



## Migration and Population Review Panel

### Common Population Policy Review

### Witness: Jersey Farmers Union

Friday, 21st January 2022

**Panel:**

Senator S.W. Pallett (Chair)

Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier

Deputy G.J. Truscott of St. Brelade

**Witnesses:**

Mr. P. Le Maistre, President, Jersey Farmers Union

Ms J. Rueb, Secretary, Jersey Farmers Union

[11:00]

**Senator S.W. Pallett (Chair):**

I am going to start. Do you believe that the Farmers Union has had sufficient opportunity to take part in the formation of this policy that is being proposed by the Council of Ministers?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Yes, I do. We have met Deputy Huelin a couple of times and we have corresponded with him. Yes, as far as it goes we have. But I would like to start, we were given a few questions to consider and the first one is: is the proposed policy fit for purpose? My answer to that would be no. The reason I say that, and a bit like you, I am a bit scruffy because I have come straight from the field; you will not be surprised to know that we are planting potatoes today. I cannot believe - not in my farming lifetime - but in the last 5 years the technological advances. Today I have got a driver who is using a tractor that basically steers itself. It is accurate to within a centimetre so instead of having a tractor with a power harrow and then someone else with another tractor opening rows, he is doing all the job himself because it is so accurate now that we can do that. Then when he wants to tell the office

what fertiliser we put, it is all sent by phone, recorded straightaway, same with our chemicals. All this is going on and then I read on page 7 you are going to have the implementation of a new I.T. (information technology) system to basically give you the facts and figures. This report that has been produced, basically it is saying ... we are 11 months in February since the census, and you do not have the results of the census even. It seems to me that the technological advances, we see on our farm and you are thinking: "How is it that it takes that long to tell you how many people are in this Island?" If you have not got that figure where do you start from because I think we all realise that you should be able to produce those figures probably every 6 months now with the sort of technology that is available. Year after year, and some of you have been in the States longer than others, there seems to me hundreds of thousands of pounds are put forward for I.T. resources and we have still got no figures at all. I think that really reading through this report, if you have not got the figures how do you work out where the population is going? You need accurate figures. There was an article, and I do not know if any of you get the *Sunday Times*, it is the only proper paper I read or have time to read during the week. There was an article there saying that they had projections for 2020 for population in the U.K. (United Kingdom) and they are now running so far out that the difference, if they had got the same thing wrong in the next 20 years up to 2040, as they did up to 2020, because of Brexit probably, that you are not having to build 8 medium-sized cities. In a country like the U.K. It can be the same here. We all know, certainly in agriculture and hospitality and building, everybody is short of staff. Now if we are all short of staff presumably there are less people in the Island. The answer to the first question is I think this is basically just a report saying this is what we are going to do. There is no meat in here at all.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

One of the disappointments that came from a previous discussion - I do not know what your view was on this - is that they have known or the Government has known they need this level of data and this type of data for several years. In fact the review board identified that. Is it a disappointment for you that they have not got on and delivered that?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Absolutely. Until you have figures, until you have data, you cannot really make any decisions. You asked later on what actions do you think we believe Islanders, business and the Government need to take. They need not take any on this because there is nothing in here. When you tell us, as a Government or as an Island, we all decide that we need some inward migration of 300, 400 a year, whatever it is, so people like me do not have to work until they are 90, but until you know what that figure is how do we know what the impact is going to be. I have to say in our own industry, because we are now almost 50:50, if you look at the figures, we are down to about 500 to 600 seasonal staff and we are, in the last statistics in June, I think we are about 470 which is basically entitled to work.

So most of those are local people. We actually have quite a large number of local people employed on our farms.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

The report itself is clear that they are not going to be in a position in terms of data to put forward any clear proposals until 2024, 2025. One of the questions I put to the Assistant Chief Minister was there are assumptions made within the report. I can name 2, one would be the infrastructure capacity and the assumptions in the bridging Island Plan. Would they have been better to potentially use these figures at least in the interim while they were waiting for the data to be collected?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

As I say, I do not think so because you get a similar situation where the figures could be so far out that you could be building a school which you are never going to use. I think you need the data first. There is nothing wrong with this sort of common population policy but it is not a policy, it is really just saying: "This is what we are going to do in the next year" I suppose it is going to take, it should not take more than that surely to get proper data so that we know how many people are in this Island now, or were March last year, and with the right I.T. system I cannot understand how it is not possible to know every year. I am not saying who cares if we are 50 out but surely you have the number of school children, you have the number of pensioners, you have the number of people who fill in a social security form. It is pretty simple, I would have thought.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

I have just noticed Deputy Truscott has his hand up for a question so I will just hand over to him briefly.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott of St. Brelade:**

