



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# Coronavirus Act: Food supply

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## 1. Overview

This briefing paper is one of a collection of Commons Library briefings on the [Coronavirus Bill](#) (now the *Coronavirus Act 2020*). It deals with the provisions relating to a power to require information about the food supply chain. The other briefing papers, dealing with other parts of the Bill and general background, are available on the Commons Library website ([Coronavirus Bill: Overview](#)).

**Sections 25-29** of the *Coronavirus Act* deal with powers to require information about food supply chains. The Government has said that it is collaborating with the food sector to manage the risk of disruption to supply chains, but that the Act provides powers in case requests for voluntary provision of information were not to be complied with in the future.

This paper provides information on the provisions of the Act relating to food supply. It also provides an overview of various issues regarding food supply that have been raised in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, including concerns about shortages and the ability of vulnerable groups to access food.

## 2. Food and the pandemic

### 2.1 Food as critical infrastructure

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) jointly hold departmental responsibility for food as a Critical National Infrastructure sector. Defra is responsible for food supply, and the FSA for safety.<sup>1</sup> The Government prepares annual resilience plans for Critical National Infrastructure sectors which are classified, but an overall summary of all sector plans is published.<sup>2</sup> The 2018 summary (published in March 2019) provided high-level information on the resilience of the food sector, and stated:

Like many industries, the food sector operates just-in-time supply chains which require sophisticated logistics operations and contingency plans to respond rapidly to potential disruption. The industry remains highly resilient owing to the capacity of food supply sectors and the high degree of substitutability of foodstuffs.

This resilience has been demonstrated in the response to events such as the 2015 flooding, and disruption to cross-channel transportation, the 2009 H1N1 Pandemic, the 2010 Icelandic volcanic ash clouds, the 2012 potential industrial action by fuel tanker drivers and severe winter weather experienced over the years 2010–2014.<sup>3</sup>

Box 1 provides information on food security in the UK more generally.

#### Box 1: Food security in the UK

For an overview of food security see a [Library Insight on the subject](#) published in February 2020.

The [UK Food Security Assessment](#) was originally published in August 2009. This was produced by Defra under the Brown Government and set out the challenges and risks facing UK food security. It found that “by any objective measure, we enjoy a high degree of food security in the UK today”, noting high standards of food quality and safety, and resilience to supply disruption deriving from openness to trade.<sup>4</sup>

The Government’s [National Adaptation Programme](#) (July 2018, in response to the second *Climate Change Risk Assessment*) stated that Defra was reviewing the Food Security Assessment “with a view to publication in 2019”.<sup>5</sup> The [Agriculture Bill](#) introduced in January 2020 would introduce a new requirement to report to Parliament on UK food security at least once every five years. The report is to contain “an analysis of statistical data”.

For further information see the [Library briefing paper on the Agriculture Bill](#) (CBP 8702, 10 February 2020). Defra has also progressed work on developing a [National Food Strategy](#). This will be informed by an independent review led by Henry Dimbleby, and is intended to cover “the entire food chain, from field to fork”.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.2 Food supply chain concerns

The Covid-19 pandemic has raised concerns about potential shortages of food and fears of panic buying (for example, see: *The Times*, [Supermarket plan to beat shortages and panic buying](#), 10 March 2020). The *Financial Times* reported on 19 March that sales of pasta, canned meat and tinned soups spiked in the UK by more than 60 per cent in the

<sup>1</sup> DHSC, *Coronavirus Bill: Explanatory Notes*, paras 54-58

<sup>2</sup> GOV.UK, [Sector resilience plans](#) [accessed 20 March 2020]

<sup>3</sup> Cabinet Office, [Public Summary of Sector Security and Resilience Plans 2018](#), 22 March 2019, p. 17

<sup>4</sup> Defra, [UK Food Security Assessment](#), 2009

<sup>5</sup> Defra, [The National Adaptation Programme and the Third Strategy for Climate Adaptation Reporting: Making the country resilient to a changing climate](#), July 2018, p. 59

<sup>6</sup> Defra, [Developing a national food strategy: independent review 2019 – terms of reference](#), 17 August 2019

first week of March compared with the same week a year earlier. The article also noted concerns around imports as European states limit border traffic.<sup>7</sup> Tim Lang, professor of food policy at City University London, has said that the “just-in-time” food supply chain, which emphasises a flow of goods through the chain over retention of stock, is “breaking” as a result of the pandemic.<sup>8</sup> The National Farmers’ Union has also raised the issue of impacts on the supply of labour if restrictions on movement come into place. The NFU’s Ali Capper called on the Government to provide clarity on the Seasonal Workers Scheme pilot and said “wider issues of transportation and access to migrant labour if borders close amid the spread of the virus will need to be addressed”.<sup>9</sup>

