

Food: a recipe for a healthy, sustainable and successful future

Second Report of the Council of Food Policy Advisors



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The Government should use the year ahead to implement its new food strategy, *Food 2030*, in the well-founded expectation that it can help to deliver a healthier, happier, wealthier and greener society

The purpose of the Council of Food Policy Advisors is to advise the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on food policy in England. This report sets out the Council's advice on the priorities that it believes should define the Government's agenda for food policy in the year ahead.

Above all, we urge the Government to give food a prominent place on its agenda. Food is central to our lives. It can unite and inspire people. Food policy can have positive impacts on public health, the environment, wealth creation, well-being and social cohesion. It can help to lower burdens on our health and social care services, deliver faster cuts in greenhouse gas emissions and boost the rebalancing of the economy delivered through the greater success of one of the UK's most significant but often neglected sectors.

This is the time for action. With the publication of *Food 2030* – the UK's most significant statement of food policy in forty years – the Government has set out a long term strategy that is shared across the food chain. The focus should now be on implementation.



The Council's proposals, set out here, flow from its belief that it is essential to encourage people's desire to eat a safe, healthy diet produced from a healthy environment, thereby creating a viable food system for people and the planet. The proposals are intended to be practical and achievable. Many explicitly promote the kind of joined-up working that the Council believes is an essential element of effective food policy. Action on these priorities will accelerate progress towards that end and towards *Food 2030's* vision for the future of food in this country.

Food is an area of policy on which government can, and will need to, engage with people on issues of popular interest and economic, social and environmental importance

1.1 Progress made in the last three years has laid strong foundations for the next phase of UK food policy development and its shift in focus from analysis to action

The Council of Food Policy Advisers believes that the contribution that food policy can make to health, the environment, wealth creation, well-being and social cohesion warrants it having a prominent place among the Government's priorities.

The progress of the last three years means that there is now an explicit recognition of the challenges the UK faces and general agreement across government, the food industry, agriculture and consumer groups on the direction we need to go. The Government last year produced a new framework for managing UK food security and recently published its first statement of food policy in forty years, the *Food 2030* strategy.

Now is the time to take the initiative. The publication of *Food 2030* is not an endpoint in itself. Government must now shift its focus from aspiration to action – starting with active engagement across the food chain, around the UK and in Europe to agree the pathway, pace and ownership of the changes needed to put *Food 2030*'s goals within reach. It also needs to consider the next set of questions that follow logically from the priorities on which the new strategy is built.

This report sets out the priorities that the Council has identified for food policy in the year ahead – the key elements of that new agenda. It offers the Council's insights and advice on the issues that the Government needs to tackle; it poses questions as well as providing answers. It is grounded in the diverse experience and expertise of Council members (annex A).

There are challenging issues to be worked through that will demand public debate as well as technical research, advice, new partnerships and delivery mechanisms. The choices made will have long term implications, not least for consumers, for business and for our countryside. Nowhere is this more so than in the meat and dairy sectors.

These issues warrant attention because of the huge benefits on offer. Benefits include improved health and environmental sustainability, and the creation of new jobs and business opportunities that can contribute to rebalancing the UK economy. This will lead to greater community cohesion, a sustained rural environment, the generation of more clean energy and the development of a more resilient food chain fit for the challenges of the decades ahead.

By the same measure, the costs of inaction are also large in terms of both economic and environmental sustainability. The business-as-usual trajectory is marked by missed opportunities for wealth creation, unnecessary burdens on public services, consumers and citizens left wanting, and damage to our local and global environment.

1. Priorities for food policy now

The Council argues that:

- a concerted effort is needed to foster consumer buy-in and promote demand-led change towards healthy, low impact diets;
- inequalities of access to healthy, low impact diets should be reduced by all means available;
- the food sector should be given greater prominence in economic strategies;
- there is more to do to secure the UK's food production base whilst continuing to provide consumers with safe affordable food;
- food R&D priorities must be balanced and responsive to needs across the food sector;
- there is a need for a new national conversation on how our land is best used;
- government, working with industry, should develop a cross-cutting greenhouse gas emission reduction plan for the food chain;
- there is a robust moral as well as practical case for the UK to apply its resources and influence to food issues in the developing world; and
- effective development and delivery of food policy will demand better coordination and engagement – with the industry, within Whitehall, across the UK, with the rest of Europe and globally.

1.2 This report builds on the Council's previous work

Since its establishment in late 2008 the Council has sought to identify for government the strategic issues that should be recognised in current policy and in the research that will inform policies and advice in the future. Prominent among these is the importance of defining a diet that is both healthy and of low environmental impact, an idea that reflects our firmly held view that the health and environmental challenges we face cannot be solved solely by technological 'fixes' engineered in the food chain.



