

Weathering the farm/work relationship

Lydia Medland, Charlie Clutterbuck, Heidi Saxby

Thursday 8th January 2020, Oxford Real Farming Conference



This Session

- We will invite you to discuss 'farm work' & 'food work'
- We will have two short presentations on farm work in the UK
- We will do a participatory analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for farm work in the context of the next few years.
- In an ideal world, and with anything that you willingly leave us with at the end, we'd like to write an article/blog-post based on this.

Themes to bear in mind.

- There are many kinds of farm/food worker.
- We are considering how Brexit may change the landscape for many such workers, in this session, particularly UK farm workers.



Growers, horticultural workers and farm workers on agro-eco and organic farms and projects and in SMEs.



Workers, British and migrant workers in conventional or large firms.



Workers in 'ethical' or 'sustainable' farming projects outside the UK.



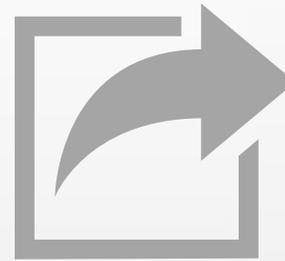
Workers in global production networks, producing for the UK market outside the EU.

Some themes and questions for the session



What is important to workers (in the UK)?

Treatment / Rights



**How are they changing?
Particularly in the context of Brexit?**

Recent changes / Things on the horizon



In small groups (3-4 people) for 5 minutes.

- Introduce yourself (briefly!)
- What is your connection to this issue?
- Is there anyone in your group who is:
 - A farm worker?
 - Employer of workers in a farming setting, or market garden?
 - Do you work in a food business?
 - Or anything else you'd like to consider....
- During the presentations, please think whether you'd like to share your case further with your group in the next part.



Over to some presentations of what we've seen so far...

Weathering the Farm / Worker Relationship

Charlie Clutterbuck

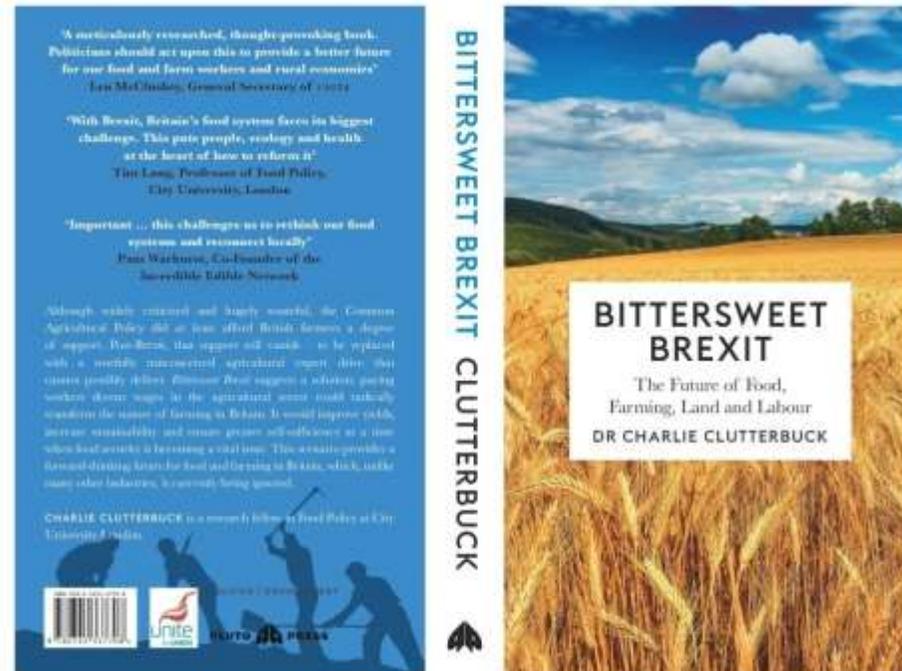
Unite's National Rural Committee 2012-17

