Victoria Prentis (14.32.40)

I should start by declaring my interest, my family has farmed on the Oxfordshire Northamptonshire Border for many years and I am myself a keen smallholder. This is a very important moment for agriculture in this country. This bill is the first of its kind for over 70 years and will allows us to shape farming for the future. The bill is about farmers and sets out a framework policy for rewarding them as they produce food and provide public goods. I want to start by thanking everyone who has tabled amendments. I apologise for the hybrid nature of this debate which prevents me from fully engaging with every point, it really isn’t ideal. I am however reassured that the bill has been thoroughly scrutinized not by one but by 2 public bill committees. I am very keen to continue to engage with members across the houses, we can continue to develop the details of the policies (14.33.33). I want to record my thanks to those who have worked so hard to ensure that we have all been fed in these frightening times: farmers, manufacturers, and retailers. They are food heroes and they have worked together and struggles on despite workplace shortages and social distancing measures and I really hope that the lasting legacy of this pandemic is that we all think a little bit more about where our food comes from. The Feeding the Vulnerable Taskforce, which I chair, has worked hard to ensure that those parts of society on whom this crisis falls the hardest can access food. On Friday we announced 16 million pounds worth of funding for food charities (14.34.17).

Measures in this bill would have been very useful two months ago. I commented in particular on clauses 18 and 19 which would have made it particularly easier and quicker to support farmer in these difficult times. And of course, 17, for the first time the government will have the duty to take a systematic review of our food security at least every 5 years, giving time to observe trends. That is not to say that we need to wait 5 years for review. The majority of data covered will of course be available between reports and we certainly have no intention of waiting until the end of the 5 years to public our report. That report will of course take into account what we have learned from the current pandemic (14.35.03). This is a domestic bill; it is not about trade. However, I have heard colleagues across this House, and I will hear them again this afternoon I am sure, voice concerns about the effect of future trade agreements on UK agriculture. Some are concerned about reductions in standards, particularly those on animal welfare, others are concerned there will not be a level playing field between our products and those coming from abroad. Like the rest of my colleagues on this side of the house, I was elected on a very clear manifesto commitment. And one, my right honourable friend Prime Minister has reiterated since: that in all of our trade negotiations we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare, and food standards. This government will stand firm in trade negotiations to ensure any deals live up to the values of our farmers and consumers (14.35.57). We are keen to ensure that parliamentarians, consumers and businesses have access to the information they need on our trade negotiations. Trade talks with the US opened formally last Tuesday (14.36.10). Ahead of this the government set out the negotiation objectives and associated documents, and a similar process will be replicated in the coming months as we do the same for trade deals with Japan, Australia, and New Zealand (14.36.24). I am grateful for the continuous contributions of the NFU and others who sit on our expert trade advisory group who helped shape this trade policy and helped feed straight into the negotiating team (14.36.37). And I can assure the House that we are actively
exploring how to build on this industry participation. I’d like to reassure colleagues that all food coming into this country will be required to meet existing import requirements. At the end of the transition period the withdraw act will convey all EU standards into domestic law. This will include a ban on using artificial growth hormones in beef, nothing apart from potable water to clean chicken carcasses, and any changes to these standards would have to come before this parliament. We would be doing our own inspections to ensure that these import conditions are met (14.37.20). while we all want to support British farmers, if passed, these well-meaning amendments will have unintended consequences. The supply of food will be significantly disrupted if foods that meet our current import standards were to be blocked. New clauses 1 and 2 would affect UK exports to countries with whom, as part of the EU, we currently have trade agreements. I am concerned that the extra conditions in these two new clauses could result in countries refusing to enter into continuity agreements. For example, accepting new clause 2 would risk whiskey exports, worth 578 million pounds, another examples is the impact it would have on our potato exporters, 22% of our potato exports go to countries with whom a continuity agreement has not yet been signed (14.38.15). An assessment of our current UK production standards, followed by an assessment of all relevant standards in a third country, followed by an assessment as to how these two compare to UK legislation and UK production standards, would be required if these amendments are passed, to make sure that any FTA complied. And this would all have to be done by the end of December. I understand that honourable members want to ensure safeguards for our farmers, however, I have serious concerns about the unintended consequences of these amendments on our producers and our exporters (14.38.54). Our manifesto commitment is clear, the government will support farmers and protect our standards, and the rules, regulations and robust processes are already in place for this (14.39.07). Turning now to labelling, I am looking forward to hearing from the honourable