1. Priorities for food policy now

The Council has received evidence, commissioned work, conducted visits and debated the issues. It has also provided advice and offered comment to the Government on specific issues. These include input to the development of the Healthier Food Mark, a government scheme designed to introduce improved health and sustainability standards for public sector catering in England. For such a scheme to be successful it needs to be challenging but achievable and driven from the centre. Government can show true leadership through a mandatory standard for all public sector organisations. This would ensure a critical mass of healthy, low impact food and food production in the supply chain.

A Fruit and Vegetable Taskforce has been established after the Council expressed concern about the lack of promotion for fruit and vegetable production and consumption in the UK. The Taskforce's remit includes looking for ways to develop new, practical approaches in this area. Combining consumption, production and supply chain issues has the potential, for the first time, to make a real impact for both producers and consumers. Early reports from this group are expected in the summer.

Clearly there is still much to be done, but some progress has been made on the skills agenda. Ministers from across Whitehall and the devolved administrations are looking for ways to work together to tackle industry skills shortages, particularly around sustainability. The cabinet sub-committee on food, DA (F)¹, is playing a role in bringing together this challenging agenda right at the top.

More coordination at a working level in Whitehall is still needed, and the same efforts must be made at all levels – from the local level upwards through to the European Union and beyond. Within England there is a need to focus more on joining up local and regional level delivery of projects and programmes.

We welcome the positive responses to Council interventions made by departments to date, and look forward to ensuring that in the long term food policy remains at the top of the Government agenda.

¹ Domestic Affairs (Food)

2. Promoting demand for a healthy low impact diet

A concerted effort is needed to foster consumer buy-in and promote demand-led change towards healthy, low impact diets

A core component of the Council's vision for the future of food is to encourage people's desire to eat a safe, healthy diet produced from a healthy environment, thereby creating a viable food system for people and the planet.

As set out in our first report, defining a healthy, low impact diet is fundamental to progress on many areas, from public procurement to determining future priorities for the food supply chain. A process for producing this advice has been agreed and integrated advice from government is scheduled to be delivered in 2011². However, this is just the starting point. People need to have the means and the motivation to act on this advice.

Food 2030 states that the Government will act to enable and encourage people to eat a healthy diet. People should be able to make informed choices about the food that they eat. Consumer demand is also a key driver for action to improve sustainability across the supply chain. We need to look at how best to provide advice, to motivate and enable people to change their diets. The evidence base about the case for change is increasing³ and there have also been relevant campaigns, e.g. 10:10, Eat Seasonably and 5 A DAY⁴. Yet there is much more to do, not least on skills and awareness.

Government has a role in setting the framework within which this change takes place, providing resources and engaging a broad range of stakeholders. Government can also deploy a wide range of policy levers to catalyse and accelerate progress. However, government is not always the most effective facilitator or messenger.

The UK food industry needs to be part of the process of framing and debating the wider questions and developing solutions. This transition must be managed in such a way that the negative impacts associated with food production are not simply exported (and potentially increased) and the economic benefits provided by the sector lost. There are some challenging issues to be addressed, some uncertainties and contested evidence. These need to be worked through in a positive climate that is helpful to consumers and to making progress on tackling core problems.

Government should develop a **behaviour change action plan** that recognises the structural determinants of consumer demand on an individual and collective level. It should set out explicitly how the full range of policy levers available to it will be used to effect behavioural change towards a healthy, low impact diet. These levers may include information, education, price, procurement, and working with the industry on areas such as product labelling. It should recognise the powerful role that third sector organisations can play in this process.



- 2 The Food Standards Agency, in partnership with other Government Departments, is developing integrated food advice and information for consumers, which will be delivered via an enhanced version of its eatwell website, scheduled for launch in spring 2011.
- 3 e.g. the review prepared for the Foresight Project on Global Food and Farming Futures, at www.foresight.gov.uk/OurWork/ActiveProjects/FoodandFarmingFutures/FoodandFarmingProjectHome.asp, and Defra, *Food Synthesis Review*, published January 2010 and available at http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=EV0510_8635_EXE.pdf
- 4 www.1010uk.org; www.eatseasonably.co.uk; www.nhs.uk/Livewell/5ADAY/Pages/5ADAYhome.aspx

2. Promoting demand for a healthy low impact diet

The Council further recommends that three core streams of work to achieve a demand-led transition are taken forward. These should focus on:

- Promoting a new, challenging but achievable 5 year target for **fruit and vegetable consumption** from sustainable sources;
- understanding what steps can be taken to reshape **meat and dairy** supply chains to minimise the impact on greenhouse gas emissions of consumption of those products; and
- set targets to shift **fish** consumption towards products only from sustainably managed stocks certified under Marine Stewardship Council or equivalent standards and eliminate consumption of threatened and endangered species.

These three work streams should focus on developing broad principles for action, based on the current evidence base. They should also consider the roles of government, industry and other participants in the change process.

The Government could make much more effective use of that part of the food system where it can directly influence the choices on offer – **public sector catering** and the hundreds of millions of meals it provides each year in England.