I was just curious, I know when I was at Social Security this time of year ordinarily farmers came on to the media and to us because of staff shortages. What has it been like this year? Are you pretty good for numbers?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Yes, we had taken the decision 4 years ago ... what happened, we went to Poland because we were starting to get a dry up of Polish staff in particular, and we soon found out why. We saw huge industrial complexes being built that was providing work for people who 20 years earlier did not have any work, and so we took a decision then to start looking for labour from elsewhere and, rightly or wrongly, the best labour we found was from the Philippines. We found a good agent who is now bringing in staff. Just to give you some rough figures. February 2020, so just pre-COVID, we had the first 18 Filipinos, and this year, at the moment, we have 158 in for the planting of potatoes. Some

of those, because of the 9-month permit regulations, are coming back now for the second time. They are obviously happy to work in Jersey. The growers, the feedback - I think Jane would be able to confirm better than me - out of the 100 or so we have had in before we have only had one, I think, that a grower said no, he was not really suitable. The recruitment process has been very successful. What we are finding difficult at the moment, these are what I call ... the Filipinos brought in so far are your basic seasonal worker who will come to Jersey and can do the basic planting of potatoes, picking daffodils and vegetables, whatever. What we are trying to look at now is, and not finding it quite so easy because their agriculture is way behind ours, we are going to find ourselves in coming years with a shortage of skilled drivers and perhaps even ... not so much, we think we can find some herdsmen, dairy people, in the Philippines but skilled drivers are going to be a problem and we are looking at another country to perhaps be able to recruit that. That seems to be the worry for most growers. The cost of bringing people from the Philippines is obviously an issue for us and, as I mentioned, when I think we wrote to your panel 2nd February last year, our other problem is the cost. There is a work permit and a visa and everything else, and that is Jersey costs. As an industry, we are not struggling to find staff, we are just struggling basically to pay all the extra costs of employment compared with pre-Brexit days.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Just sticking to our question plan. I think you have answered this in some ways in the first question I asked, but in terms of the consultation, have you been happy with the level and the form that any consultation has taken place?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Yes, we have really. I have met Deputy Huelin myself. We have had correspondence and we submitted papers in May this year to help formulate the policy. From our industry's point of view, we are not ... as I say, I do not think really we are the problem. Again, if you look at the statistics ... well, no. If you go back in Jersey's history, going back to 1990 I think is where their first figures came from in here, if you did not have the finance industry you would not have this problem. It is as simple as that. Finance and government are the 2 areas where jobs have gone up and up and up and everyone else ... obviously construction goes up because of that, hospitality has gone down, agriculture has gone down, (a) we have lost a couple of sectors and (b) we are getting much more productivity, as I just mentioned. We are using machinery, particularly in potatoes and the dairy industry. Those are the areas that are easy to increase productivity. The vegetable sector is much more tricky. We cannot at the moment, even though we have been promised a small robot to have a look at picking tomatoes in a greenhouse this year. So that will be an exciting thing to see.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

I was going to pick up on that because I was quite impressed with the comments you made around working the fields with potatoes. In terms of technology, can you see that making even a greater difference in terms of the number of staff you employ, moving forward, or do you think there is a limit to how far that can go?

[11:15]

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

I think there is a limit but I think we are a long way off it. We have had some money out of the rural economy strategy to hopefully develop a robot to plant potatoes. It all sounds very pie in the sky but if I tell you that in ... we have teamed up with the University of Cambridge and the University of Lincoln. There is an East Anglia group of universities who work together on this sort of thing and we brought them over for a day. We mocked up a planting because it was out of season and one of the students sent us a video just before Christmas and he already has a robot in his laboratory that can pick up a potato and place it on the ground the right way round and space them out. That was in 3 months. We have them coming over to the Island next week to see us in actual planting mode. The idea really behind that is we have good machinery now, which is available across Europe for planting potatoes from mid-February onwards. But these early slopes that we are doing, not perhaps the cõtils, because they will always be too steep, but the next area of land, which we have to plant by hand, if we had a small robotic tractor that could well be the answer. They believe that by 2023, so it will be another year away, we could have a little prototype to have a go. That sort of thing is pretty impressive and the dairy industry, as you may or may not be aware, again we have got at, least for 2022, a reasonable amount of money now in a productivity fund that growers are going to be able to invest more in things like robotic scrapers for the stables. There is a lot of use now of robotic milkers in the U.K.; that is basically a system where you just can watch it from your living room on the computer and the machine does everything. But the difficulty in Jersey is even the largest cattle farms over here probably do not have enough land around the cattle shed. As you know, for many reasons but probably most of them to do with partage over the years, where land has got split up from farms. If you are having a robotic milking system the cows need to be able to wander in and out when they like. There are not a lot of dairy farms that have enough land around them to be able to do that. But there are other areas we can mechanise.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