lady for Chatham and Aylesford on the labelling amendment she has and I understand that she will be championing consumer choice in the domestic market which is very important. Other colleagues, including members for Tatton, Totnes, West Dorset and others, have asked us to explore whether labelling approaches could be used to differentiate products that meet domestic production standards from those that do not (14.39.44). This would include exploring mandatory labelling. Any scheme could not be devised until we have completed the transition period and, of course, would have to recognise WTO obligations but I would like to reassure members from across the House that this is something we will consider closely and on which we are prepared to consult. We all hope, Madame Deputy Speaker, that UK food producers will benefit from increased export opportunities as we open up foreign markets. For example, in the last year we have seen the lifting of the 20-year ban on the export of UK beef and lamb to Japan – our food has great campaigned targets, consumer audiences abroad, and is boosting global demand for our food and drink (14.40.32). I turn now to amendments related to financial assistance. I defy anyone to maintain that the Common Agricultural Policy was good for either environmental protection or the productivity of British farming. It has held us back. It has paid those with more land more subsidy, regardless of what they did with it. It’s favoured some parts of the industry over others. We are really keen that that changes now. We have an exciting opportunity to reset and plan for the future. Passing this bill will give farmers and land managers a clear direction. In England, it will enable us to deliver direct payments, simplified council stewardship schemes,
productivity grants next year and I’d like to assure the honourable gentlemen that that is why this bill is top of the queue (14.41.27). The gradual 7-year transition will allow farmers and land managers time to prepare for the new environmental land management scheme, which is currently being piloted. Upland farmers, for examples, will be well placed to benefit from it. We will also create a UK shared prosperity fund which addresses the needs of rural businesses and communities (14.41.52). Delaying the start of the agricultural transition to 2022 would just delay the benefits of moving away from direct payments. And to reassure, again, for most farmers our maximum reduction for 2021 will be modest, of under 5% for 80% of farmers. Improving the health of our environment, as set out in the 25-year environment plan is a priority. The measures in this bill will help us combat climate change, but this bill is not the place for more targets (14.42.24). ELM will be critical in helping us deliver against our legally binding targets, to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. We recognise, for these policies to be effective, they need to be properly funded, and in our manifesto we committed to maintaining current agricultural spending for each year of this parliament. Of course, this is a framework bill and this is only the beginning. I look forward to working with colleagues right across the house and with groups such as the NFU to develop the policies that will flow from this legislation. I turn now to those amendments tabled on agro-ecological farming practices and on reducing the use of pesticides (14.43.07). We are already supporting ELM to support farmers to take a whole farm, wholistic approach. We have 50 test and trials in progress at the moment with many more to come before the national pilot starts in 2024. We are considering innovative solutions like Integrated Pest Management, which aims to reduce pesticide use on farms. We absolutely agree that pesticides should not be used where that pesticide use may harm human health and have a robust regulatory system in place to ensure this. I turn now to the many benefits that this bill will bring farmers in the devolved administrations (14.43.44). Clause 33 tackles an unfairness in the red meat levy system and will allow the levy collected from animals that have crossed the border to slaughter to be returned to where the animals were reared. The levy boards are working very hard at the moment to devise a scheme and our aim is to have one in place by April next year. New clause 9 is for the DERA minister to consider and I understand that he has no plan at this stage to introduce a sunset clause (14.44.11). The UK government will continue to work closely with the devolved administrations and I would like to reiterate our commitment to consult with the Das on our proposals for regulations to be made on to the WTO clauses. I turn to the amendments on fairness and transparency in the supply chain (14.44.29). No decisions have yet been taken on the subject of the appropriate enforcement body. We are exploring options with the industry first, before designing the enforcement regimes, and appointing a regulator, but I will keep the House up to date on this. Turning to the amendments on tenancies, tenants should be able to benefit from our new payment policies and we will continue to work very closely with the industry we had a large consultation last year as we developed these policies further (14.45.00). Finally, Madame Deputy Speaker, 3 minor and technical government amendments have been tabled in the name of my right and honourable friend the Secretary of State at the request of the Welsh government. These are needed to bridge a gap until new powers are provided by Welsh legislation. So, Madame Deputy Speaker, to conclude, this bill provides a framework for an exciting future for farming. It will ensure that those who produce are food are properly rewarded and that farming efficiently and improving the environment will go hand in
hand in the future. I am very much looking forward to working with colleagues across this House to develop the environmental land management policies and working out how they’ll work not only on the ground but also above it and beneath it.