Voluntary approaches to raising public sector catering standards have failed to deliver systemic change. It is time for the Government to make good on the goal set out in the Cabinet Office's *Food Matters*⁵ report by **introducing mandatory standards** covering health, environmental impact and animal welfare for the procurement and provision of public sector catering in England. A transformation in public sector catering could play a significant role in encouraging a shift towards healthy, low impact diets.

Upgrading public sector catering in this way would:

- give effect to the principles that government set out in *Food 2030*;
- provide equality of access to better food across the public sector for patients, employees and others;
- make a direct contribution to reducing the negative health and environmental effects that are of concern; and
- provide a substantial lead market for innovative producers and suppliers.

There is great potential for better procurement to deliver better food. Studies have highlighted the efficiencies on offer from smarter food procurement⁶. For example, it has been estimated that there are 35,000 different buying requisition points in public food procurement⁷, adding complexity and reducing the opportunities to leverage economies of scale. A graduated approach that starts with a common minimum standard but allows organisations to aim higher over time provides a means of raising average performance without the short term transition being too uncomfortable or costly.

There is ample evidence now to inform such a scheme. Lessons need to be learnt from the introduction of school meal standards⁸, the pilots of the Healthier Food Mark and other initiatives in England, elsewhere in the UK and further afield.

5 Food Matters, Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office, 2008. www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/food_policy.aspx

6 The *Smarter food procurement in the public sector* report by the National Audit Office in 2006 estimated potential savings of up to £224 million per year by 2010-11 could be achieved by changes in procurement practice and systems.

7 First Report of the Council of Food Policy Advisors, Defra, September 2009.

8 A survey of meals in primary schools, published in February 2010 by the School Food Trust, reported shifts towards healthier eating compared to a similar survey in 2005, see www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/UploadDocs/Library/Documents/sft_primary_school_food_survey_2009.pdf

3. Inequalities of access to a healthy low impact diet

Inequalities of access to healthy, low impact diets should be reduced by all means available

3.1 Ensuring that low income families have easy access to good, affordable food is vital to avoid increases in diet-related health inequalities

The Government needs to ensure that existing health and social inequalities do not widen further. Access to a healthy and low impact diet should not be restricted to the relatively well off.

There is evidence that some dietary deficiencies are greater in low income households⁹. For example, research highlights that lower income groups consume fewer fruits and vegetables than those from more affluent groups¹⁰. The importance of food in the budgets of low income households and the disproportionate impact on such households of food price rises are well documented¹¹.

Access to food by consumers on low or fixed incomes is influenced by many factors, and should not be characterised by “physical” access alone. Deeply embedded aspects of food culture can mean that though healthier foods might be available, and affordable, they remain off the menu. Issues of access need to be seen in the round and should include how we improve consumer information, knowledge and skills, and ensure the economic access to healthy, low impact food. Much good work is being done to help dismantle the physical, economic and cultural challenges for healthier eating in deprived communities and poor households, especially by third sector organisations. But there is more to do if inequalities are not to increase.

By and large the market has delivered a good deal for consumers. Most people have access to food at affordable prices, albeit at a cost to health and the environment. But consideration needs to be given to how we improve affordability for those on low incomes, for whom food can account for 17% or more of household expenditure. Government is already using fiscal measures such as tax credits to target low income families. Given the backdrop of constrained public expenditure and future inflationary pressures it is important that such measures, as well as vouchers and other incentives, support the most vulnerable groups.

In retail development it is important that planning policies continue to play a role in ensuring that people with limited physical access are able to buy healthy and low impact food easily and affordably. It is also important not to lose sight of retail diversity as a factor in social and community cohesion¹².

The Council recommends that the Government:

- Commission and publish **research on the baseline cost of a healthy low impact diet and its affordability** for different income groups, and how economic access might be improved for the poorest. This will shed new light on the extent to which economic access to a decent diet is a problem. The concept of access to a decent diet should form part of our understanding of the reality of poverty in the UK today in the same way as decent housing and affordable heating¹³.

9 A commonly used definition of ‘low income’ is where a household is below 60 per cent of median disposable income.

10 See the FSA’s Low Income Diet & Nutrition Survey at www.food.gov.uk/news/pressreleases/2007/jul/lidns and related commentary at www.sacn.gov.uk/pdfs/sacn_position_paper_on_the_low_income_diet_and_nutrition_survey_lidns.pdf

11 See for instance research on minimum income standards, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, at www.minimumincomestandard.org/index.htm

12 The Marmot Review on health inequalities in England recently recommended that policy focus on improving the food environment to reduce diet-related health inequalities. See www.ucl.ac.uk/ghcg/marmotreview.

13 The work on minimum income standards supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation provides a useful point of departure for such work.