In terms of population management, could you outline any of your concerns and hopes or the concerns and hopes of the farming industry? Do you think they have been addressed within the policy?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

As I say, I am not really sure there is a policy. There cannot really be a policy until you have data and you decide on a figure you are going to aim for and how you are going to get there. As far as the agriculture industry, every time the population goes up it puts huge pressure on our land resource. The land resource we want is for growing. At the moment, I do not think it is a secret, well, it is not a secret in terms of ... I do not know if I remember the total number. There is certainly 100 vergées of land wanted by the Minister for development for affordable housing but then there were another, it must have been, 400 or 500 vergées of other sites put forward. Whether any of those will get to the top of the list, I am not sure. On top of that we have people talking about using more land for carbon sequestration rather than producing food. We have the J.E.C. (Jersey Electricity Company) who want to have solar panels in fields. Every time the population goes up there is more and more strain on the actual physical land resource in Jersey, which if you want to grow and you want to feed the population, you have to have some land.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Before I hand over to Deputy Ahier, in terms of housing, have you, as an industry, had discussions with the Minister for Housing and Communities or Government around land that you would consider to be less of a loss to the industry?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

I attended 5 of the 8 days of the bridging Island Plan specifically for that reason, and I gave the planning inspectors the agricultural industry's view on the importance of the fields. We set out to the Minister for Planning before that, that we do not want to lose any land and we would not support the building of any houses but I said to him there are some fields, and particular reference we made were the 3 fields at Mont à l'Abbé which form part of the organic dairy herd, which are critical to the dairy industry. I said we do not want to see those fields built on, and there were a couple of others in there. But we have said while we would not support some of the others we were not going to object too strongly because I think we all realise that we are going to lose some land for building. That is just common sense. We also made the point to the Minister before and to the planning inspectors, we still feel there are a number of glasshouse sites around the Island derelict and disused, which could be used first before taking agricultural fields. So we made that point very strongly.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

I will hand over to Deputy Ahier for the next question.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier:**

I would just like to quickly mention obviously about the organic fields at Mont à l'Abbé, how aggrieved the representatives of the area are and will certainly fight to try to defend that from taking place.

What, in your view, are the short-term, medium-term and long-term needs of your industry and does the common population policy take sufficient account of those needs?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

There are a couple of points to be made. The first is that, and there is mention in this policy report, particularly in the insight stuff where people have been asked questions, people have to understand seasonal workers that come, as we have got from the Philippines, those are not really the jobs that local people are going to do, and I will tell you why. Because who wants a job ... when I say we cannot deal with the Philippines because we are on a 9-month contract, we are having to try to share them round a bit. But in the days of the Polish, for example, we would say: "We need another 200 staff to pack potatoes from April to July" and they have come in for 2 months and then they go back home. Now nobody in Jersey wants a 2-month job. It is the same in hospitality if you are running a beach kiosk it is a sort of May until September job, and there may be odd people who want just 6 months of the year but most people want a full-time job. I think we have to put the seasonal worker aside. When it comes to local people working in agriculture, and I notice there are remarks made: "Oh, it is a low paid sector." In my experience, what has put people off working in agriculture is not the money. It is the long hours. In my own case I have 2 sons, one has worked in finance and at 4.30 p.m. on a Friday he is finished and 4.30 p.m. tomorrow afternoon my son is on the farm with me. We will be getting ready for Saturday and Sunday, we will probably work until 8.00 p.m., 9.00 p.m. at night. Then we will be up at 5.30 a.m. the next morning if it is still dry. I think in the days where there were hundreds of farmers and there were many young people, they had the Young Farmers Club and they met when they were not busy, but that was their social life. But now, when you have got such a small number of young people, you are trying to attract them and they say: "When do we finish?" and you say: "We will be finished when it rains. You just keep going until then." I think that is one of the things we have to try to address as an industry is to reduce the hours. To come to your question, I do not think really, apart from, as I say, the extra cost with all the permits and the visas, as far as seasonal staff I do not think this population policy should affect our industry in any way because I made the point, I think it was in the letter to you, Senator, that not only are they seasonal staff, we are providing the housing for them; so they are coming in, they are not affecting, which is ... I think that is one of the drivers for the population policy is housing and schools and everything else. These people are coming in, they do not have families, they are just coming in to work, we are housing them and 9 months later they are leaving. When it comes to the local people that we are employing, some of them are housed but most of them would be in housing round the Island, and if we can pick up some of the slack, which when other industries catch up with us, because again if you look at the figures in terms of productivity the agricultural industry is probably the leader in increasing productivity over the last 10 years. Hopefully, as I say, we are moving to talking about robots planting potatoes, the guy then that is going to be planting potatoes is not someone who is 6 foot 4 and can carry 5 boxes of spuds across the field. This is going to be

someone who is good at computer games, for example. We may be recruiting hopefully completely different people. Not for all the positions on our farm but certainly for some of them. Apart from the associated cost with having to have work permits, visas, et cetera, I do not think the population policy will affect our industry too much.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