Author

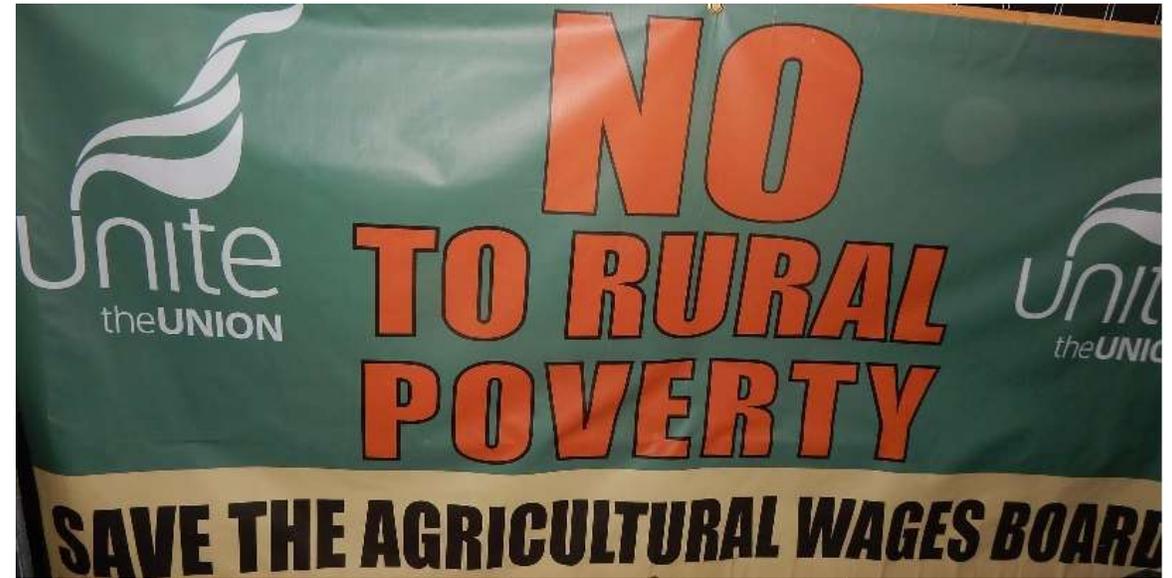
Bittersweet Brexit

Pluto Press 2017

Mates rates today – half price £10



Agricultural Wages Board



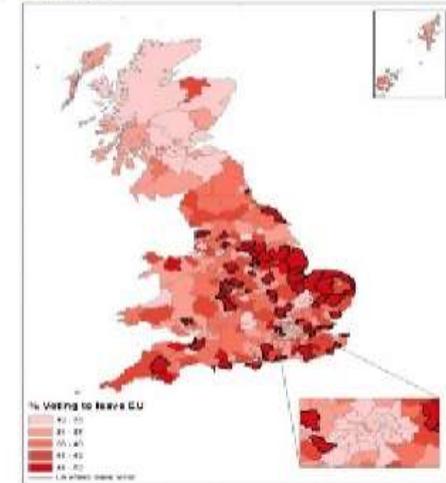
- Nationally agreed wages, sick pay, holidays, skills inc even H&S!
- Plantation owners pushed for Minimum wage only.
- AWB of England & Wales abolished 2013 by Coalition government
- Wales re-instated theirs, Scotland & NI kept their own.

Brexit

Close correlation of arable lands and predicted Brexit Vote (2month before referendum)

EU Voting intentions

- Deeper red = more brexit,
- With lines = >50%
- Pale yellow - arable/plantation
- Look at the close overlap of Brexit & Arable



Doubt if this was due to concern in these areas about vegetable growing wrecking our best land - in plantations, like all based on monocultures and migrants. Suspect the concern was about monoculture. Migrant workers difficult to organisewhen we tried.. Any future growing plans for Britain need to recognise this situation, but seems to be ignored

Predictions

- Lamb farms to slaughter..family farms in West most likely to be hit hardest.
- Drive for ever cheaper food . More cheap imports but supply chains more costly, drive for even cheaper labour..but where from?
- Wages will have to rise to attract workers – from outside EU..J Tory Manifesto pledged to quadruple allowed under SAWS.
- Do not see massive government investment in agricultural science to bring it back to 1980s

More at www.bittersweetbrexit.co.uk 'Getting Brexit Done'

Where are Workers' Rights?