3. Inequalities of access to a healthy low impact diet

- Look at what more must be done to build on *Healthy Start* and the case for **voucher schemes linked to healthy low impact eating for low income families**. The benefits of good schemes will be seen in reduced long term burdens on the NHS, reduced social exclusion and healthier people living longer lives. Local authorities and primary care trusts should be involved in engaging households and communities on healthy eating to ensure the schemes are well targeted.
- Improve access to healthy, low impact food in schools and **reconfigure health education to support sustainable living**. This includes building young people's food skills and knowledge, its provenance and storage, and their confidence in preparing and consuming healthier, low impact meals.
- Determine what **policy frameworks** and incentives would help the private sector to increase access to food from healthy and low impact sources for those on low or fixed incomes. This scanning exercise should span R&D through to food retailing.

The Council's recommendations (see previous section) on improving food provided in public buildings and through public services could further support this agenda, to provide better access to healthy, low impact food for service users, public sector works and visitors, including low income groups.



4. Greater prominence of the food sector in UK economic strategy

The food sector should be given greater prominence in economic strategies

4.1 The UK food sector can contribute to the rebalancing of the economy

In the wake of the financial crisis there has been much discussion of the need to rebalance the UK economy. The food sector is ideally placed to contribute to this rebalancing, creating jobs, adding value and boosting exports.

Food and drink is the UK's largest manufacturing sector. Food retailing and catering are major employers as well as contributors to the wider economy and the food chain as a whole sustains 3.6 million jobs in the UK.

The food sector can also contribute to balanced growth in so far as employment in food manufacturing and agriculture is distributed across the UK. The employment and social cohesion that the food sector generates in rural areas are particularly important.

Realising the potential of the food sector to support economic recovery will help in the creation of wealth and jobs. Supply chain effects multiply the benefits of action. For example, food manufacturing is a major customer for UK agriculture. If manufacturing capacity grows, supply chain jobs will grow with it.



Many thousands of businesses in the UK food sector succeed by meeting the demands of their customers here, and overseas. This is a predominately private market, but the Government has a vital role, not only in defining the framework within which the sector operates but also by helping to ensure that the skills and basic knowledge it needs to thrive are preserved and nurtured.

The food sector needs to be treated equally and in line with its potential when decisions are being made about public investment in skills development and R&D. There are many small and medium food enterprises that have struggled to improve their productivity but do not have the resources to invest in new solutions themselves.

4. Greater prominence of the food sector in UK economic strategy

The food and drink industry is the largest manufacturing sector in the UK. But it was not included in *Building Britain's Future: New Industry, New Jobs*, the Government's strategic plan for Britain's economic and industrial future¹⁴. It is likely that opportunities are being lost, particularly through skills shortages and lack of innovation. The industry has much to offer as an employer and as a contributor to the green economy and this needs to be better communicated.

There needs to be increased coordination on skills and skill development in the food chain. This includes skills in agriculture (pre farm gate) and in the food industry, retail and catering (post farm gate). There is some work underway to address pre farm gate issues, however the whole supply chain should be brought together to develop a cohesive strategy and action plan. Action must be taken at all levels (from CEOs to manual workers) and include the different types of skills required to incorporate health and sustainability into training, particularly at the catering level. This should include ways to promote the food sector to school children, graduates and those changing career. Training should cover environmental, economic and social sustainability (for example waste, power use and sourcing) and information on the 'eatwell' plate¹⁵ (which shows the types and proportions of foods needed for a healthy and well balanced diet).

4.2 Government should also give greater recognition to the food sector and its contribution to the economy and employment

The food industry, like food itself, is too often taken for granted. The Government should do more to celebrate the sector's successes and help to promote what is best about our food here and abroad, as other countries do with their products.

Regional food organisations have the skills and expertise to help in the preparation of economic development plans that recognise the food sector's potential. There are successful models of third sector organisations helping to support supplier and supply chain development, and build consumer demand for new products and services. This role should be clarified, strengthened and supported.

Through the dialogue begun in the *Food 2030* process, the Government should work with the whole food sector to develop an action plan that codifies how the chain will respond to the challenges and emerge more productive, and better able to compete here and abroad.

¹⁴ www.berr.gov.uk/files/file51023.pdf

¹⁵ www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/eatwellplate/

5. Securing the UK's food production base

There is more to do to secure the UK's food production base whilst continuing to provide consumers with safe affordable food

To secure the UK's production base we need a fair distribution of profit, return and risk, whilst continuing to provide consumers with safe affordable food.

5.1 The strategic challenges facing the UK food supply chain, and especially UK farming, are well documented

There have been numerous analyses of the UK food chain over the last few years from the Competition Commission, the Curry Commission, Foresight, Defra and others. All comment on the sheer complexity of the inter-relationships within the supply chain, and the European and global perspectives and options for supply and distribution of many traditionally 'domestic' foods.

The fundamental issues are:

- To what extent is intervention required? and
- Who will pay?

5.2 Experience shows that trying to protect or foster certain food supply chain interests and outcomes through government action is not straightforward

History is littered with examples of the consequences (often grotesque) of initially well-meaning interventions in food production. The market distortions and environmental damage caused at the peak of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) production subsidies are just one example. It is very difficult preferentially to support or defend one part of any supply chain without causing unintended consequences (for good or ill) elsewhere in the chain.