**Dierde Brock (14.45.00)**

I am going to move to amendment 29. This is a strange piece of a bill, Madame Deputy Speaker, a hybrid which covers reserved and devolved competencies, now it looks like it’s going to be the first piece of legislation to be passed under the hybrid procedures and so the first UK legislation to be passed under electronic voting, so that Westminster can look a bit modern when it needs to. Perhaps after this pandemic the electronic voting and other good developments might be retained. This bill of course is only needed because we are leaving the EU, so it’s a case of cauterising a self-made wound. The bill will pass, of course, because farmers – our food producers – do need to be provided with the support they need to keep going. I’ll say it again, because it bears repeating, that farmers are good stewards of the land, they take good care of it. It is, after all, one of their biggest assets and absolutely essential to their ongoing businesses and livelihoods. Good farmers manage the land well and they improve it. I would urge the government, though, to provide more immediate support to farmers to help them get through this crisis so that they can come out the other side with working farms and productive land (14.47.28). They might even be opportunities for them to use this time to innovate, to adapt to their farming and business practices to a new model with an eye to future operations. We passed a new legislation, recently, to set up a new payments system, and I don’t see any reason why the government shouldn’t use it now to support farmers. In the amendments we have a few choices selection, and I can say that the SNP will be backing sensible improvements to the bill, we support righting the need for high standards in imported food into the legislation and we will be voting for that. It is of great concern to farmers, and to fishers, and to other food producers, that any low quality, mass-produced, under-priced rubbish from elsewhere might be allowed to flood the market and squeeze them out (14.48.17). Our food producers have high quality, high standard, high welfare products, that give excellent nutrition to consumers. We would be doing the food producers, the end consumers, and the retailers all a disservice if we were to allow these high quality products to be squeezed out by any low quality products that have, for example, been dipped in bleach to kill pathogens before they are dumped on shelves. It is a massive concern for consumers too, they don’t want their choices to be shut down by low-grade products. Save our farmers, save our cooking, and save our families. We must support continued high standards in animal welfare, plant hygiene and end-product quality. Do not dump rubbish in our kitchens and on our plates, let’s keep the standards on imported food as high as the standards on food produced in this island. I note the First Minister’s commitment, in her speech, to maintain those standards, I cannot understand why it’s not in the text of the bill, so I look forward to her explaining that a little further later because I am afraid the explanation she gave wasn’t sufficient for me (14.49.25). We also support the principles that the honourable member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport has written in new clause 7: food poverty in these wealthy nations was always a disgrace but the pandemic has
brought that inequality and inhumanity into sharp release. Action is needed to address it and I can only hope that the government takes that under advice and looks to extend the principle in the long-term. People shouldn’t go hungry or rely on charity to feed their children. Decency and humanity are not too expensive. Public Health Scotland looks at the effect of poverty on health, including food poverty, and analyses possible solutions as part of its work. I would imagine that Public Health England must be doing something similar so the preparations for this might not as big a task as it might seem. And Scotland might also offer a template you can adapt to serve England better. The Fairer Scotland Action Plan seeks to address inequalities. Recommendations from an independent working group on food poverty informed the creation of a fair Food Fund, which is now part of a larger fund investing in communities (14.50.33). I think a large lesson from that, though, is that you cannot address food poverty properly if you do not address poverty properly, and you have to roll back austerity fully if you are going to do that. You also need to ensure that there is nutritious and untainted food available, which means respecting the principles underpinning the needs to keep import standards high. There isn’t, though, a recognition of the devolved governments in this amendment, and it is a devolved competence so that leaves us unable to support it. I also looked at the amendments which we lodged, my own on import standard, I want to mention the commencement of the proper operation of the red meat levy – I understand that the boards themselves have been in agreement on the way forward, they have been for quite some time, and it is incumbent upon the government to accommodate the ambition they are showing by making sure that the machinery of the scheme is up to scratch and that it is ready to rock and roll as soon as possible (14.51.35). Scotland’s farmers have already waited far too long to get their money back so that their investments can support their businesses and we will continue, I note the First Minister’s commitment on this, to press the government on their commitment to April delivery. The amendment which I would like to put forward to vote today is, it’s a bit technical and it’s explained in quite some detail and length in Holyrood’s Sewel memo (or legislative consent memorandum to give it the fancy title) if anyone needs the background, but it concerns the reporting to the WTO. My amendment 39 addresses the concerns, that are in the Sewel memo, and will remove the scheme that renders the devolved administrations subject to the whims of the Secretary of State – it is surely a central principle of devolution that the devolved administrations should be free to operate in the devolved policy areas without interference from the UK government. As the bill currently stands, the power to determine how farmer support is treated, for the purposes of WTO reporting, and therefore the ceilings in each classification of support, are reserved to the UK government rather than the devolved administrations, which will still be tasked with providing the support to farmers. I must stress, this is a new reservation, it is the centralisation of function which does not currently exist. So, I urge members to support amendment 39 to remove that from the bill (14.53.02). And I am very conscious, Madame Deputy Speaker, we do have a restricted timetable or these proceedings so I will leave my contribution there.

Owen Paterson (15.03.06)

I would like to bring attention to my entries in the register as I come from a long family of farmers and have interest in farming and food production. I represent a
very successful rural constituency producing some of the finest food in the world with its absolutely top-class farmers and food producers. I very strongly welcome this bill and I look forward to seeing it go through today. It frees us from the constraints of the Common Agricultural Policy which held us back for many years and lets us give freedom to farmers. When I was in DEFRA as Secretary of State, time an again farmers said “get out of our hair”, this will allow farmers to concentrate on what they are good at, which is producing food. I entirely echo the comments made by Minister and others earlier in the debate about the extraordinary efforts made by farmers and food producers to cope with the circumstances brought about by corona. There is no conflict between freedom of farmers and free trade around the world. I see a great opportunity for farming benefitting from any free trade deals and that is absolutely clear (14.04.22). There is a narrative out there that free trade arrangements are going to be some sort of cost to farmers and I just don’t buy that. We have huge export opportunities that the Minister touched on, exporting beef to the States – that’s been worth over 60 million over 3 years – and when I was in DEFRA we started getting beef back into Hong Kong, and there are enormous opportunities. If you take the lamb industry, America and China are the world leaders of lamb consumption and they each consume twice as much as France or Germany so there are great opportunities. There are some really interesting figures that just came out of the FAO. In a metric of one, back in 1961, the EU is producing a given amount of food still at 0.55, we are at 0.43, the world is at 0.2 and the world leader is 0.03 and that is the lesson: if you free up agriculture, it will take benefit of free trade and technology. So, turning to the new clauses, I am afraid – take exception for my friends from North Dorset and Tiverton and Honiton – I just don’t agree with this. We have very clear standards already. The Minister has made clear we do not want to reduce these standards. And I do think that these new clauses are unenforceable (15.05.56). If you take the great issue of chlorinated chicken, as a matter of fact they don’t even use much chlorine, they use pathogen reduction treatments, which have been cleared by the US, they have been cleared by the EU authorities, they have been cleared by Codex Alimentarius, and their stock in densities are very similar when you look at the regulations to those in Europe pertaining in Europe. And their outcomes, in health terms, are better: Americans eat roughly twice as much chicken as Europeans, and their outcomes on salmonella are significantly better. So what would we do if this went through, this would completely block the possibility of a free trade deal with catastrophic consequences. But are we going to go after the individual chicken plants, are we going to go after the State, are we going to go after the whole of the US Nation on this, when they are going to come straight back and say “sorry guys, our product is healthier”. What is much better is we take our seat back on those bodies, the Codex Alimentarius Commission on Food Standards, the OIE on animal welfare, which is so important to so many citizens and the IPCC on plant health. We take our seat with those and we work with our allies and we push to improve world standards (15.07.17). I was really struck in DEFRA, going down to New Zealand, seeing that they had massively reduced their number of sheep, but massively increased the volume of meat exported and conforming to religious protocols for minorities, everything they exported to the Middle East was stunned before slaughter. We talk a lot about standards, what goes on in many of our slaughterhouses does not bear inspection. I challenge members to look at videos or better go and look, and they will be horrified when they see what many of our livestock go through. And most of this volume of materials is not required by the
minorities, but we can copy New Zealand and learn from them implementing higher standards. So, I am afraid, I do not support the amendments, but I do support the bill.