- Gov left out Workers Rights from Withdrawal Bill, saying regulations will be in Employment Bill.
- Regulations are not same as Rights, regulations try to stop worst cases, and anyway difficult to impose in rural situations.
- Witness Gangmasters' Licensing and Modern Slavery Acts – both UK initiatives.
- Predict that 'hours/holidays' bits of law will be weakened..and in H&S, 'risk assessment (EU origin) will be weakened too.
- [MORE HERE](#) where you can join in!

‘I am not a number’

Exploring the wellbeing of seasonal farm workers in the UK

heidisaxby@gmail.com



@heidisaxby

Research aim:

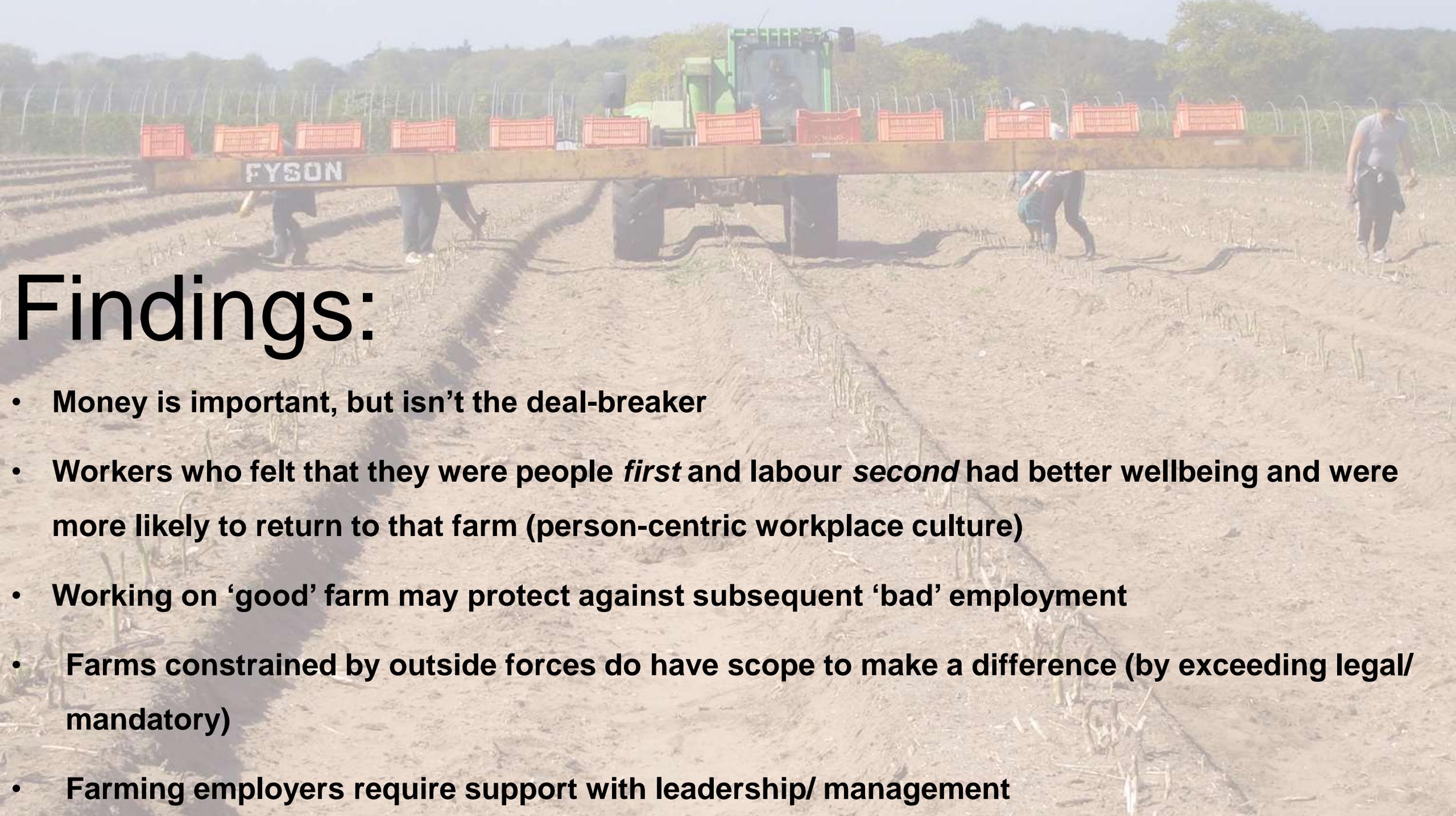
- To explore on-farm factors affecting seasonal workers' wellbeing and how their cumulative effects influence workers' decisions to return to a farm.
 - What on-farm features and practices do workers identify as important for wellbeing?
 - What do farming employers (knowingly/unknowingly) do to facilitate workers' wellbeing?
 - What is the relevance for workers' employment decisions, including returning to specific farms?