Consolidation and scale are sometimes seen as desirable, but are often not easily achievable at the farm level. Over time it has become clearer that regulating the process and setting rules of engagement, rather than trying to intervene in the market has a greater chance of success.

5.3 Recent events have refocused political attention on the value of a competitive UK food sector, but policy solutions that efficiently deliver the productivity and sustainability outcomes society is looking for remain elusive

The 2008 price spikes and concerns about climate change and population growth catalysed a change in attitudes to food security and the need to sustain domestic production capabilities. This culminated in two recent government actions – Hilary Benn's Oxford speech¹⁶ (launching *Food 2030*) and the Government's acceptance of the need for a form of 'Grocery Ombudsman'¹⁷ to monitor supply chain practices.

A new Code of Practice (GSCOP) came into effect in February 2010, which is intended to stop those practices that have in the past caused tensions between major supermarkets, manufacturers and their suppliers.

¹⁶ Available at www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/about/who/ministers/speeches/hilary-benn/hb100105.htm

¹⁷ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. *The Competition Commission's recommendation to establish a groceries supply code of practice (GSCOP) Ombudsman. The Government response.* www.berr.gov.uk/files/file54194.pdf

5. Securing the UK's food production base

The Government has launched a consultation on the form and remit of the proposed 'Grocery Ombudsman'. The Ombudsman function is focused on relationships between supermarkets and their direct suppliers, and not the 'upstream' relationship between farmers and intermediaries. A clear definition of both role and the rules of engagement are critical if this innovation is to prove effective and effect progress towards the objective set out in the Government's *Food Matters* report, i.e.,

"A key objective for food policy should be for food to be traded at a fair price. This means consumer prices that reflect fair trading practice in competitive markets throughout the supply chain,...."

There has been a great deal of analysis of the critical skills and capabilities that are fundamental to maintaining domestic production. Some of these will be maintained solely by the investment made by individual enterprises whilst others cannot be sustained without the combined efforts of many enterprises and/or external support. In the UK food chain, maintaining the skills and capabilities at the production end (farming and fishing) pose the greatest challenge.

The big question remains – who should pay for things that the market does not value today but that key groups believe are important? An answer to this question is needed before any real progress can be made.

In practice much will be decided at European level, not least because it is only from the CAP budget that any meaningful resources are likely to flow. If the CAP is to continue, it needs to foster productivity based on sustainability. Achieving early clarity about the UK's priorities in the next round of CAP reform must therefore be a priority. The UK also needs a creative and effective approach to influencing the debates elsewhere in Europe.

The key priorities for the Government are:

- To establish an **implementation team for Food 2030**, with hard targets and credible milestones agreed across industry (see below);
- To develop a clear and credible view of **the future of the Common Agricultural Policy** (CAP), with the devolved administrations, that is consistent with *Food 2030* and then a viable UK CAP negotiating strategy that will influence European partners;
- To use **public food procurement** far more effectively to support food production standards that government has championed by implementing mandatory sustainability, animal welfare and health standards for public sector catering in England;



5. Securing the UK's food production base

- To **develop sector strategies** that set out the role of government in helping key production sectors meet the twin challenges of improved sustainability and greater productivity, beginning with fruit and vegetables (where a start has been made), meat and dairy, and fish;
- To foster the conditions whereby **contracts** between retailers, processors and farmers support sustainability;
- To align the **levy funding priorities** of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) to efficient, low-impact production; and
- Examine what needs to be done to promote **technology transfer in the farming sector**.

5.4 The Government needs to work with the food chain to define who is going to do what to accelerate progress towards the vision set out in *Food 2030*

Food 2030 says little about specific actions, responsibilities or delivery mechanisms. This makes implementation more challenging. Roles and responsibilities should be defined as part of developing an implementation plan for *Food 2030*. Such a plan, which is urgently needed if momentum is not to be lost, should set out:

- the short and medium term milestones that need to be reached on the journey to 2030's long term objectives;
- responsibilities for their delivery; and
- who is going to monitor and reinforce that process.

The Curry Commission showed the benefit of having an independent Implementation Group. This is an approach that may have value in the context of the implementation of *Food 2030* implementation.

5.5 Monitoring and management of the contingent and systemic risks to our food security are essential

It would be naïve to assume that the free market will always be able to put food on the nation's plates at an acceptable price. A failure to anticipate possible market failings and implement mitigation strategies could have profound implications, including food shortages and price increases.

The market has a good track record in ensuring that the UK is able to produce and import sufficient food, at affordable prices, to meet the needs of its citizens. In 2008, however, we saw what the impact of commodity shortages and high oil/energy prices did to food availability and prices. The "just in time" nature of the modern food industry means that manufacturers and retailers are more susceptible to supply chain shocks.

Looking forward, the affordability of food that most of us have come to take for granted is far from guaranteed. Global demand for food has to be reconciled with constraints on natural resources such as water and the disruptive impacts of climate change.

