the battle of the braes. The crofting legislation and land reform have helped, but as recent events in Harris have shown, we are not quite there yet. Attitudes of greed and ownership need to be resolved.

Crofting has a distinguished past and it has to have a distinguished future. The motion talks about crofts being

“a valuable source of high-health status animals for larger agricultural food producers”.

For me, the link to the local butcher is more important than that. Our earlier debate on food policy covered a lot of issues that affect crofters. Some of the things that were mentioned included the modern globalised food supply chain, an unsustainable food culture, the domination of multinational corporations, and community-driven initiatives. I think that we all recognise that the community around crofters is the one that we want to see promoted.

The motion also talks about the key role of crofters

“through the production of store animals for the agricultural supply chain”.

It is about quality and it is about staying local—it is vital for the planet that food production and consumption take place as close to each other as possible. The Scottish Government's food policy recognises that.

The Scottish Crofting Federation produced a report in 2008 that prompted some discussion about the indigenous people of the Highlands and Islands. It contains a lot of pleasing radical language. It says that sustainable local agricultural systems such as crofting must be supported ahead of unsustainable agri-industry, which the UK Government would export, along with the environmental consequences for places overseas. It goes on to say that crofts have a vital role to play and that there is a fear in some quarters that the very idea of crofting is the subject of official hostility.

Other members have alluded to the fact that most crofters rely on common agricultural policy subsidies to earn a marginal income. In 2008, there was talk about the less favoured area support scheme, a policy that saw areas such as East Lothian and the Black Isle, with fine agricultural land, being treated the same as the rocky slopes of Harris, as the report mentions. Of course, the farmers in East Lothian and the Black Isle did not have second jobs—most crofters do. In Lochaber, I well remember neighbours who worked for the Forestry Commission having crofts and having time off to work on them.

We have moved on in some areas. There has been talk of efforts to remove the bull hire scheme, but that scheme will be retained. I hope that community use can be made of Knocknagael, where land is being freed, and ideally there will be a combination with what is in the existing plan.

Recent events on Raasay have led to a high level of interest in crofting. I ask people to act with good grace, in the terms that Dave Thomson outlined, in relation to those events. The situation

was not ideal, but I think that the best has been made of it. There is a future for crofting.

17:44

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): I, too, congratulate Jean Urquhart on securing this debate on a wide range of issues that are relevant to crofting. It comes as no surprise to hear the strong support for crofting and for the benefits that crofting delivers for Scotland.

The Scottish Government fully appreciates the difficulties that are faced by crofters in rural and remote rural areas; remoteness from markets, the higher costs of foodstuffs, fuel, goods and services, and the extra time that it takes to access such things are all important. I will come on to some of the substantive points that members have raised, but first I will highlight a few points of my own.

My recent visit to Barra highlighted the appreciation that crofters have of the natural environment and their role as stewards of it—I think that Jean Urquhart made that point in her opening speech. The key for the Scottish Government is to build confidence within the communities that we trust them to protect the environments in which they live.

We also fully appreciate the social and environmental value-added benefits that high nature-value farming brings. Because of that, we will do all that lies within our power to create and maintain an environment in which the crofting way of life has a sustainable future. It is regrettable that the sustainability of crofting is being put at risk by the current UK Government's position on CAP reform negotiations, especially given that crofters currently depend on €11.6 million of single farm payments each year. Crofting tenures predominate in the 85 per cent of Scotland's land that is in agricultural production that is designated as LFA, and which will in the future be covered by the new designation of "areas of natural constraint".

While it is represented at EU negotiations by the UK Government, Scotland receives the fourth-lowest single farm payment per hectare of member states, and the lowest in the UK by far. Pillar 2, in which Scotland already receives the lowest payment in the EU—again from within the UK—is also key to many crofters who are involved in conservation farming and is vital for agri-environment projects. I was therefore extremely disappointed on behalf of our crofters that the UK Government chose not to argue, as 16 other member states did, for additional pillar 2 funding.

Maintenance of coupled payments for those who are engaged in livestock farming is also

essential. To date, the UK Government has taken a different view—despite clear advice to UK ministers from our own Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment on their importance to Scottish agriculture.

Rob Gibson raised a point about abattoirs, about which he was absolutely correct. The future of our smaller rural abattoirs will be vital to our crofters; the review of the food policy that was outlined by the cabinet secretary earlier this afternoon offers an opportunity to address that issue. However, a key part of the future of crofting is tied in with effective regulation and compliance with the duties that are placed on all crofters, whether they are tenants or owner-occupiers.

Jamie McGrigor: Does the minister agree that the land that he is talking about—the poor land on which crofters farm—is greatly disadvantaged by the fact that it is entirely measured by past productivity, and that some of the things that the land can now produce, such as public good, should also be taken into consideration when looking at the value of the land for the purpose of drawing down payments for areas of natural constraint and other European awards?

Paul Wheelhouse: I will take Jamie McGrigor's points on board. Perhaps we can discuss them at a future date. I am conscious that time is pressing, so I apologise for having to rush on with my speech.

Parliament agreed to set up the crofting register under the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. My recent visit to Barra highlighted the fact that there would be value in local meetings to explain the mechanism for registering crofts in order to ensure that crofters can, under the new register, for the first time have legal certainty on the extent of, and interests in, their croft. I have asked my officials to ensure that local meetings be arranged to assist crofters in understanding the process of, and the requirements for, registration. Those meetings will take place in sufficient time for groups of crofters to access the 24 per cent reduction in voluntary registration costs that the Government offered in the first year of registration, at a cost of up to £100,000.