In your view, is the proposed policy fit for purpose?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

I do not think it is because, to be honest with you, unless I have misread something, I do not think there is a policy apart from ... they are waiting. Every topic says: "We need data, we need census analysis, we need data collection." It just goes on and on. Until you have all that then you will decide as an Island, hopefully not just Government, we desperately need 300 or 400 people a year coming in, which is probably a realistic figure. What has been unrealistic is that the policy, as I understood it 10 years ago was that number, but one year 1,500 people came on the Island. That is not sustainable.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

The proposed policy highlights, the need to improve skills and education, do you believe the policy will help do this in relation to your industry?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

As I say, I think we have some work to do there. I think schools have been pushing people understandably towards the finance industry because that is where all the money is. I think we have attended, and so have the dairy industry attended, the last couple of skills fairs that were allowed. One since COVID but the other one was pre-COVID, so that is 3 years ago now. Trying to get the people to understand that if you take a big company, like the Jersey Royal Company, there are jobs there for H.R. (human resources), accountancy, every aspect of Jersey's industries or Jersey's employment opportunities can be in one company. As I say, as we get more technologically advanced hopefully we would be able to recruit local people. I think the skillset ... it is a long time since I was at school, but I think they turn out pretty good people provided you tell them what you want. We are still recruiting. We have a young lad that works for us every Saturday. He is leaving school in July and now he is going to agricultural college. He has been working for us for a year. And other farms are doing the same sort of things. There are people out there, local people, who want to get into agriculture.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**



Are there areas that the proposed policy does not provide guidance on, which you would like to have seen addressed directly?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Sorry, I will just have a look at my notes. Not anything significant, no.

[11:30]

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

The chair has his hand up.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Just a brief question and, Peter, you just mentioned there about a young person coming to work in the industry. It is a changing industry. It is becoming more technological and you mentioned a lot of the jobs involved. Do you think it is an industry that is going to become more attractive to local people or can you make it more attractive to young people? That is sort of a million-dollar question, is it not?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

I hope we can. That is difficult. Certainly I am not the only one. As I say, we have this young lad. Funnily enough, in the last 6 months we have got 3 local people who have started for us. That is the biggest sort of recruitment locally we have had for years. It is slightly more expensive but we have had to be more realistic, and I will be honest about that, they all actually get one day off a week apart from Sunday because they are not really used to working Monday to Saturday night. So we have had to adapt. I am not answering your question very well really.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

You are.

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

I want to attract young people. The lad I am thinking of, he is keen. As I say, he wants to go to agricultural college and that is the sort of thing, as an industry, we need to support people like that. He is going to come back with different skills that people who went to agriculture college 30, 40 years ago, it is all going to be about how you ... I mean a lot of the data that we get about inputting chemicals and fertiliser and self-driving tractors, a lot of that is also not just about productivity, it is also about improving the environment and how well we can do things. As I say, we are keen to work with this young lad because he is going to come back with another set of skills from and knowledge and information from going to college that probably old people like me do not have.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Thank you for that answer.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

I will pass over to Graham, who has got his hand up as well.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

I was just following on from that. We had a conversation earlier with the Chamber of Commerce and plainly a lot of businesses, including the Government, are finding it increasingly difficult to bring people to the Island to recruit them to the Island because of the cost of housing and the cost of living in the Island. It is extremely difficult now to attract people here. Plainly your industry is slightly different inasmuch as you provide accommodation and you provide meals, et cetera, but nevertheless, every year the Assembly has a debate over the minimum wage, which has, I am sure you appreciate, increased above inflation over the recent years, now sitting at £9.22. There is also a move to go to the living wage, which I just do not know how that is going to fit ... certainly you might be able to attract more local people should it move but how is that going to fit with the business model of the Jersey Farmers Union?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