There needs to be an on-going assessment by government of the robustness of the UK's food security indicators and the industry's continuity plans.

Food Research and Development (R&D) priorities must be balanced and responsive to needs across the food sector

6.1 Food R&D priorities must be balanced and responsive to needs across the food sector and reflect consumers' needs and priorities

There is much valuable research worldwide and the UK does not need to duplicate activity conducted elsewhere. The UK should, however, have properly directed and funded research programmes for those parts of the agri-food chain that are important to the economy and where the UK can lead internationally. The timely translation of new knowledge and technologies into practical application is of fundamental importance, particularly in agriculture.

6.2 The new strategies in this area are welcome and work is now needed to translate them into action

The *Food 2030* goals on research are welcome. We agree that it is particularly critical that, “research is joined up across disciplines and translated effectively into practice”. Research needs to be responsive to consumer needs. We also support the *Food 2030* goal that food research and innovation funded by the public and private sector should be, “developed with end users of the research, and [...] effectively translated into practice in primary production, to promote a thriving agri-food sector, and allow business to be more sustainable and efficient in meeting economic, environmental and social goals”.

There is a way to go before we reach these goals. The new cross-cutting science and innovation strategy for food¹⁸ is a helpful development. It provides a framework to facilitate more coordinated and collaborative approaches between public sector bodies involved in funding, commissioning and delivering research in the UK. But it has less to say about ‘what should be’ in terms of the volume, focus and form of public R&D and how additional private sector R&D in this area can be encouraged. As such it is the start, not the end-point, of a process to refocus UK public spending on food R&D.



¹⁸ Government Office for Science, 2010. *UK Cross-Government Food Research and Innovation Strategy*. <http://www.dius.gov.uk/~media/publications/GO-Science/UK-Cross-Government-Food-Research-Strategy>

6. Food R&D

The Council believes that public-funded research on food should focus on:

- Research priorities that draw on the UK's strengths in its science base and in industry to exploit the opportunities for innovation and new markets that exist, and to ensure a thriving agri-food sector which is innovative, resilient to shocks and internationally competitive;
- Research that addresses 'public good' attributes that may not otherwise be addressed through the private sector, for example, increasing sustainable food production, mitigating against evolving threats from climate change (pests and diseases etc.), reducing waste, improving animal welfare, safeguarding human health and promoting better nutrition; and
- Approaches that address research challenges in a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary way, linking social, environmental, health and economic factors.

There is a need to look flexibly and creatively at how world-class research can be transferred to practical and relevant outcomes for a large and diverse range of businesses and users. We welcome recognition of the importance of impacts in the Research Excellence Framework.¹⁹ Additional consideration of research incentive structures will be needed, and particularly the nexus between research users and the institutions that draw up research priorities.

The UK has been overtaken in areas where it could potentially lead (e.g. in horticultural R&D). Greater value must be placed on research that delivers practical and relevant outcomes. Funders must ensure that research funds are directed to the agreed major priorities. Increased production of fruit and vegetables is an already agreed priority; related research priorities need to be set and agreement reached on how they will be met.

Much 'near market' research is prioritised and funded by firms in the marketplace. However, the structure of agriculture makes it unlikely that the private sector will carry out sufficient research and the producer levy model is a rational way of funding the shortfall.

¹⁹ <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Research/ref/>

7. How is our land to be best used?

There is a need for a new national conversation on how our land is best used

7.1 We cannot hope to realise the future set out in *Food 2030* without paying close attention to how our land here in the UK is used

The effective use of land for food production is important in achieving the *Food 2030* vision. Yet we are also expecting our land to deliver and support an ever increasing range of services – housing, commercial property, amenity, renewable energy, carbon capture and storage, infrastructure, and more. The tensions and trade-offs between these land uses have changed over recent decades, and are set to evolve further in the years ahead. Pressure to develop land to service the needs of a growing population will increase as the economy recovers. The scene is set for further debate about the balancing of agriculture and biomass production, landscape, biodiversity and amenity in the uplands.



So there are choices ahead in determining how much land is used for food production and how much for other uses. The prospect of climate change and the renewed concern about food security are reminders of the need to be very cautious in making choices that result in irreversible loss of productive land. Only if land use is well aligned with other imperatives will we gain maximum leverage from land assets, for food production, for the protection of the natural environment and for other needs.

The UK's post-war planning laws helped to contain urban sprawl and conserve the best agricultural land for food production. But policies and procedures governing land use are struggling to manage the complex challenges we face. They are not best equipped to address the big strategic questions, such as how to best respond to the future threats and opportunities associated with climate change. Such systems should be kept under review as society's needs evolve. As the recent Foresight Land Use Futures Project²⁰ demonstrates, there is a strong case for developing a much more strategic approach to guide incremental land use change, incentivise sustainable behaviours, and unlock value from land. A more coherent and consistent approach is needed for managing growing demands on land – at different levels of government, and across a wider community of stakeholders involved in the many land use sectors.