The newly constituted board of the Crofting Commission, with a budget of £2.5 million per annum, is mainly made up of people who croft. That is important because it means that the commissioners are ideally placed to understand crofting issues. It is worth noting also that the franchise for the elections to the commission included 16 and 17-year-olds, which is relevant today. Scottish ministers will look at how we can support the commission's vision on how crofting can be effectively regulated for the benefit of all.

I turn to some specific points in the motion. The Scottish Government is committed to providing on-going support to crofting. The crofting cattle improvement scheme, which is situated on the outskirts of Inverness, provides good quality high health-status bulls to groups of crofters at an annual cost to Government of £400,000. That is vital in areas where no alternative hiring facility exists and where it is neither practicable nor cost effective to keep bulls and overwinter them. The scheme has dual benefits for participants and knock-on benefits for the rest of their communities. The hire cost is heavily subsidised and the progeny of the bulls that are used in the scheme are invariably healthy, heavy and attract premium prices at market.

As well as providing an affordable means to hire bulls, the Government has proved its on-going commitment to the scheme by modernising the facility to make it safe and future-proofed. As well as the higher livestock prices that will be achieved by crofters, other social and environmental benefits also accrue from the scheme.

Also in relation to food production, earlier this year we were delighted to support with £112,000 for the period to 2015, as part of the food education programme, phase 2 of the crofting connections project, which has been mentioned by a number of members. The Scottish Government recognises the role that active crofting plays in maintaining population, which ties in to Jean Urquhart's point about the health of crofting affecting the culture and health of communities. The Government has continued to support that role through provision of grants for construction and improvement of croft housing through the croft house grant scheme, which has a budget of £2.6 million per annum.

However, the nature of crofting has changed and, although some 8,000 crofters are agriculturally active, we should recognise that comparatively few crofts are large enough for sufficient family income to be generated from agriculture alone. The "Committee of Inquiry on Crofting—Final Report" of 2008 recorded that

"on average crofters derive about 20% of their net income from agriculture"—

that relates to the point that John Finnie made about how crofters need more than one job. However, the link to agricultural activities is of great importance to the crofting way of life, and the Scottish Government offers our support for that.

In the time that remains, I want to respond to some of the substantial points that have been raised. On owner-occupier decrofting, we recognise that the fact that owner-occupiers are unable to decroft their land is a matter of great concern to many members and, in particular, to

many crofters. I have already asked my officials to investigate the issue as a matter of urgency. We are taking legal advice, and I can assure Parliament that we are prepared to take any necessary steps to ensure that owner-occupier crofters can apply to decroft their land in the same way as tenant crofters and landlords. If legislative change is required, I will look to Parliament for support to encourage smooth passage of that legislation.

Regarding Jean Urquhart's point about Brian Inkster's suggestion that ministers could use section 1(3) of the 1993 act, I am told that the commission's legal advice is that legislation does not provide for owner-occupiers to decroft. Instructing the commission to accept such an application would amount to instructing the commission to act unlawfully. Therefore, if ministers were to issue guidance to the commission that it should resume the approval of such decrofting applications, we would in effect be asking the commission to act unlawfully.

On Tavish Scott's suggestion that crofters have been told to take their own legal advice, the Scottish Government has never given advice that crofters should take independent legal advice. The commission published legal advice on its website recently.

Rhoda Grant said that crofters cannot build on croft land because it needs to be decrofted in order for them to secure a loan. The Scottish Government proposed legislation on standard securities over tenanted crofts in the draft bill in 2009, but crofters did not accept that. The Committee of Scottish Clearing Bankers had accepted safeguards in the draft legislation for crofters to provide standard security over tenanted land.

I would like to ask Tavish Scott to clarify where his 3,000 figure came from. Not all owner-occupiers have applied to decroft. The Crofting Commission has indicated that 179 decrofting directions have been issued and 59 applications are held in abeyance; the figure of 3,000 is not one that I recognise. Since the Crofting Commission published its legal advice in February, we have been working very hard to address the issue, which should give Tavish Scott an idea of the timescales involved. I am grateful to the member for raising the issue with me, and I can assure him that we take the matter extremely seriously and will address it in due course.

Regarding Raasay, I recognise that a degree of concern has been expressed in the chamber. I acknowledge to Rhoda Grant and to others that we made a mistake. Unfortunately, that mistake was made without ministerial involvement, and we have taken steps to rectify it, as Dave Thompson

indicated. I can assure members that that process should not happen again.

Claire Baker: Can I ask whether the Scottish Government still adheres to the principles in the estates charter that the then Scottish Executive established in 1999?

Paul Wheelhouse: Clearly, the Scottish Government believes very strongly in community ownership of assets and community management of land. I want to put that on the record today.

The Scottish Government will take all steps that we can to ensure that the community in Raasay has a full consultation on the future of the sporting rights on the island. We want to ensure that the whole community has an input into that decision—hence the decision, as I explained to Rhoda Grant, to allow at least a year for the community to arrive at a solution. We hope that the matter will be carried by consensus in the community.

I hope that I have reassured members, including Claire Baker, that we take very seriously communities' interest in management of our estates in this country. I assure members that I will personally take a great interest in that in the future.

Meeting closed at 17:54.

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