You are quite right about the minimum wage. I mean, the rise, I know we did not have one the year before but it was 11 per cent. Then coupled with that, the holiday entitlement for our seasonal staff was increased by 50 per cent. It used to be 2-week guaranteed, which was basically a day a month, and now it is 1.5 days a month. So the total wage bill rise for our members is close to 13.5 per cent for 2022. I think, and we all think, that the minimum wage is going to go up again for 2023. We do worry that where we cannot mechanise ... so in the potato job, as I say, we are just looking at every avenue for mechanisation. But when it comes to picking daffodils and when it comes to harvesting cauliflowers or courgettes, or whatever vegetable it is, there is really at the moment no mechanisation available. I think without more government support it is going to be very difficult to keep the local production of vegetables going. The second point I would like to make is it is quite interesting because, you are right, we have managed to attract Filipinos here, we have our own accommodation, but we are still up against it. I will just give you a very simple example. Pre-I.T.I.S. (income tax instalment scheme) if you earned £15,000 a year or £20,000, but you only worked for 10 months, you still got your 12 months' allowance. So somebody earning £20,000 only, in effect, paid tax on the £3,000 or £4,000 but over the year. With the I.T.I.S. system our staff are, if they come for 9 months, which they do, they then have to go away for 3 months where they cannot work. So they are going back to the Philippines. There is no employment there or if there is they are earning sort of £1 a day. Yet they are taxed, in effect, on 9 months because the allowance is only

for 9 months. So we have said, for example, the minimum wage has gone up and the staff are all very surprised because it has been quite a big jump in income tax for them, as you can imagine, because it is basically £1 an hour and if we are doing 50 hours a week, which is a sort of typical farm, it is £50 a week and £10 of that is going in tax. I think Government has to make Jersey an attractive place for people to come and want to work. Whether that is in hospitality or construction or agriculture. Wages is not the only thing. We keep making the point, and whether the Employment Forum will meet this year so we will have a chance to express our views, but it may be coming time where seasonal workers are looked at slightly differently because again one of our grievances with the rise in the minimum wage was that the Minister for the first time ever, since the minimum wage was implemented, did not raise the offset, which we are allowed to charge for accommodation, in line with the rate of the minimum wage rise. We have now got people ... my driver is in what I call a one-bedroom flat and I am charging him £90 a week. You find me somewhere else in the Island you can rent a one-bedroom flat for £90 a week. It is ridiculous. In effect, I believe now that we are subsidising our staff with the accommodation we provide, probably to the tune of about £150, so a lot of them really are probably on a living wage already.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Thank you for that. I will get the questions back on track.

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Sorry.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

No, it is us asking you the questions. But back to the question lines. Is it the right course of action to commit future Council of Ministers to include its policy on population in Government Plans from 2023 onwards?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Yes, definitely.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Do you want to just back it up with a definitely or the rationale behind that?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Definitely because I think we all agree that once we have got to 100,000, we are probably 105,000 people, you do now really need to start, if you want to keep agricultural land, if you want to keep what I think ... well, without building more schools and an even bigger hospital, I think we really have to be very careful how many extra people come into the Island every year.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

What impact do you think this will have, if any, going forward?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

I think the policy to us, as I say, I just put one word, "cost". Cost and perhaps loss of land, if we do not get it right. It will be a real sort of double whammy for our industry.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

What are your views on the proposed overall aim to progressively reduce Jersey's reliance on net inward migration within the currently agreed Common Strategic Policy?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

My views, from our industry point of view, is that we are doing everything we can to reduce the number of staff we employ, basically to keep our businesses solvent. I do not believe if we can reduce it, and as I hope we can by probably another 10 per cent to 15 per cent, I do not think that really makes a lot of difference to Government in the sense that because we are providing our own accommodation, and you might say if you are reducing your staff you will need less accommodation so there will be more for local people. I think while the accommodation for staff has improved incredibly over the last 10 years there is still a large number of portacabin-type stuff that we would like to see gone as an industry. There might be a small benefit to the Island from that. But I do not think that our industry will make a great deal of difference to us in terms of staff. It is going to make a difference to us if we get it wrong, and we start, as I say, losing land to all other areas because of the need for expansion.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

So just moving on, you would agree that it is an achievable goal but how would this goal impact on the farming industry?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

If we get the figures right I do not think it will impact on us. I do not think so, no.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Thank you. Over to Steve.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Just going back to, maybe just slightly changing the question, do you think it is right that the next Council of Ministers should commit to delivering this policy or do you think that they have the right

to take their own course of action? Do you want to see consistency through one Council of Ministers to the next?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