²⁰ <http://www.foresight.gov.uk/OurWork/ActiveProjects/LandUse/LandUse.asp>

7. How is our land to be best used?

7.2 Public policy ought to recognise the fundamental importance of soil quality in sustainable food production

Our capacity to produce food at scale in this country depends on maintaining healthy, productive soils. Soil quality was often depleted in the 20th century as farming intensified. Today good soil management is increasingly recognised for its carbon storage benefits as well as its contribution to sustainable productivity²¹ and to water management. Defra's Soil Strategy for England²² is a welcome development. An increased emphasis on soil conservation and quality needs to permeate policy thinking about land management.

7.3 The need to look again at the role of land in achieving food policy objectives is not just a rural issue – urban land could be used more creatively to promote a reconnection to food and to support food production

Unused urban land given over to food production can have a hugely important role in helping people reconnect to food sources, and make helpful contributions to healthier diets in neighbouring communities. The increase in popularity of allotments, of growing spaces in local parks, of fruit trees in municipal planting schedules, and of use of roof spaces and window boxes are indicators of public demand for access to soil and the enjoyment that comes from 'growing your own' food. More could be done to release land for these purposes when development is deferred. Providing schools with access to spaces where children can learn about growing food should be a priority. Opportunities to make better use of urban fringe areas should also be explored.

7.4 A vision and policy for land use is needed that balances food production and climate change requirements with other land uses, and with biodiversity conservation and the maintenance of landscapes

Central government, working with the devolved administrations, should develop a land use vision and policy framework that seeks to integrate food production and climate change requirements with other land uses, with biodiversity conservation, and the maintenance of culturally distinctive landscapes. It will also need to factor in carbon reduction from agriculture and the role that land should play in mitigating emissions and storing carbon.

It should incorporate an economic model that values **all** types of land use (food, amenity, bio-fuels, carbon capture, housing etc.). Thus government can better address the emerging tensions and trade-offs between land use and landscape and how we best protect other natural resources such as soil, water and wildlife. It should also consider new farming opportunities and not just existing farmland, e.g. brown field or close to towns. Getting buy-in from the public is critical: open consultation needs to take place at an early stage.

In developing this vision and policy framework government should build on existing analysis, such as the Foresight Land Use Futures Project, the National Ecosystem Assessment²³, Natural England's agri-environment targeting work and the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme²⁴.

²¹ It is estimated that soils in the UK contain around 10 billion tonnes of carbon, half of which is found in peat habitats.

²² www.defra.gov.uk/environment/quality/land/soil/sap/index.htm

²³ <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/>

²⁴ <http://www.relu.ac.uk/>

8. A greenhouse gas emissions reduction plan for the food chain

Government, working with industry, should develop a cross-cutting greenhouse gas emission reduction plan for the food chain

8.1 There are important linkages between the food system and climate change

In a future world of constrained resources it is important that the environmental impact of food is fully taken into account. *Food 2030* rightly puts a strong emphasis on the linkages between climate change and food. Climate change threatens our food security, the safety and nutritional content of our diet, our environment and biodiversity, even our national security.

The food chain is an important contributor to the problem. It accounts for approximately 20% of all UK emissions, of which around one-third comes from agriculture. It is also important to recognise, however, that farming and food production are also a vital part of the solution, helping absorb and store carbon, and contributing to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. There is also huge potential for reductions in emissions through cutting waste and cost-effective investments within the supply chain.

As a successful developed economy the UK should act responsibly and take a lead in driving change and in ensuring international support and governance for climate change action across the food chain. Allowing inertia to overcome the need for a change of pace on climate change initiatives will lead to larger problems in future years.

Reducing the environmental impacts from the food chain is very important. What the food sector does not address in greenhouse gas reduction will have to be accomplished by other sectors instead. Mitigation and adaptation strategies need to be implemented whilst ensuring that citizens have access to a healthy and low impact diet at affordable prices. Rapid and aggressive cuts in greenhouse gas emissions that are out of steps with those made by trading partners risk impacting on the long term competitiveness of the food sector.