**Robbie Moore (15.30.54)**

Before beginning may I refer the House to my Register of Members’ Interest. The agriculture bill is a once in a lifetime opportunity to shape our farming sector for the better. I would like to discuss the amendments brought forwards regarding food imports and standards. I have given immense thought to these amendments over the last few days. But thinking back to just a few years ago when I was lucky enough to travel across the world undertaking a research project specifically looking at the global agri-sector, one thing that came across to me loud and clear is how small a dot the United Kingdom is considered by others on the world stage when it comes to influencing the global agri-sector. But also, the lack of any penetration previously into global food markets. But this country is now on an exciting and new course, as we can shape our new export opportunities, and one on which our agriculture industry can exert real influence in terms of promoting high animal welfare standards and ensuring that our high environmental bar, which our farmers passionately adhere to, is also met abroad (15.32.13). But as we consider this bill we need to look ahead to our new future, and the question which I have been mulling over is what is the best mechanism that ensures that our domestic agriculture industry thrives and is truly sustainable long into the future, while at the same time showing real leadership at the global level by promoting high animal welfare, environmental, and food safety standards abroad, which we are recognised for. We have a truly credible sector, producing some of the finest food this world has to offer. And I want to see our agriculture industry thrive, with food production at its heart, and that means ensuring strong market opportunities both here and, also, abroad (15.33.02). The phrasing of the amendments definitely seems attractive and I agree that their aspirations are profoundly correct. But the question is, by including these amendments into this bill, which is domestic policy, are they workable on the world stage and, indeed, are they enforceable. After seeking advice from my right honourable friend the Environment Secretary I have been informed that they do not adhere to WTO SPS agreements and, likewise, the wording of the amendments leads to uncertainty as to how the traceability measures would be enforced in countries abroad. I reiterate that I am in complete agreement with the aims of the proposed amendments, those being creating a thriving domestic agriculture industry, which is not undercut by cheap foreign imports, whilst maintaining and promoting high animal welfare, environmental, and food safety standards abroad. But if the amendments are not workable through domestic policy, then other mechanisms for achieving all these aims must be sought rather than the inclusion of a blanket protectionist approach, a strategy which in the long term and as we immerse in the global stage might have unintended consequences on the prosperity and sustainability of the British farming sector, as securing export markets for our food products may be harder to achieve. As an example of the opportunities for British farmers, we have recently seen the US lift its ban on US beef exports creating a market for British farmers worth over 66 million pounds over the next 5 years. As a country we are on the cusp of opening up new and exciting market opportunities to our UK farmers.
Such trade deals can be used to influence the world with our high animal welfare, environmental, and food safety standards. We heard yesterday, in this place, from the dispatch box, the reassurance from my honourable friend the Secretary of State for International Trade, that we will not lower our food imports standards as a result of the ongoing US trade deal. Likewise, seeking reassurance, I personally spoke with the Prime Minister this morning and he assured me that our strong animal welfare, environmental, and food safety standards will not be compromised, and I accept such reassurance. But I look forward to making sure that these reassurances are upheld. In concluding, let's think big and long-term for our UK farmers by opening up opportunities and ensuring that our UK sector is known internationally and not just as a dot as I found a few years ago (15.35.50).

Daniel Kawczynski (15.39.00)

The Minister, in her introductory remarks, referred to many amendments, in this bill, which will be devolving more power, and responsibilities, to the Welsh parliament. She also referred to her family’s long history of farming in Oxfordshire and those counties. But what I would like to explain to her is how concerned I am of this move of additional powers to the Welsh government, because I represent a community and already we have seen, as Cardiff and London move further and further apart, on the border, additional complications and problems for our farmers in dealing with very different, and sometimes contradictory, legislation emanating from both parliaments (15.40.37). One example is the crisis we are facing in Shropshire, of an unprecedented scale, bovine tuberculosis. We killed 47 cows in Shropshire in 1997, as a result of bovine TB, last year we killed over 2,000. It is a crisis of untold proportions that my farmers are going through. And yet, and some of my farmers have land on both sides of the border, bovine TB is something unfortunately that does not respect national frontiers, and so it is very difficult for my farmers, with this devolution process. And secondly, my understanding of this bill, is that subsidies will end for English farmers in 7 years’ time but not for Welsh farmers – again, this is a devolved matter. And so my question is: when you are competing – when you are a chicken farmer or a dairy farmer or anything that we produce in Shropshire – how are my farmers going to compete against their Welsh friends and counterparts across the boundary, when they still have subsidies, but we don’t (15.41.58). That is a real concern to me. I have especially come here today to personally, rather than through a laptop or a television, to look the Minister in the eye and ask her to take these concerns from border communities into consideration. I would like her to create a Task Force within her department to look at and evaluate the impact on farmers who are operating within border communities and to assess how they can remain competitive and have a level playing field if there is this growing divergence between Cardiff and London (15.42.48). I would like to speak on new clause 1 and, of course, interestingly, the gentleman who represents the NFU in my constituency, Robert Newbery, and many others, cattle farmers for instance, come to me asking me to support my honourable friends from North Dorset and the Chairmen of the EFRA select committee. They quite rightly feel that we have some of the best standards not just in Europe but across the whole globe. And they feel they want these guarantees enshrined in law, that there will be a level playing field. I am always amazed at the amount of investment that our farmers have had to make in order to comply with
these standards, it is absolutely mind-blowing. I spoke for 30 minutes today with a farmer from Little Ness, who has 5 million chickens per year, but in addition to that uses the chicken manure to generate over 9 million Kilowatts of electricity, which can power up to 2,000 homes – he wants me to support this. So, if the Minister wants me to back her, rather than going with my honourable friends, she really does need to explain just what guarantees we will have to take back to the NFU and the others who feel so very strongly on this matter. And lastly, Deputy Speaker, this is the most important bill to the President of the NFU since 1847, it is a landmark bill, and I would like to pay tribute to all the Shropshire farmers who contribute so much to my community.