Food retailers published a joint letter co-ordinated by the British Retail Consortium on 15 March, stating that “there is enough for everyone if we all work together” and calling on consumers to be “considerate in the way they shop”. The letter said that “we are working closely with the Government and our suppliers to keep food moving quickly through the system”.<sup>10</sup> It has been reported that retailers have called for relaxation of restrictions on the weight of goods that delivery vans can carry, easing Groceries Supply Code of Practice requirements around halting certain orders in order to focus on essentials, and relaxing minimum wage regulations to allow for flexibility in working arrangements.<sup>11</sup>

To help manage demand, several supermarkets have announced restrictions on purchases such as limiting numbers of items per customer, closing food counters, and dedicated shopping hours for older and vulnerable people, and healthcare workers.<sup>12</sup> The British Retail Consortium has said it will publish a [daily summary](#) of actions taken by individual retailers in response to the situation.<sup>13</sup>

## Government response

Environment Secretary George Eustice said on 19 March:

We have well established ways of working with the food industry during disruption and our retailers already have highly resilient supply chains and are working around the clock to ensure that people have the food and other products that they need. [...]

There is not a shortage of food. The challenge we have had is getting food to shelves in time when people have been purchasing more. [...]<sup>14</sup>

The Prime Minister was also asked in a press conference on 17 March about food supplies, and said he was “absolutely confident” that supply chains would function:

We are absolutely confident our supply chains are working, and will work, and we will get farm to fork food supplies. Therefore people should have no reason to stockpile or panic buy.<sup>15</sup>

The Government announced on 9 March 2020 that it would work with local authorities to extend delivery hours for food retailers. Current rules mean that deliveries are prohibited overnight so that vehicles do not disturb residents. Supermarkets had told the Environment Secretary that a relaxation of the rules would help retailers respond to the

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<sup>7</sup> *Financial Times*, [UK food suppliers battle to fill the empty shelves](#), 19 March 2020

<sup>8</sup> *The Guardian*, [Millions to need food aid in days as virus exposes UK supply](#), 27 March 2020

<sup>9</sup> *Farmers Guardian*, [NFU demands ‘assurances’ on SAWS pilot amid coronavirus spread](#), 18 March 2020

<sup>10</sup> British Retail Consortium, [Food retailers reassure consumers and ask them to buy responsibly](#), 15 March 2020

<sup>11</sup> *The Guardian*, [Food retailers urge government to relax trading regulations](#), 19 March 2020

<sup>12</sup> *The Guardian*, [UK supermarkets impose tight new rules to prevent hoarding](#), 18 March 2020; British Retail Consortium, [BRC Bulletin](#) [accessed 30 March 2020]

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> [HC Deb 19 Mar 2020](#)

<sup>15</sup> BBC News, [Coronavirus updates](#), 17 March 2020

increased consumer demand for some products, including hygiene products and a limited number of long-life items.<sup>16</sup> Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick also announced on 17 March that planning rules would be relaxed “as soon as possible” to enable pubs and restaurants to operate as hot food takeaways without a planning application. This would be done through a Statutory Instrument laid under the negative procedure, and would apply for a limited period.<sup>17</sup>

There had been reports that supermarkets have sought a relaxation of competition law to co-ordinate a response to the Covid-19 situation.<sup>18</sup> On 19 March 2020, the Government announced that legislation would be laid to amend elements of the *Competition Act 1998* to allow for a temporary relaxation to enable retailers to work together “for the sole purpose of feeding the nation during these unprecedented circumstances”.<sup>19</sup>

The Government also confirmed that it would temporarily relax drivers’ hours rules to allow supermarket delivery drivers to meet the increased demand for home deliveries, as well as temporarily relaxing the single-use carrier bag charge for online deliveries in England to speed up deliveries and minimise cross-contamination from reusing crates.<sup>20</sup>

On 26 March, the Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA), Christine Tacon, wrote to retailers’ Code Compliance Officers highlighting the importance of cash flow for many suppliers in the context of the pandemic. The GCA said that payment terms are not covered by the Groceries Supply Code of Practice but that any support from retailers to suppliers “to help them through this extremely difficult time would be very welcome”.<sup>21</sup>

The Environment Secretary penned an open letter to the food and drink industry on 26 March, in which he paid tribute to workers along the food supply chain and said:

[...] there are many key workers that are crucial to the resilience of our country. Our NHS staff will be working harder than ever in the weeks ahead. Those of you working to provide the nation with food and other essentials are also delivering an absolutely vital service.

