

EFRA Committee: Immigration and Labour Supply in the Poultry Meat Sector.



July 2020: Written evidence submitted by the **British Poultry Council**

BACKGROUND

1. The British Poultry Council is the voice of the British poultry meat sector and the trade association for producers of poultry meat from chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese.
2. Poultry makes up half the meat the country eats. As an industry, we are a vital asset to the UK's economy. We contribute £5bn GVA (Gross Value Added) and generate £1bn in tax revenue per annum. We also directly employ over 40,000 people in the UK. These people ensure that safe, nutritious and affordable food is available for all.
3. The Government's Immigration Bill is likely to directly impact labour within the poultry sector. This has been highlighted recently in light of the Covid-19 crisis. Poultry meat businesses are already facing the consequences of the pandemic. This, combined with the Government's Immigration Bill, is set to make access to quality British food harder for all.
4. As we move to begin a new chapter outside of the European Union, it is more important than ever to adopt policies that enable businesses to drive productivity, create good jobs and strengthen our food security in a thriving, independent UK post-Brexit.
5. The poultry sector, vital to the UK economy, cannot thrive without access to non-UK labour working to continue feeding the nation their favourite meat.

BRITAIN'S FOOD HEROES

6. The Immigration Bill must recognise the power of food and not undervalue Britain's food heroes. COVID-19 has reinforced the importance of self-belief and dignity that comes wrapped up in food. It has brought an unusual kind of recognition for food workers who were upgraded in the public rhetoric from 'low-skilled' to 'essential' to running the country.
7. The Government must acknowledge that the food on the nation's dinner tables under lockdown is being produced in large part by the people whose proposed policy undervalues. It must recognise food production as a vital asset to UK's sovereign capability and treat food as a national security issue.

8. 8.4 million people in the UK are still ‘too poor to eat’. We simply cannot afford to lose our food workers (half of which are EU migrants) who have made extraordinary sacrifices to keep the nation fed in these difficult times.
9. Key workers in food, regardless of where they come from, are an important part of Britain’s cultural fabric and prestige. Our country, economy and citizens deserve an immigration policy that makes it easier for food producers to retain access to the talent and skills that put food on every table.

DEMONSTRATING INNOVATION AND CREATING GOOD JOBS

10. Poultry meat businesses have been busy future proofing themselves by ramping up investment in innovation and technology, focusing on nurturing talent and skills, and attracting UK workers.
11. In order to create good jobs that attract UK labour and roll out technological advancements, the poultry meat industry needs a period of three to five years to transition into this new phase of growth. In this interim period, it’s essential that the Government introduces routes for non-UK workers to come in and fill roles that cannot currently be filled by UK workers.

THREAT TO FOOD SECURITY

12. The Bill must not penalise poultry meat businesses already facing the consequences of the pandemic and make access to quality British food harder for all.
13. With the UK beginning a new chapter outside the European Union, it is more important than ever to adopt policies that enable businesses to drive productivity, create good jobs and strengthen our food security in a thriving, independent UK post-Brexit.
14. Poultry is half the meat the country eats. Our sector has grown significantly, beyond the UK labour availability in the areas we operate (where the unemployment rate remains very low). 60% of our workforce – 22,800 people – are EU nationals who are going above and beyond to keep this country fed. The current estimation of the annual turnover of staff is 30%. Hence, every year, our industry has about 7,000 vacancies that need to be filled with non-UK workers.
15. The Government must recognise the needs of this vital British industry and enable poultry meat businesses to have access to the non-UK workers to continue feeding the nation their favourite meat.

SEASONAL AGRI-FOOD MARKET

16. The British poultry meat sector caters to the seasonal agri-food market. Around 9 million British turkeys are reared for Christmas every year to some of the highest standards in the world.
17. We are calling on the Government to extend the seasonal worker pilot scheme currently aimed at the horticulture sector to the poultry meat industry. This will ensure that British turkeys remain affordable and available for all every Christmas.

LOOKING AHEAD

18. Covid-19 has reinforced the importance of self-belief and dignity that comes wrapped up in food, and the role of food in transforming lives. The Government must recognise food as a special case and treat it as a national security issue going forward.
19. This national emergency has highlighted the crucial role played by key workers in food production who are feeding the nation during these extraordinary times. We urge the Government to recognise the pivotal role of those working in the food supply chain and ensure that our workers are no longer categorised as 'low-skilled' in future immigration policies.
20. Every year we have about 7,200 vacancies that need to be filled with non-UK workers. If these vacancies cannot be filled, it will have a significant impact on the production of, and therefore cost of food - all of which will pose a risk to affordability and potentially force people to go without food.
21. Government must ensure that British poultry meat, and the quality it represents, stays affordable and available for all. Losing control of how we feed ourselves as a nation would penalise British food producers at a time when we should be taking matters of food security into our own hands.