Nick Fletcher (15.49.14)

My constituency is known as a former mining area, but agriculture has always played an important role in the local economy of Don Valley and continues to do so. Consequently, as the government confirmed that there will be no extension to the transition period, this bill is more necessary than ever and this meeting today will provide farmers and many other individuals in my constituency reassurance on several issues. I appreciate that members on all sides are concerned with environmental sustainability of food production, which can be seen in amendment 26 as being put forward by the Opposition. Yet it would appear to me that this amendment is wholly unnecessary as clause 1, subsection 4, in the current bill outlines that the provision of any financial assistance by the Secretary of State to any agricultural businesses would have to take into account whether such assistance would encourage food production in an environmentally sustainable way (15.50.15).

I am pleased with the addition of this requirement as it ensures that the often wasteful aspects of the European Common Agricultural Policy will become a thing of the past. Furthermore I am pleased that clause 17 will require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament at least every 5 years on food security in the United Kingdom, as this is particularly relevant at this moment in time. Like so many of my colleagues across the House, I have had dozens of constituencies email me about the lack of food in shops as a result of panic buying that we unfortunately witnessed last month. Some are even scared that the UK will run out of food. Yet I am concerned that new clause 4, which has been tabled by the Opposition, will add such a large number of requirements on the Secretary of State to report on that the original purpose of the clause 17 would be lost (15.51.12). While I appreciate that the new clause promoted the consumption of healthy food, I would like to highlight that clause 17 subsection 2 paragraph e of the current bill already states that the report by the Secretary of State will include statistics on food safety and on consumer confidence in food. It would appear to me that this would inevitably relate to an aspect of the nutritional value of food and consumers’ confidence that the food available to them was healthy to consumer. This has been a diverse debate and I appreciate the range of views that have been expressed across the House. I would like to end simply by stating that this Bill has my full support and the issues of food security and environmental sustainability are important to many of my constituents (15.52.04).
Mark Garnier (16.25.27)

I want to speak about a couple of the new clauses this afternoon, the first of which is new clause 1, which is being put forward in the name of my honourable friend from North Dorset and the second is new clause 4, which hasn’t seen selected in the batch but was in my own personal name. Talking about new clause 4, this seeks to have the DEFRA Secretary of State to be a trade champion for the British agricultural industry. Whilst it is absolutely the case that the Department for International Trade is the lead department for negotiating free trade deals and for trade promotion, it is of course also the case that trade promotion is a whole government exercise and I think it is incumbent on every single government department to promote the great and fantastic products we have in this country that we want to export to the entire world (16.26.17). And I want to put a mark down to the whole of government that they must be there to promote British Exports. When it comes to the specifics of my new clause 4, it looks at a number of particular issues, and I think we need to get deep into the weeds of what DEFRA actually does when it comes to food exports. One of the most important parts of exporting food, and indeed of importing food, is ensuring that those foodstuffs are of a sufficient quality. So, irrespective of the market access we secure in a trade deal, irrespective of the tariffs that we secure, nonetheless every country needs to allocate a license to ensure that food product class is sufficiently safe for their own consumers. And it certainly is the case that when people want to export food to the UK, DEFRA together with the Food Standards Agency, will license the import of SPS products. So similarly to when we import, when we export DEFRA and the Food Standards Agency work really hard to ensure that the audit of our producers and the audit of our regulators is done so that these licenses can be expedited as quickly as possible. They can take 3 years to get done, we need to get this done far, far quicker (16.27.39). And it is also the case that from time to time we get a problem, whereby those licenses will be withdrawn. We have seen this in the case of British beef and we have seen it over the years, when we had the Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, the mad cow diseases, and it’s only in the past few years that we have seen the French lift their ban on British beef, and we have seen the Americans lift their ban on British beef and lamb as a result of C-J disease, this is decades after this was a problem. And this is the second area where we need to see the DEFRA Secretary doing absolutely everything they can to make sure that these bans are lifted and that we get proper market access into these areas (16.28.17). Furthermore, when we get to these countries there are local laws which may create problems. And a good example of this is Thailand, where they have perfectly acceptable religious views about alcohol, and require that alcohol is not promoted on the bottle. And yet when you try to sell a bottle of 21 year-old malt whiskey, the laws could interpret that to be a promotion of a product, rather than just a statement of fact that it is a very good whiskey. We managed to resolve that problem through the DAT, as it turned out, but the important point is that need to make sure that at every level we break down those inadvertent barriers to entry. But no I do want to speak about new clause 1, put forward by my colleague from North Dorset, because new clause 1 is incredibly well-intentioned. He absolutely stands up very enthusiastically for the interest of farmers (16.29.09). But I am afraid that I feel it is rather misguided. Apart from everything else, I think it goes against the WTO laws. One of the problems with this new clause is that it seeks to ensure that standards are maintained in the UK, but in doing so, it misses the point that standards are defined
as outcomes not as processes, and it is the outcome that we are particularly interested in. The process to ensure that we have good animal welfare is very long and very important, and actually quite expensive for our own producers. But the outcome is to ensure that our consumers are not poisoned by food, and that is a really important point. I completely sympathise with the objectives of this new clause because I think it does look to try to help our farmers. But if we were to pass new clause 1, we would end up setting up a barrier for ourselves because we would introduce a process-based regulation rather than an outcome-based regulation under WTO terms. So, what we have to do is support our farmers in terms of promoting exports, we need the Secretary of State to be reporting back on an annual basis, but we don’t want to create other barriers and new clause 1 will introduce those barriers.

