

parts of North Yorkshire, and indeed the country. Anne briefly went through some of the pointers or issues that the Select Committee has looked at.

Anne outlined the work the Committee carried out including a report on food production in the Uplands; CAP Reform; reaction to the Foresight Report; sustainable food production; dairy production including milk prices and egg production; labelling; and the Groceries Code Adjudicator, where the EFRA Committee came out in strong support of the BIS Committee and agreed that the Government should revert to the original proposals of 2008.

Joan Walley MP, Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) and second guest speaker then addressed the group. Joan gave a brief overview from the Environmental Audit Committee, echoing Anne McIntosh's earlier point regarding the role of Parliament and the important role of the Select Committees in terms of scrutinising legislation.

Joan spoke about the EAC enquiry into sustainable food, launched on 15 February 2011 and focused on the previous government's 2030 proposals. The Committee has tried to scope the issues that need to be addressed in relation to food in their entirety, from the perspective a crosscutting committee; that doesn't shadow any one governmental department.

Joan also spoke about sustainable food linked the issue to carbon budgets; uncertainty about the overarching food policy; fair prices; supply networks; waste and food waste; the need to produce more energy or become more energy-efficient; and nutritional standards.

Melanie Leech, Director General of the Food and Drink Federation then outlined the perspective of the food and drink manufacturing industry, the biggest manufacturing sector in the UK. The industry is a key part of the government's move to economic recovery. The size of the industry brings responsibility and the sector aims to lead and very much be part of the key debates, addressing the challenge to produce more from less, with less impact on the environment. FDF's fivefold environmental ambition is the industry's response to this agenda.

Melanie highlighted the importance of looking across the chain to find solutions. Food production and food policy needs to be a priority for the government, and there needs to be an overarching framework where manufacturers and retailers can both make contributions as part of the food chain, both in the UK and globally.

Melanie also spoke of the skills agenda in relation to this. The UK food and drink sector has an aging workforce and there needs to be work across the chain to address future skills gaps.

Andrew Opie, Director of Food and Sustainability at the BRC then spoke to give the retailers' perspective. Although these are tough times for the consumer, there's still an interest in issues like local sourcing, provenance, and sustainability. Retailers thrive by meeting consumer demand, so they need to work with UK producers to make sure the consumers get what they need and get what they want, and now it's an ever more demanding consumer where price is a bigger factor in that equation.

Andrew spoke about the importance of working collaboratively, from the farm right through to the retailers, in terms of cutting emissions, working on waste reduction, and then helping consumers to manage both their budgets. He spoke of the importance of effective labelling for consumers, who now want increasing information.

The BRC will be publishing a report in January, which will detail the next steps to a better retailing climate; covering issues all the way from sustainable sourcing through to how they are cutting emissions and water in our chain.

Jane Ellison MP then raised the issue of competition, and asked if manufacturers and retailers felt under pressure from competition, particularly from abroad.

Mark Spencer MP spoke about making sure sustainability is balanced with the need to keep retailers, manufacturers, farmers and growers profitable at the same time. He spoke of the environmental impacts of ammonium nitrate fertiliser and suggested the way to solve this was to find crops which fix their own nitrogen. This could be done with GM technology. He asked 'When is a manufacturer or a retailer going to come out and say, we're willing to research or assess or fund more research into GM technology?'

John Stevenson MP suggested this would only happen after parliamentarians came out and supported this first.

Melanie Leech spoke of the debate about GM and its potential benefits going on at the FDF. She made reference to the Foresight report, which says you can't afford not to look at all the tools in the box or dismiss anything that could potentially be a part of the solution.

Lord Boswell made two comments. Firstly that the psychology of the relatively small producer of food in the farming area is still one of suspicion and mistrust of people further down the chain, which he hopes we can dispel. The second point was the yearning of the consumer to know where their food comes from. He emphasised the importance of using the food chain to promote sustainability.

Returning to the issue of GM **Melanie Leech** said that one of the biggest challenges that we face is engaging with the consumer on a whole range of scientific developments and benefits that could be brought forward and could have a big impact on sustainability, but which consumers, understandably, are very suspicious of.

Chris White MP picked up on the connection between farmers and retailers, and food security. This will be important going forward, by talking to producers, retailers will be able to address issues such as skills.

Responding to the points made, **Anne McIntosh MP** spoke about the industry that has grown up around GM. She spoke about the pressures of being a small island with a dense population and the benefits that GM could bring both here and overseas. Anne addressed the issue of food waste and possibilities regarding anaerobic digestion.

John Stevenson MP spoke about the need to keep our economy competitive; we still need jobs, we still need growth, we still need profits. He suggested we can create an environment within our own country where people have to have certain standards. However, we're also competing internationally. We are not self-sufficient in food so we import, so there's our competition there. If we're taking in goods from other countries that might not have the same requirements put upon them; they have a competitive advantage. John asked how do we reconcile those two issues?

Justin Tomlinson MP spoke about clearer labelling and the appetite of consumers to know where the food's come from. He recognised that the Government needed to go further in

terms of food policy and on waste-to-energy. He shared frustrations on cooking basic foods and how this is taught in schools.

Paul Gardiner from British Sugar, spoke about linking together competitiveness and the Common Agricultural Policy, where the Common Agricultural Policy or the sugar CMO has required producers to reduce the facilities to produce sugar in their countries. Proposals to abandon quotas from 2015, means that other areas, particularly other areas of Continental Europe, where they have not taken on board the rationalisation required of them, will be able to send sugar into the UK and we will not be able to respond by building new factories. The way around that is to allow quotas to go, but not just with a dead stop at 2015, but between 2015 and 2020. This would allow our industry to speed up again.

Paul also spoke about anaerobic digestion and British Sugar's plans to build UK's biggest anaerobic digester at one of our sugar factories.

Russell Brown MP spoke about the environment and energy-related issues that appear to be so frustrating to so many businesses. On imports/exports, Russell asked if there was an indication anywhere of the number of businesses that do manufacture food and drink in this country, but the largest part of their market is actually export.

Melanie Leech replied that she was unsure if this statistic was currently measured. However, from experience it tends to vary. Melanie suggested that it might be something interesting to look at within the APPG.

Joan Walley then summed up the debate from her perspective. She emphasised that what the DEFRA Select Committee and the Environmental Audit Committee are doing is complementary. The EAC report on sustainable food is trying to set out where the tensions are and scope what needs to be looked at, and how we navigate getting from where we are to where we need to be. At this stage there are so many issues which need to be resolved, with no kind of framework, policy framework to look at it. And as the EAC is crosscutting, they can do that. The Committee want to look to see how they can propel food policy in terms of energy, in terms of food security, in terms of sustainability, all the issues to, you know, long-term economic, environmental and social viability.

Jane Ellison then added her closing comments and thanked the speakers. She stated that the meeting had been a timely reminder to the parliamentarians around the table, that the climate of uncertainty in the legislative processes is really tough for the very people they're also asking to contribute to growth in the economy. Her final thought was to question who is the consumer; is it a homogenous group? Is there a single view?

John Stevenson MP then closed the meeting.