I do think you want to see that. Once you have the data and you make a decision, this is where we are today, if we want to ... the 3 key issues in here are if you bring in a lot of people it is great because we can all retire at 60 and there will be loads of young people working to keep us with a nice pension. If you bring no one in at all we will all be working until 80. So you have to find a balance to that. But the balance has to be how much extra housing do you need? How many extra schools do you need? I know there was the talk, I think it might have been Deputy Huelin was saying that if you start outsourcing, now that people are working from home, some of the States jobs and perhaps finance as well, to people who are living in the U.K. or further afield you could reduce that number. But you also reduce your tax take and everything else. It is a very difficult balance to find that.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

It is. I have a suspicion I know what your answer might be to this but, in your view, what would be the overall impact of this particular common population policy?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

They cannot really do anything, can they, until you know how many people are here or were here last March and you decide where we are going to go from there to get ... hospitality is the one that we must have all noticed. I know we wanted to go out for a meal on Saturday evening in Gorey and half the places were shut. Now the reason for that, I understand, is because they have been working short-staffed for most of last year so they have all decided to take January off, which is great but it is not much of a ... if you come for a holiday to Jersey in January and you find all the restaurants are shut. We have to have the staff.

[11:45]

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Would it be fair to say that you do not think there is going to be any major impact until we have the data?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

No, I do not. I think you need the data and then you have to decide as a States body. I think after that, once you have decided, you have to have it rolling on so that the next Council of Ministers have to have it as a blueprint until the figures change.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Fantastic. I am going to hand back to Deputy Ahier.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

The proposed policy makes it clear that all sectors of the community have a part to play in making the policy work for Jersey. Do you understand from the policy what the role of your sector is?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

No, I do not. I am not really sure obviously where the ... reducing net inward migration is one of the main goals. We have already been doing that, as the figures clearly show, where we are down 20 per cent in the last 5 years, something like that, in terms of the number of people coming in. That has all been done by increased mechanisation. Our sector will continue doing that but we do get to a critical limit because ... it would be a very similar example if someone waved a magic wand and I had a robotic planter tomorrow, I would still need 6 staff to lay polythene. So like in any business there are critical points that you cannot go below. The same with our lifting of potatoes, we can run a 2-row machine instead of a single-row machine and we reduce our staff by 4 but there is no machine at the moment that will run ... it may come but at the moment there is no machine to dig Jersey Royals without any staff at all. So other than that what can we do? Well, I do not think we can do very much because we are going to be, perhaps, on the other side if they come up with a policy that says we are going to carry on bringing in 1,000 people a year, we are going to be fighting to keep our land. That is my view.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

Very true. What actions do you believe Islanders, businesses and the Government of Jersey need to take to meet the proposed policy?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Well, as I say, I think the most important thing is to decide on this figure. The key is to say we need net inward migration of 400 people a year and everyone has to work around that. How can we achieve that without taking too much land, without ... I know I keep repeating myself, I keep coming back, it is a very ... there are a lot of pages to read but without the real data to make decisions I do not think ... you see it is also a lot about education but if you are short of staff it does not matter how well educated they are, you are still short of staff, are you not? You know, as I say, today construction is short, hospitality is short. You can train 50 people to do that job next year but they will not go into finance so they will be short, so they will bring in people. It is a very complex issue in my view.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

We are nearly there, you will be pleased to hear. In your view, is there sufficient rationale in the proposed policy for the conclusion that it is premature to set any specific population forecasts?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Again, it is only premature because they do not have the data to work it out, do they? It literally does come down to knowing what the position is today and also they ... the Government needs to know how many people are in the Island. Certainly I think it could be done pretty much on a 6-month basis so you can start to see where we are. One thing - and as I say it has not happened to us because we are not really sure - I have never seen anyone send a survey out to say in the last year how many staff are you short of in your industry? That would be an important starting point.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Yes, personally I think manpower ... sorry, go on.

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

No one has certainly contacted us to ask us that question.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

No, I would imagine the Government picks up a lot of information from the manpower returns form that they receive. I think Murray Norton made a very good point, and it is something I have been aware of for some time, we do not actually know or record or have any idea of how many people leave the Island. So hopefully the census, when it comes out eventually, could give us some indication where we are. Over to you, Steve.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

In your view, does the proposed policy take sufficient account of the rights of workers in your industry?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

No. Well, it is not directly in the policy. It is another battle that we are fighting at the moment. We met with economics groups last week and made the point to them. We are very disappointed that now all our seasonal staff are on a 9-month contract, they got a work permit for 9 months, they have a visa for 9 months, and when the 9 months is up they have to leave the Island for 3 months before they can come back. While one could accept that the first 6 months they work in Jersey they are only eligible for A. and E. (accident and emergency) in effect at the hospital but nothing else, when these people, as I say, are returning again now for the second time it is very unfair that they do not get full medical cover like anyone else from day one. That to me is ... that has been one of the

population and the control of housing and work policies, they have said: "Right you can only have a 9-month permit." Well I think if you are going to give someone only 9 months you then have to say: "Well, if they come back the second time they should be eligible for healthcare like anyone else in the Island." That seems to me completely unfair.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

Absolutely. Before you mentioned that you had approximately 158 people coming in from the Philippines. Now of those 158, how many of them are bringing their children with them for that 9-month period? Or are any of them?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

None. None at all.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

None whatsoever?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Well, Jane, is more ...