Liam Fox (16.35.20)

I wish to speak against amendment 1. There is a real issue that needs to be dealt with and that is that the high level of regulation imposed on UK farming can, and does, add to increased costs to UK farmers. But these high standards can be an advantage in two ways. First, in themselves, in what they say about the United Kingdom and our attitude towards animal welfare; and secondly when it comes to exporting, we can show to those who want to buy British produce, that they are produced to the very high standards and as State Secretary I had a number of occasions when that was a huge advantage. And therefore, the best way to help our farmers is to have a proper cross-governmental strategy to improve UK farming exports (16.36.10). These amendments do not deal with that particular problem, but they do create a number of other problems. There are three main unintended consequences. The first is a damage to our reputation for observing international treaty law. The second is that it will damage our possibility to conclude our current and possible future free trade agreements. And the third is to make a mockery of our current negotiating position with the EU. The amendment is not compatible with WTO rules. Now, food safety and related issues are anchored in WTO law. Only the slaughter of animals is treated as an animal welfare issue in the SPS agreement. There is nothing that this government will do to undermine food safety standards in this country and to suggest otherwise is a complete red herring in this whole debate. But it would be a fine start to Britain’s independent trade policy outside the EU if we were to begin by being in conflict with the same rules-based trading system which we believe to be necessary (16.37.14). Secondly, this amendment would challenge our ability to complete our free trade agreements – the US would walk if this amendment were to become law in the UK and it would be swiftly followed by others, the Australians, the New Zealanders and those involved in CPTPP would be unlikely to take kindly to this. They do not want the incorporation of UK rules to become a prerequisite to trade agreements with the UK. But there’s an additional problem, it’s not just our current FTAs is our ability to conclude future FTAs with developing countries who simply cannot afford to have the same level of animal welfare as we enjoy in a country as wealth as the UK, and that would be a great pity if after all the work we have done to promote development we would undermine it unintentionally by passing this particular amendment (16.38.13). But it also makes some mockery of what we are doing with our negotiations with the European Union. We are telling the EU currently we cannot accept the introduction of rules made outside our own
country as a precondition of trade with the EU, a so-called level playing field approach. And this is exactly what this amendment is doing in relation to everybody else and there is nothing that I can imagine will bring greater joy to the bureaucrats of Brussels than the UK stopping its trade agreement with the US on the basis that we are insisting on a level playing field agreement that we have actually ruled out categorically in terms of our dealings with the EU (16.38.49). I want to go slightly beyond the content of these amendments to wider consequences because I worry about what some of these amendments say about the signals we would send as a country and our approach to free trade in general. It is worth pointing out because no one seems to have noticed that global trading volumes went negative in the fourth quarter of 2019 so before COVID global trade was on a downturn, with inevitable long-term economic consequences. Since 2010, the world’s wealthiest economies, the G20, have increased the number of non-tariff barriers to trade: in 2010 they were operating about 300, in 2015 they were operating about 1,200, a bit of environmental law here, a bit of consumer protection here, a bit of producer protection elsewhere, it all adds up. Why does that matter? Because it risks the progress we have made in the past generation of taking a billion people out of abject poverty through global free trade. It is not morally acceptable for these countries that have done very well out of global trade to turn to the others who are still developing and pull the ladder up in front of them. We have benefitted from a global open trading system and it’s not only economically sensible it is also morally the right thing to do to ensure that that free trade continues (16.40.20).

David Johnstone (16.45.18)

Starting with imports, it is fair to say that right out the window we have first-grade farming. The food, the environment, the agriculture, the animal welfare standards are extremely high and it is fair to say that a number of my farmers would like to see me support some of the amendments this afternoon, particularly new clause 1 and new clause 2. I have thought hard about that and have felt pulled in that direction, but in the end I have decided not to because in the end even if it were to provide a short-term help, and I am not sure it would, even if it was compatible with WTO rules, and I am not sure it is, I don’t think in the long-term it would help our exports for the farmers we have right here and all the way across the country (16.46.23). One point on food security though, and on the need to report every five years on that, whilst that is a minimum requirement, I do hope that we will hear about food security a lot more regularly than that. Talking about public money for public goods, this is one of the most exciting pieces of this legislation and in fact it makes it one of the most exciting pieces of legislation in my judgement. The fact that we would be entirely changing the system of paying farmers and be able to do so in a way that helps protect our environment – farmers are the natural custodians of our environment – and being able to support them to improve our air quality, our water quality, our soil quality, our biodiversity, is a hugely welcomed development (16.47.09). Maybe, just maybe, it would be good to reverse the average age of farmers, which we know at the moment is at 60, and who find it very difficult to persuade their children and grandchildren to take it on and maybe this is a step to encourage others to maintain the land for these great purposes that support our efforts on climate change. In the future, some people may try to minimise the food production aspect of that, I hope that does not happen, because that should not be
seen as in contract with our efforts to protect the environment because these are mutually beneficial things we can do together with this new bill. And thirdly, turning to exports, I was one of the people who voted to leave the EU and was then surprised to be told that that meant that I believe in a closed society rather than an open one, on the contrary, I always wanted an open society and was that was open to more than just the EU. I would like to see British products in countries all around the world and I hope we will do everything we can to ensure that. I do think that there is an opportunity on food labelling at the end of the transition period so that we can clearly define and consistently apply food labelling and that demonstrates to the world how high the standards that we have here in this country are. I also think there is undoubtedly more that we can do to promote our exports, our food is a great campaign, I hope we turbo produce that in the coming years. But my last comment is just to ensure that we remember the small farmers in this because this is a tremendous opportunity for our farmers here and I hope that we will support them with our contracts, with the promoting of their goods so that they too can benefit from this ground-breaking legislation.