George Eustice also said that “the advice of Public Health England is that there is very little risk of the virus being spread on food or packaging”.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.3 Vulnerable groups

### Self-isolating/shielding people

Over the weekend of 21-22 March 2020, new measures to support those considered “extremely vulnerable” to Covid-19 were announced, including urging 1.5 million to stay at home and “shield” themselves from the virus. On 21 March, it was announced that a new “Local Support System” would support delivery of “basic groceries” to those self-isolating and without a support network of friends and family. A partnership between the Government, the groceries industry, local government, local resilience and emergency partners, and voluntary groups would facilitate deliveries.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> GOV.UK, [New measures on night time deliveries to supermarkets to support coronavirus response](#), 9 March 2020

<sup>17</sup> GOV.UK, [Government to grant permission for pubs and restaurants to operate as takeaways as part of coronavirus response](#), 17 March 2020

<sup>18</sup> *The Telegraph*, [Morrisons boss wants competition law relaxed to keep food on shelves](#), 18 March 2020

<sup>19</sup> GOV.UK, [Supermarkets to join forces to feed the nation](#), 19 March 2020

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> GOV.UK, [Letter to retailers about payment terms](#), 26 March 2020

<sup>22</sup> GOV.UK, [Letter from the Environment Secretary to the food and drink industry](#), 26 March 2020

<sup>23</sup> GOV.UK, [Major new measures to protect people at highest risk from coronavirus](#), 21 March 2020

On 22 March, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick told the Government's daily Covid-19 press conference that those "shielding" from the virus would be able to obtain food and medicine from "community hubs", with groceries being delivered by local councils and food distributors, working with supermarkets. The deliveries would be free of charge and the operation would be supported by members of the Armed Forces.<sup>24</sup> Defra Minister Victoria Prentis also said in response to a Parliamentary Question on 27 March that the support would include a "free grocery pack containing a basic selection of food and other essential household items" to be delivered to those at home and unable to make other arrangements.<sup>25</sup>

MHCLG said on 29 March that the first 2,000 boxes had been delivered, containing "essential food and household items such as pasta, fruit, tinned goods and biscuits", with the number expected to exceed 50,000 in the following week.<sup>26</sup>

## Food banks

Food banks supply food to some members of society who are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19. Figures from the Food Foundation suggest that over 17 million people in the UK are at elevated risk of the virus, and that of these 860,880 experience low or very low food security. It also found that over 1 million people at elevated risk experience loneliness (affecting the extent to which they are able to ask family and friends for assistance).<sup>27</sup> Food Foundation director Anna Taylor was also quoted in the *Guardian* on 27 March 2020 as saying that between 4 and 7 million people in lower risk categories are also affected by severe food insecurity or loneliness.<sup>28</sup>

There have been reports of food banks either closing or finding it difficult to operate because of conditions brought about by the Covid-19 emergency.<sup>29</sup> The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), which represents over 800 food banks in the UK, reported on 20 March that a lack of donations, rationed access to supermarkets, the vulnerability of volunteers and a rise in the number in need of help as a result of the pandemic is compromising their service. IFAN have asked supermarkets to set aside surplus food for food banks and to allow emergency food aid providers to bypass restrictions limiting the amount of each product customers can buy.<sup>30</sup> The Trussell Trust, which runs 1,200 food banks in the UK stated that, as the coronavirus outbreak unfolds, demand for food banks is likely to increase while fewer volunteers will be available.<sup>31</sup>

Following the 23 March announcement of restrictions on movement and businesses, the Trussell Trust stated that food banks face a difficult decision about whether they are able to stay open.<sup>32</sup> It has also said that if a food bank feels unable to open, the Trust will look at how to distribute food "in a safe, alternative way".<sup>33</sup> IFAN also posed "ten urgent

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<sup>24</sup> *The Independent*, [Coronavirus: Boris Johnson unveils plan for community hubs across UK as 1.5m told to stay home for 12 weeks](#), 22 March 2020

<sup>25</sup> [PQ 31588](#) [on Food Supply: Coronavirus], 27 March 2020

<sup>26</sup> GOV.UK, [First food parcels delivered to clinically vulnerable people](#), 29 March 2020