Motivation for research:

- Ethical/moral imperative
- Returnees are highly valued
- UK food retail approach necessitates flexible workforce. This 'encourages' workplace practices which disadvantage workers

Wellbeing:

- Common-sense use
 - Subjective
 - In constant flux
 - Different for everyone
 - Many components/influences
 - Determined in part by prevalence

A green tractor is pulling a long, low-profile trailer across a field. The trailer is loaded with several orange plastic crates. The tractor has the name 'FYSON' written on its side. Several people are visible in the field, some standing near the trailer and others further away. The field appears to be a vegetable or fruit field, with rows of plants visible. The background shows a line of trees under a clear sky.

Findings:

- **Money is important, but isn't the deal-breaker**
- **Workers who felt that they were people *first* and labour *second* had better wellbeing and were more likely to return to that farm (person-centric workplace culture)**
- **Working on 'good' farm may protect against subsequent 'bad' employment**
- **Farms constrained by outside forces do have scope to make a difference (by exceeding legal/mandatory)**
- **Farming employers require support with leadership/ management**

'Good' and 'Bad' farms:

'Good'

- 'Small'
- Flat hierarchy
- One or few nationalities/languages
- Many returnees
- Known by name
- Low occupancy of caravans
- Supervision/ autonomy
- Respite and reprieve (inc piece rate/hourly)
- Gestures of hospitality
- Seen as workers who provide labour
- Personally invited back
- Scope to negotiate working pace/ method
- Variety of tasks/ crops

'Bad'

- 'Big'
- Complex hierarchy
- Multiple nationalities/languages
- Few/ no returnees
- Numbers, not names
- Full occupancy of caravans
- Micro-management
- Surveillance
- No respite/ reprieve
- No social niceties
- Labour, not workers
- No invitation to return extended
- Farm 'machine' dictates working pace/ method (relentless)
- Mono crops

Brexit:

' Various participants involved in Brexit say that there can be no cherry picking. People need to realise that there will be no strawberry, raspberry or any other type of berry picking unless action is quickly taken.'

(Member of the Association of Labour Providers. Quoted by British Summer Fruits, 2017).



Group discussions

- Return to your small groups
- Is there someone in your group who would like to consider the experience of their own work?



SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats



STRENGTHS (+)

- All workers known by name
 - Many returnees (consistency)
 - Under-occupied accommodation
- Flat hierarchy
Farmer employer lives in site

INTERNAL
FACTORS

WEAKNESSES (-)

- Little scope to develop/ promote workers
 - Can't afford to retain staff year round
- 'Plantation' production
- Monocrop (mundane, deskilling)

OPPORTUNITIES (+)

- Apprenticeships
- Increased demand for locally produced meat/ UK fruit and veg
- Tapping into existing schemes/networks (LWA, local veg box schemes etc)

EXTERNAL
FACTORS

THREATS (-)

- Increasing min wage (raises production costs)
- Brexit (uncertainty, upheaval)
- Small pool of local workers able to do p/t, manual work
 - Reducing access to EU workers



Group SWOT of workers' rights post-Brexit





In the future

- If you would like to share your SWOT with us, we would be grateful. We'd like to consider these further, but only with your permission.
- You can contribute to Charlie's webpage with your expertise
- Good luck and solidarity!
- Thank you!

Lydia, Charlie and Heidi