

**The Foundation for Science and Technology Meeting on**  
**Food Security**  
**at The Royal Society, Carlton House Terrace**

**15/10/08**

**Speaking Notes - Lord Haskins**

**1 Security**

- A dangerous word
- Enables governments to justify actions which would normally be unacceptable    WMD    42 days
- Plays on people's fears    Images of U boats
- A cover for Protection - conventional and organic farmers

**2 Food Security**

- Wholly wrong to talk about British Food Security
- As a member of the EU largely self sufficient in food.
- Till recently problems have been surpluses
- Unilateral action by Britain to raise self-sufficiency by applying restrictions on imports illegal

### **3 Short history of British self-sufficiency**

#### A Till 1846

- Largely self-sufficient.
- Huge import barriers known as The Corn Laws.

#### B 1846

- Repeal of The Corn Laws
- Priority to provide growing urban population with affordable food. Populace growing restive.
- Opening up America to British food market.
- Lower prices
- Self-sufficiency down to 40% by 1914
- 1<sup>st</sup> World War blip
- Further decline in UK agriculture in the 20s and the 30s
- Geest buying Lincolnshire land for £10
- 2<sup>nd</sup> World War crisis
- Digging for Victory
- “Never again”

## C 1947

- Post war drive to raise domestic food production
- Tom Williams Act
- Standard Quality
- Imperial Preference
- In 1970 90% of UK milling wheat came from N America

## D 1973

- Joining the EEC
- Introduction of huge tariff barriers and subsidies
- Massive increase in UK farm products 75% self-sufficient by mid 80s
- “Food from our own resources” (Walker. Major)
- Reducing trade deficit

## E 1988

- But
- Surpluses had to be tackled

- Introduction of Set Aside and Quotas
- UK production declines
- But today still about 70%
- Practically all milling wheat in a good year is UK

#### **4 Limitations of Britain's capacity to raise self sufficiency in food**

- Membership of EU prevents national tariff barriers and subsidies
- Climatic restrictions on range of crops which can be grown
- Shortage of spare viable land (after set aside)
- Competitive disadvantages
- Labour for intensive crops
- Overheads in a densely populated country
- Climate makes beef, dairy, sugar uncompetitive
- Poor collaborative marketing by farmers (dairy products)
- Regulation – partly responsible for decline in pig herd
- Growing population demand rising fast
- Powerful anti science lobby

## However

- Crop yields could still grow again after several static years  
Bioscience blight in potatoes
- Climate change will widen the range of crops for British farmers

## Unknowns

- Will EU phase out subsidies by 2013? Unlikely without WTO
- If so what will be the impact for Britain?
- Because UK farmers are larger than average, they should increase share of EU market (subsidies are biased in favour of small producers)
- But real problems for farmers on marginal levels
- And concern about beef and dairy farmers ability to cope
- Is intensive livestock production in the UK viable in the long term?
- Health breakdowns, Poultry, Pigs, Dairy Cows
- Pollution concerns

- Animal welfare concern
- **Price Volatility**
- At £80 a ton, wheat only viable on 10 tons per hectare
- At £150 a ton viable at 5 tons per hectare
- Is today's volatility here to stay? Or will Malthus chickens come home to roost?
- On top of this is the dual currency volatility
- Farmers need to be part of the Single Currency

## **5 The real problem of food security is in the developing world.**

- Growing population, poverty, political instability, climate, lack of resource, over populated rural societies
- The only solution is to build political and economic stability
- Managing, not resisting the flight from the land
- Building a viable non agricultural economy
- Economy not resisting farm restructuring, fewer, bigger.
- Enabling bigger farms to borrow more
- In existing science, technology and infrastructure
- In new science and technology
- In water conservation

- In combating climate change
- Promoting population control
- Enabling food to trade freely from regions in surplus to regions in deficit.