<sup>27</sup> The Food Foundation, [COVID-19: latest impact on food](#), 27 March 2020

<sup>28</sup> *The Guardian*, [Millions to need food aid in days as virus exposes UK supply](#), 27 March 2020

<sup>29</sup> The Independent, [Coronavirus: Food banks strained as volunteers isolate and demand surges during pandemic](#), 23 March 2020

<sup>30</sup> The Guardian, [Food banks ask UK supermarkets to set aside coronavirus supplies](#), 20 March 2020

<sup>31</sup> Trussell Trust, [Asda donates £5m to food banks & community charities to help people through COVID-19](#), 21 March 2020

<sup>32</sup> [What does tonight's announcement mean for food banks?](#) Trussell Trust, 23 March 2020

<sup>33</sup> Trussell Trust, [Coronavirus and food banks](#) [accessed 26 March 2020]

questions for the government” in a statement published by food advocacy charity Sustain on 24 March.<sup>34</sup>

Environment Secretary George Eustice said on 21 March that the Government was in discussion with supermarkets “to try to ensure that food banks retain an access to food supplies to help the most vulnerable”.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.4 Government work with industry

The explanatory notes prepared for the Bill state that “Defra has a long history of working collaboratively with industry and across Government to respond to food supply disruption”. The notes point to the Food Chain Emergency Liaison Group (FCELG), comprising officials from Defra and the Devolved Administrations as well as trade associations from across the food supply chain.<sup>36</sup> The FCELG had previously formed part of Defra’s planning for the impacts of a potential “no-deal” Brexit, and was also referred to in a PQ response in March 2006 in the context of emergency planning for pandemic influenza.<sup>37</sup>

The explanatory notes state that Defra has agreed a Data Sharing Protocol with food retailers to regularly gather information on a voluntary basis, as part of the Government’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The notes also state that the FCELG will be convened on a more regular basis.<sup>38</sup> Environment Secretary George Eustice said on 19 March 2020 that he had been in daily calls with the food supply sector.<sup>39</sup>

While Defra “anticipate[s] ongoing collaboration on a voluntary basis between Government and industry”, the explanatory notes to the *Coronavirus Bill* state that it is “right and proper” to plan for a scenario in which voluntary requests for information were not complied with, “in order to ensure Government has the necessary information to build a clear understanding of the situation, make informed judgements and respond effectively”.<sup>40</sup> The Act therefore gives powers to require the provision of such information.

The [Agriculture Bill 2019-21](#) also includes provisions around information relating to the food supply chain (see Box 2 for more information).

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<sup>34</sup> Sustain, [Emergency independent food banks ask: "Can we stay open?" as UK goes into coronavirus lockdown](#), 24 March 2020

<sup>35</sup> *The Telegraph*, [British shoppers hoard food worth £1bn – and should be 'ashamed'](#), 21 March 2020 [paywall; video timestamp 32:52]

<sup>36</sup> DHSC, *Coronavirus Bill: Explanatory Notes*, paras 54-58

<sup>37</sup> [PQ 281002](#) [on Food Supply], 9 August 2019; HC Deb 22 Mar 2006 [c443W](#)

<sup>38</sup> DHSC, *Coronavirus Bill: Explanatory Notes*, paras 54-58

<sup>39</sup> [HC Deb 19 Mar 2020](#)

<sup>40</sup> DHSC, *Coronavirus Bill: Explanatory Notes*, paras 54-58



## Box 2: The Agriculture Bill

The [Agriculture Bill 2019-21](#), currently before Parliament, contains provisions which have some read across to those in the *Coronavirus Act*.

**Part 3, Clauses 21-26** of the *Agriculture Bill* introduce new requirements for those in the agri-food supply chain to supply information in relation to that supply chain. The provisions are intended to make data collection throughout the agri-food supply chain more transparent and to improve the dissemination of this information. They would enable the Secretary of State to make secondary legislation to collect and share data relevant to the agri-food supply chain, to serve a specified number of purposes. These are largely related to: productivity, supply chain fairness, animal and plant disease and risk management.

The powers in the *Coronavirus Act* would require the provision of information in narrower circumstances, to allow the Government to respond in the event of supply chain disruption (see the next section of this paper). The aim of the Agriculture Bill measures is to improve transparency and fairness in the supply chain, hence the purposes for which information may be required to be provided are wider. See the [Library briefing paper on the Agriculture Bill](#) (CBP 8702, 10 February 2020) for further information.