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Yes, they are not allowed to bring children or any dependents with them as part of the work permit rules.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

Sorry, is that work permit rules in Jersey or the work permit rules through the United Kingdom?

**Secretary, Jersey Farmers Union:**

No, that is the Jersey work permit rules. They are here on temporary work permits. It is the same for hospitality and also construction.

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

Oh, okay, fine. Thanks very much. I will pass back to the chair, thank you.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Before I ask the last question, obviously we have been talking a little bit this morning about increased use of technology and I think that is incredible. Do you know where you are in terms of the value of industry G.V.A. (gross value added) for the Island and whether you have kept that level and being able to reduce staff in that same time?



**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

I do not know. I could find it for you but I do not know if I have it.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

All right, if you could find it. If you could let us have it it would be fantastic. It would just give us some extra information. I suppose the next question would be ... because obviously moving forward the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture has talked a lot about increasing productivity. Do you feed into him with productivity figures?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Well, not directly because they come through your Statistics Unit. That is where we get all our figures from as a whole industry. Since Deputy Morel has been made Assistant Minister he has a responsibility for agriculture and since he has been appointed in the last 12 months we have been working very closely with him. Through him and the Rural Economy team we have managed to get more money into the productivity budget. So if I tell you I think last year it was around £150,000 and this year it is going to be close to £500,000 or £400,000-something anyway. It has gone up a huge amount. We have simplified the way it is going to work as well because in the past it was a lottery. You basically had to submit tendering against other farmers and because there is extra money in there we will now be able to give everybody a base amount they can apply for. It will give much greater certainty to businesses to be able to increase our productivity, whether they are small or large.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

How long does it take before you or the businesses actually begin to understand the effect it has had on their productivity? Did you see it year on year?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Some things you can literally see straight away. If I give you the simplest example, I am sure some of you ... when we dig our seed potatoes we take them to the shed and we tip them in potato trays and they are left there until October when they have a shoot on for standing. That was a very manual, labour-intensive job. The cost of a machine that now does it, the forklift and the machine, the cost is about £25,000 and it saved 5 staff on our farm.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Okay, so there is a big saving there?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

We can basically pay off that machine ... if it is leased we can pay off that machine in 3 years and that machine will probably have a lifespan of 20 years. So things like that we can see straight away. Okay, the cost will take us 3 years to pay off but the fact that, certainly in the last 2 years when it has been more difficult with COVID, is really the reason we have not been able to get the staff. Not that we could not get them, it was just we could not get them always when we wanted them. It made a huge difference to have that labour saving.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Okay, I have noticed Deputy Truscott has his hand up.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Sorry, I realise we are getting close but are you okay for 5 minutes over or whatever?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Yes.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

That is great. I think it was about 5 years ago the Gorst Government instructed the Minister for Economic Development to go out and look at ways of increasing productivity on the Island. It was interesting to hear you say it was not until Deputy Morel came on board - this is some 5 years later - that this is now taking off, which is great news because I think it is the way forward. Is there any more, other than just throwing money at the solution, a Government can do to actually assist the Jersey Farmers Union progress productivity in the Island? Resources, people, what can be done? Research?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

As I say, part of the money is being spent with what we are doing with Cambridge and Lincoln Universities with this robot scheme. I know the dairy industry at the moment - it is not quite productivity related - is doing a lot of work with Royal Holloway University for methane emissions. So we get a fair amount of funding for research. What has been disappointing is, you are right, there was this fund of money put aside for productivity and if you wanted to spend an evening trawling through the figures, it would be interesting to know how much States Members have voted on this productivity fund for the last 5 years and how much has actually been paid out. It seemed at one stage it was £1 million but we never saw anything like that. The closest I think it got was about £200,000. So it has either gone to a lot of other industries, but I do not know where, or it has never been paid out. I think certainly Kirsten Morel has realised that our industry is a very difficult position, not only with the minimum wage rise but costs in other areas have just gone through the roof. Our fertiliser bill went up 100 per cent year on year and people who thought it would go down ... and

most growers over here bought or a few did not hedge their bets and thought it would go down, it has gone up another 30 per cent since they could have bought it in November with everyone else. So figures like that are quite scary really. To keep our business or industry going we are going to require all the productivity savings we can get.