Marcus Fysh (16.54.34)

I want to speak in support of the bill overall, I think it’s great for agriculture, it is a landmark bill and I want to thank both my local NFU and local farmers for the engagement I have had with them over this for many months now. I do, however, want to speak against the new clauses 1 and 2, which some of the NFU representatives have been encouraging MPs to vote for. Because I do think that while there are good intentions, and clearly I want to do everything I can to support and create opportunities for farmers up and down the country including in South Somerset, these new clauses would, in fact, be quite damaging to their long-term interests and to the long-term interests of the country (16.55.35). And I just wanted to say a few things about the reasons for that, and to address a few things that my honourable friend from North Dorset said. He said he wanted for us to be a beacon of standards around the world, and I would agree with him, but I believe that we can champion higher standards, and that we can do that much better, if we are not a trade p a r i a h, which we would be regarded as, if we were to ban imports on a blanket basis as the clauses would effect (16.56.14). I am also, as he is, pro-consumer safety, and it is very important to understand that we are not going to be reducing import standards, we will have the Food Safety Agency to ensure that our products are safe and to keep our consumers safe. I am, as I said, pro-farmers’ opportunities, and we have a lot of scope to increase the work that the government can do to help farmers to market their products, to develop new, innovative products, and I understand that the department for Environment and Food is looking into a new grant scheme, and then there are the opportunities of trade itself and these are very large. He also said that he was pro food security, and I would also support such a thing, but part of that is about having diversified supply chains and that is exactly what would be damaged by effectively a blanket ban on imports at the whim of the government or at the whim of a Food Safety Agency, and I don’t think that’s in our interest either (16.57.34). The bottom line is that we are not going to let standards slide as the shadow Minister said was his fear, and, in fact, as my honourable friend from North Somerset made a point of, our very high standards are often a very good
marketing feature for our export products around the rest of the world. Being able to do these deals around the rest of the world is critical and at the end of the day, if these new clauses were passed, would interfere with our ability to close new trade deals and to roll over the existing ones we have with the EU and it would put us outside the scope of our WTO agreements and we would be that trade pariah that I described earlier (16.58.26). I would just like to finish by saying a couple of things, my honourable friend from Tiverton and Honiton said that he wanted lots of US imports. Well, that simply wouldn’t happen under a trade deal as he said he wanted because there would not be a trade deal if these new clauses passed. And I just wanted to address my honourable friend from Penrith and The Border, he, I think, had heartening faith in our trade negotiators and I would agree that we have some great trade negotiators and they will fight hard for us, we will fight hard for our farmers, and I will do what I can to aid them in the process of fighting for them, but I am afraid, however good they were, if these new clauses were to be passed into law, it would not make any difference, there would simply be no trade deals with any other nation.

Julie Marson (17.04.34)

This bill is a once in a generation opportunity to shape the future of agriculture in the UK: how we farm, how we feed people, and how we make farming sustainable for this generation and the next. It also comes at a time when we are fundamentally reassessing the trading relationships we have across the world, and at a moment of crisis, when the expansion of international trade is essential to our recovery and future prosperity. This bill, as it stands now, opens the door to our farmers to opportunities for growth that international trade brings, and with that it goes some way addressing the regional imbalance of opportunity and wealth that this government and I want to focus on (17.05.25). Farmers in my constituency, Hertford and Stortford, and right across the country already sell exports worth about 24 billion pounds to Europe. And by setting a template, for expansion into other regions, as this bill does, our farming community will be able to compete abroad as never before, they will sell more of what they already sell and sell into new markets, so that they can sell more of the same products, and new products too. And to bring the narrative back to how extending British farming into the global markets will directly boost growth, it’s just simple maths that growth leads to more jobs and with that better jobs. Growth in trade will create new opportunities in places that may have been left behind, and it will help to keep talent at home, and attract new talent from afar (17.06.19). And the levelling up of society in every region of Britain will take one more step forward. I want to support the aspirations of farmers in Hertford and Stortford who want to sell into foreign markets and I want both farmers and consumers to be clear that I support their desire for the highest food and animal welfare standards, as does the government (17.06.45). We are leaving the EU and the CAP and we must be able to sign meaningful trade agreements and resist calls for the protectionism that will squander opportunity. And not try to force dynamic alignment from others with us in the UK. Apart from everything else, it was those rigid rules that played a large part in our vote, my vote, to leave the EU. And so what message would we be sending, if we were trying to enforce them ourselves now (17.07.16). Concerns about the safety and standards of food in the UK have been
addressed in this bill. The same stringent standards which we are all used to and which we wish to see upheld will still apply, including those that exclude chlorinated chicken and hormone-injected beef. And again I want to reassure farmers and consumers in Hertford and Stortford that I will always support the highest environmental standards, celebrate the fact that farmers are the custodians of our wonderful countryside, and I support the highest standards of food production and animal welfare here and around the world (17.07.56). And I also support the principle of clarity in food labelling, which will enable consumers to make informed choices in what they will buy, and I will always champion our wonderful UK farmers, their producers and products. I will be supporting this bill as I am satisfied that our food standards and safety are protected and I want to see farmers in my constituency benefit from different markets, from greater product opportunities, and from the distribution of wealth and opportunity across the country. This is an opportunity to renew British Farming and add vigour to our global aspirations. It is an opportunity to secure more resilient food supply chains and global standards for sustainability through international cooperation and leadership.