## 3. Provisions of the Act

The provisions in the Act allow the Government and the Devolved Administrations to set out requirements for the provision of information about food supply chains in writing, rather than in secondary legislation, which the explanatory notes state will allow for the power to be used at short notice.<sup>41</sup> The Government's summary of impacts for the *Coronavirus Bill* sets out the rationale for intervention:

In the event of disruption to food supply chains due to the outbreak of coronavirus, the Government may seek to intervene to support industry efforts to restore efficient and equitable supply. The Government response to food supply disruption currently relies on information which is provided by industry on a voluntary, regular basis to Defra during the disruption. Without the provision of information from industry, Government is unable to develop an accurate view, making it difficult to support any industry response and inform a proportionate and effective Government response.<sup>42</sup>

The summary also states that "Defra does not wish to activate these clauses unless the power is required", and that "safeguards have been drafted into the clauses to ensure that they could not be used in any other situation".<sup>43</sup> These provisions apply to the whole UK.

### Power to require information

**Section 25** provides a power for an "appropriate authority" to require a person in, or closely connected with, a food supply chain to provide information about their activity connected with that supply chain. The *Coronavirus Bill* impact summary provides "the location of certain food stocks" as an example of information that might be required using this power.<sup>44</sup> **Section 29** defines various terms used in Sections 25-29, including "food supply chain".

Persons "in" a food supply chain are defined in the Act as producers (in agriculture, fishing or aquaculture) and intermediaries (those between the producers and consumers). Producers, slaughterhouses, packaging centres, distributors and retailers are "in" a food supply chain, as set out in the explanatory notes.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> DHSC, *Coronavirus Bill: Explanatory Notes*, para 224

<sup>42</sup> GOV.UK, [Coronavirus bill: summary of impacts](#), 19 March 2020

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> GOV.UK, [Coronavirus bill: summary of impacts](#), 19 March 2020

<sup>45</sup> DHSC, *Coronavirus Bill: Explanatory Notes*, para 244

Persons “closely connected” with a food supply chain are defined as those providing certain goods and services to producers and intermediaries (such as seeds, fertiliser, pesticides and equipment), as well as bodies representing persons either in or closely connected with a supply chain (such as trade bodies represented on the FCELG, as set out in the explanatory notes).<sup>46</sup>

Section 25 sets out that the appropriate authority can “require” information only if:

- The authority considers that the provision of the information is necessary to establish if a food supply chain is at risk of disruption, or to establish the nature of such disruption; and
- The authority has previously requested the information and the person has either not provided it, or has provided false or misleading information.

A requirement must be made in writing and specify how and when the information is to be provided. It may not be imposed on an individual, which the explanatory notes state will prevent individual farmers and sole traders from being subject to such requirements.<sup>47</sup>

## Authorities and devolution aspects

**Section 26** defines the authorities which may require information under the preceding section. They are:

- The Secretary of State;
- The Scottish Ministers;
- The Welsh Ministers; and
- The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland (DAERA).

The power for the Devolved Administrations to require information is linked to the devolved competence of the relevant legislature.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, it is specified that the Secretary of State may not impose a requirement for information in relation to a devolved nation without the consent of the relevant administration, if that administration could have imposed the requirement itself. If such a requirement is imposed with the Devolved Administration’s consent, the Secretary of State must disclose to that administration any information provided in response to the requirement, if it relates to food supply chain activity in the relevant nation.

## Use and disclosure of information

**Section 27** establishes restrictions on the use and disclosure of information. Information provided under Section 25 can only be used if it is for the purposes set out in that section (i.e. establishing if there is disruption to food supply chains), or for the purpose of mitigating or preventing such disruption.

The body which holds the information may only disclose it to another person for the same purposes. If the further disclosure is to a body other than a government authority, the information must be anonymised. If the information is disclosed by a body that is not a government authority (that is, a Minister of the Crown, the Devolved Administrations and any other person exercising functions on behalf of the Crown), that body must act in accordance with the terms on which the information was disclosed to them. These

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<sup>46</sup> DHSC, *Coronavirus Bill: Explanatory Notes*, paras 244-5

<sup>47</sup> DHSC, *Coronavirus Bill: Explanatory Notes*, para 220

<sup>48</sup> DHSC, *Coronavirus Bill: Explanatory Notes*, para 227



restrictions do not apply to information that is required to be disclosed to a Devolved Administration by the Secretary of State.