[12:00]

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

Absolutely, thank you.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Okay, just slightly off-piste, I have a question about the migration controls. At the time of the first phase of that work and the debate earlier in 2021, the Farmers Union expressed concerns to the panel about the implementation of those controls, which is still ... well, I say they are still to be brought forward, they were lodged yesterday as amendments to the Control of Housing and Work Law. While this is not strictly part of this review currently, but we are going to have to do some work on it, the panel would like to understand if the farming industry feels that those concerns have been addressed and whether there has been any further meaningful consultation with Government in regards to what has been lodged?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Do we have a copy of that? No, obviously we do not. We will have to have a look and see what exactly has been lodged and how far away it is from what we were expecting. We still have issues ... well, we have issues about the cost of 9-month permits but we have got around that in terms of growers are now looking at a 4-year working plan or a 3-year work plan with 9-month segments planned out. Our main concern otherwise, which we made at the time, is that it seems that herdsmen for dairy farms are no good on 9-month permits; these people have got to be certainly up to 4 years. The other problem is they should be on the skilled employment list. Because most of them are earning over £30,000 because of the skills they come with, but they do not even appear on the list. It is not that easy to get them in.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

I have one last question. You mentioned offsets against accommodation before and I personally do not believe it is a way around paying a living wage but do you think the amount that is allowed against offsets could be a way of offsetting some of the costs to the industry and bring you to the living wage? How do you view that? Is that one way of achieving that target?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

A living wage, in effect, is what you have in your pocket at the end of the week. If I take my Filipino worker who is doing 50 hours a week, he is on about £470 a week, he has to pay social security and I.T.I.S., which is about, let us say, 10 per cent to make it easy, that is £46, and then the £90, after he has been and done his groceries, he probably has about £150 in his pocket at the end of the week. I do not know, I would call that a living wage, after you have paid your accommodation, you have paid your food. Most of the accommodation, well certainly ours, comes with electricity and internet and all that stuff all included in the £90, so it is a pretty reasonable charge. They buy their food. It is quite interesting, after the first ones had been here about a couple of months, a chap drove in and I said: "Good morning, can I help you?" He said: "Yes, I have bought the rice." They are coming in with 20 kilo bags of rice. So word soon gets around. I do not know where the hell they got it from. I know this for a fact because if you talk to the Filipinos, you know, and you are quite welcome to come to visit my farm and chat to them, one of them is trying to buy a banana plantation, one of mine, and he reckons 4 years and he will have enough to do that. I think that is one of the things that Immigration are very happy about the Filipinos; they are coming to Jersey to earn money and they want to go back and reinvest in their own Island. Most of them are on outlying islands from Manila. It is a good thing from Jersey because it means they do not want to stay in Jersey, they want to go home and we seem to be able to, with that £150 ... sometimes we will get a long week in potato season and it can be £200 they are putting in their pocket. Over 9 months they are taking home £7,000 to £8,000, which, as I understand it, is a lot of money in the Philippines.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

You see it very much as a 2-way street. There is benefit in both directions.

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

I genuinely believe if the minimum wage ... if someone said it is going to be £11.50 next year because that is the living wage or £11.30 whatever it is, I think agriculture would basically have to pack up. £2 an hour on a wage bill which is £15 million, is it not? You put that up by another 20 per cent I mean we do not make £3 million.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

It is going to put you under stress?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

The profit is not there.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

I do not have any other questions, do my colleagues?

**Deputy S.M. Ahier:**

No, nothing further, thank you.

**Deputy G.J. Truscott:**

No, nothing.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Okay, that is great. Can I thank you both, Peter and Jane, for speaking to us this morning? It is a shame we could not meet personally, we have to do it virtually, but that is just the situation we are in. Obviously we will let you see copies of the transcribed notes before anything goes out or anything is made public. We do appreciate you coming in, we know it is a very complex issue and we thank you very much for taking time to, firstly, read the policy and give us your thoughts on it. I will close the meeting.

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

Could I just thank you and just say 2 things? We will have a look at the lodged migration policy and make sure there is nothing in it that we are not ... and if there is we might ...

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Okay, that would be fantastic.

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

... say we do not like this or we like that or whatever. Just something brief, and we will try and get those G.V.A. figures to you early next week. Do we send them to Anna Thorne and then she would get them to you?

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

Yes, please. I should have asked, is there anything else you want to add?

**President, Jersey Farmers Union:**

No, if you are all free this afternoon I can find 3 spaces for you to plant.

**Senator S.W. Pallett:**

I have been doing some building work at home and my hands are in bits at the moment. But I thank you very much.

[12:07]