Victoria Prentis (17.22.22)

We have heard from passionate colleagues from across the House, colleagues who are passionate both about farming and about food, and about food security. We have heard from distinguished former Secretaries of State, we have heard from farmers, from those from farming families, from many members who represent farming constituencies, from a vet, and from many colleagues who love both food and food security. And we have heard, well, indirectly, from the cows from Wantage. I would like to take this opportunity to reassure members that the government understands the importance of agriculture to the nation (17.23.25). I think, well in fact, I know that British farmers are the best in the world. This bill will ensure that they receive the support that they need to provide us with the food that we need and that we enjoy, and to protect and enhance our beautiful rural landscape, and to ensure the health of the wider rural economy. We have had a robust debate, though I think well-intentioned on all sides, and I need to reiterate at this point that there is no question to sacrifice the UK livestock or other farming industries for the US trade deal (17.24.06). To the contrary, it is our opinion that a US trade deal is perfectly compatible with the thriving UK farming industry and very high standards. We have heard mention of the dreaded chlorine-washed chicken several times and I would like to reassure the House that under existing regulations, which we are going to put into English law at the end of this year, there is no question that chlorine-washed chicken is not allowed and that only a vote of this House can change that (17.24.41). I think I also need to re-state that the government is willing to commit to a serious and rapid examination of what can be done through labelling to reassure colleagues. It may well be that that would help colleagues understand that we do intend to promote high standards and high welfare across the UK market. And I agree that we must consider the case for consumer choice more fully when we look at this in more detail. I reiterate here that we will consult on this at the end of the transition period, it is important that we look at how it would affect both the industry and consumers and, indeed, retailers, but I am keen to take that forward (17.25.28). I would like to thank my predecessor, now the Secretary of State, my honourable friend from Camborne and Redruth, for making the agriculture bill such a great piece of legislation. We will
hear from him later at the reading. And I would like to gently tease the honourable gentlemen from Cambridge opposite me, isn’t it great that we have a Secretary of State who stands up for high standards of British farming, and isn’t it great that he has been reassured that this framework bill and what has been said by our trade negotiating teams and indeed that the Prime Minister in the Conservative Manifesto and again and again has reassured that that champion for high standards and farming and that he is behind the agriculture bill as I am sure he will tell you later. I am very grateful to the members of the Public bill Committee for their diligent scrutiny and it is fair to say that this bill has evolved and indeed improved during its passage through the House – I am so sorry that many of them have not been able to speak in this debate. But I think, given the hybrid nature of the proceedings this afternoon, we have had a pretty goof go at discussing the issues which concerned the public bill committees (17.26.54). I would also like to thank personally our PPSs to the department, they have been towers of strength at a difficult time, when it id difficult to communicate with colleagues in a way we like to and are used to. I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to all of the civil servants who have worked on the bill, especially Natalie Shelman, our bill manager, and indeed more wildly to those across the four nations who have worked very hard on the bill to get it to this stage. During the work that we have done in the Task Force for Feeding the Vulnerable over the last few months we have worked very closely with my colleagues across the four nations and I hope that we can continue with that spirit of cooperation as we take these policies forward (17.27.41). I would also like to thank the Councils and local authorities to help us to make history, we hope, as the first bill voted on using electronic voting – I hope I have not spoken too soon, and I hope that it works. This, we have said, many times, is a framework bill. We have a long way to go and many tests and trials in place before the agricultural transition period comes to an end in 2028. I would like to reassure farmers that the government will support the, and ensure that consumers will continue to have access to great quality British food to eat – we very much hope that that will be consumers from all over the world. Farming is more than a job, we must cherish the deep personal connection felt by those who farm the land for the soils and landscapes they care for, and we must build upon it in the reforms that we make. This bill give us that framework for the future for farming and for countryside outside the EU. It would allows us to reward public goods such as environmental improvements, it will support investments in technology and research to improve productivity, and it will support our farmers to produce the high-quality food which they are renowned for and which we all so enjoy eating (17.29.08). I commend this bill to the House.

George Eustice (18.32.55)

I would like to acknowledge the work that has got us to this point in particular DEFRA officials and those who have provided evidence but especially those honourable members who served on the bill committee and I am conscious that the restricted nature of the hybrid parliament means that many of those committee members have found it difficult to contribute to this stage of proceedings but they all contributed comprehensively during earlier stages and the points that they made have been heard (18.33.31). The government stood on a manifesto commitment to guarantee the current annual budget to farmers in every year of the new parliament, our farmers need stability, certainty, and a smooth 7-year transition to adapt to our new...
policy for public money for public goods, and the bill provides for that. This is the second hearing for this bill and I was involved in the last parliament and committee stage for the first, we have made a number of changes since then, including strengthening parliamentary scrutiny with a multi-annual plan, a strengthened duty around food security with 5 yearly reviews of food security, and a new clause on the importance of food production. Finally, I am conscious that animal welfare has been a big feature of the debate today, that the government has a manifesto commitment that in all trade deals it will not compromise on our higher environmental protection, animal welfare, and food standards.