Section 27 also sets out that any disclosure of information made under the Act does not breach any obligation of confidence or any other restriction on disclosure. Personal data may not be used or disclosed under Section 27 if this would contravene data protection legislation.

## Enforcement

**Section 28** provides for enforcement of the requirement to provide information. It applies if an appropriate authority is “satisfied on the balance of probabilities” that a person has failed to comply with a requirement, or has provided information that is false or misleading to a material extent. In this circumstance, the authority may impose a financial penalty in accordance with **Schedule 15**.

Schedule 15 provides that the authority must inform the person of the penalty by a written notice of intent, specifying the amount of the proposed penalty, the reasons for imposing it and information about the right to make representations.

Paragraph 2 of the Schedule sets out the maximum penalty that can be specified for a business engaged in the provision of goods or services – that is, 1% of turnover in the most recent accounting period. The remaining paragraphs of the Schedule deal with representations and appeals against penalties, late payments, and recoverability where payments are not made.

## Response

Food sector stakeholders have emphasised their ongoing cooperation with the Government. British Retail Consortium food and sustainability director Andrew Opie told *FoodNavigator* that food retailers had set up a reporting system ahead of the Bill’s introduction. The Food and Drink Federation also said it was keen to support and fully cooperate with the government, adding that Brexit preparations had contributed to the adaptability of supply chains.<sup>49</sup>

Some commentary pointed out that the Bill only enabled the collection of information, and did not provide the Government with new powers to directly manage disruption to food supplies. A letter to the Prime Minister signed by Professors Tim Lang, Erik Millstone and Terry Marsden raising various concerns about “the emerging food crisis” noted that “the Coronavirus Bill has just four pages out of 329 on food, and empowers authorities to obtain information about potential disruptions to food supply, but no powers to resolve those disruptions”.<sup>50</sup>

# 4. Passage of the Act

## 4.1 Debates

During Commons Committee Stage, Cabinet Office Minister Penny Mordaunt said that there were “several” powers in the *Coronavirus Bill* that the Government did not expect to use, “particularly on food supply and so forth”, but that flexibility was required in the unpredictable situation. On food supply, Shadow Minister Nick Thomas-Symonds MP

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<sup>49</sup> FoodNavigator, [UK Coronavirus Emergency Bill looks to 'keep food supply flowing'](#), 19 March 2020

<sup>50</sup> [Tim Lang, Erik Millstone and Terry Marsden to Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP](#), 20 March 2020

highlighted “profiteering and unnecessary stockpiling”, and said that the Government required a “strategic approach” to these issues.<sup>51</sup>

At Lords Second Reading, Labour peer Lord Falcolner of Thoroton said that the Opposition agreed with the Bill’s approach of including a “reserve power” in case voluntary provision of information ceased, but stated that “it does not, in itself, do anything to guarantee the availability of food and other items” and asked what conversations the Government was having with actors in the supply chain to maintain public confidence.<sup>52</sup> Shadow Health Spokesperson Baroness Thornton also raised issues of stockpiling, seasonal labour and the role of the military in supporting food supply logistics.<sup>53</sup>

## 4.2 Amendments

There were a number of non-Government amendments at Commons Committee Stage of the Bill, some of which had relevance to food supply. The following amendments were not moved.

**New Clause 4**, in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and others, would have created a duty for the Prime Minister to make arrangements to ensure access to “the basic means of living”, including food; the explanatory statement accompanying the amendment said that this requirement would be “throughout the present coronavirus emergency”. **New Clause 6**, tabled by Bob Seely MP (Conservative, Isle of Wight) and Angus Brendan MacNeil MP (Scottish National Party, Na h-Eileanan an Iar) would have given the Government powers to direct transport operators to work together to ensure the provision essential goods to isolated communities (Paymaster General Penny Mordaunt told Mr Seely that he would receive a letter regarding transportation to the Isle of Wight).

**New Clause 28**, in the name of several Labour MPs, would have provided for prices to be capped in the event of disruption to the food supply chain, and **Amendments 53 and 54** were also tabled to allow financial penalties under the Schedule for non-compliance with a price cap.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> HC Deb 23 Mar 2020, [c134](#)

<sup>52</sup> HL Deb 24 Mar 2020, [c1656](#)

<sup>53</sup> HL Deb 24 Mar 2020, [c1731](#)

<sup>54</sup> HC Deb 23 Mar 2020, [c134](#); [Committee of the whole House Amendments as at 23 March 2020 - updated](#)

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