8. A greenhouse gas emissions reduction plan for the food chain

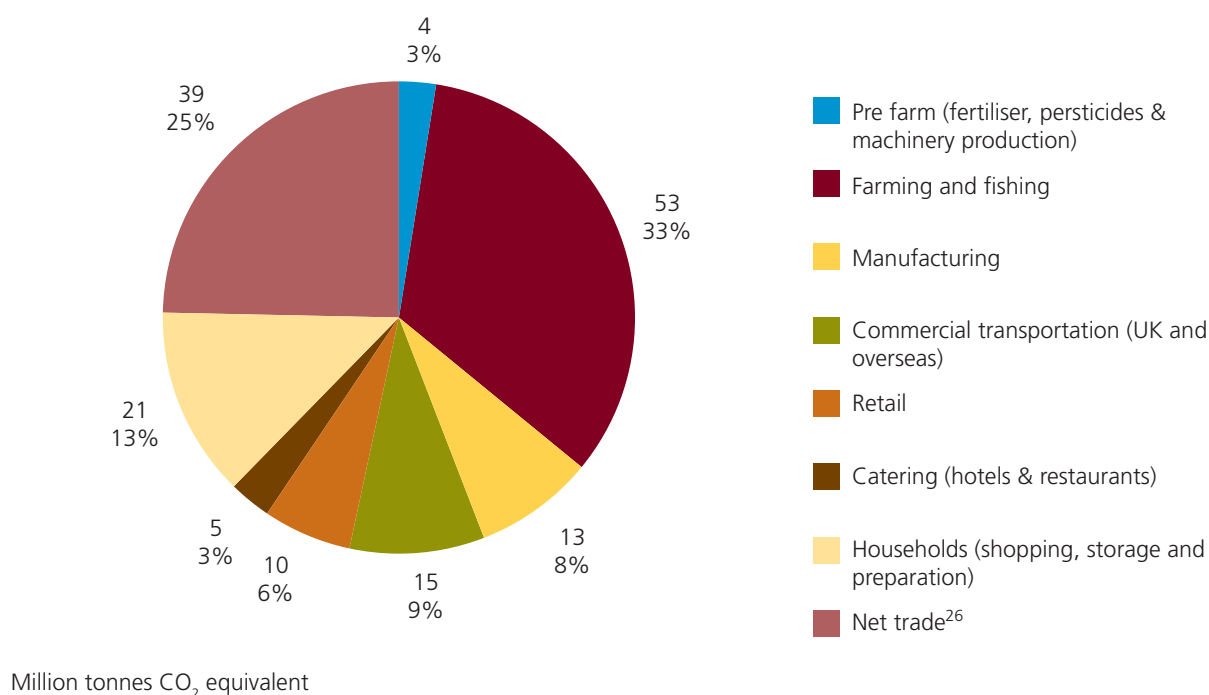
8.2 The food system needs to play its part, and its effort must be equitably distributed, with implications for producers, the supply chain and consumers

Food should take its fair share of the UK's overall greenhouse gas reductions commitments. Government and the food industry share responsibility for delivering the necessary reduction in greenhouse gas emissions whilst ensuring that we have a profitable and sustainable industry providing consumers with a healthy and sustainable diet.

That effort needs to be equitably distributed across the food chain, and a fair price of carbon maintained across food production, distribution and consumption to reduce market distortions. There may be a case for new market-based approaches that put a price on carbon (in those sectors where none is yet present) to help ensure that reductions in emissions take place where they cause least economic harm.

Many businesses are already working hard to do their bit. For instance, the collective carbon dioxide emissions of the Food and Drink Federation members was cut by 19% by 2008 compared to a 1990 baseline²⁵. The sector is thus close to meeting its target of cutting emissions by 20% by 2010 and on a trend towards its longer term aspiration of a 30% reduction by 2020.

Figure 1: Greenhouse gas emissions from the UK food chain, 2006



Source: Environmental Statistics (Defra)

A key challenge now is to develop, deploy and support policies that will tackle the greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture in ways that meet the sector's carbon budget, while also ensuring it continues to meet consumer needs and builds competitiveness. The Council welcomes the progress made in setting a target for GHG reduction from the sector²⁷, and the publication by government with industry of a voluntary action plan²⁸. Carbon emissions need to be addressed while also taking account of other environmental impacts, such as those on water resources.

²⁵ Based on reporting under the sector's Climate Change Agreement. See also http://www.fdf.org.uk/environment_progress_report.aspx

²⁶ This figure excludes commercial transport which is shown separately, but includes all other emissions arising from the overseas production of food for consumption in the UK. Trade emissions are shown net of any emissions related to food exports. The UK imports more food than is exported.

²⁷ The statutory target requires the removal of 3 million tonnes CO₂ equivalent by 2020.

²⁸ www.nfuonline.com/Our-work/Environment/Climate-change/GHG-emissions---reducing-agricultural-emissions/

8. A greenhouse gas emissions reduction plan for the food chain

8.2.1 Defra should publish an analysis of how it expects emissions to fall across the food chain and develop a plan for delivering those changes efficiently and equitably

It is generally understood that food-related emissions need to fall in step with those in the economy as a whole. Yet climate change policies tend to target technologies or specific sectors of the economy. For businesses in the food chain (that links together farming, transport, manufacturing, retail and other sectors) it is difficult to see both the 'big picture' and the significance of contributions of individual parts of that chain. *Food 2030* fails to spell out clearly the deliverables and timeframes.

To support its efforts on climate change and make progress towards the goals of *Food 2030*, the Government should explain in clear terms:

- The contributions (in terms of emission reductions) projected for different parts of the food chain in the future, including those delivered through changes to consumption;
- The conditions under which change could happen faster, and ideas on what more can be done to realise those conditions without damage to the long-term viability of the UK food industry; and
- It should also examine how policies in Europe can help to reduce the carbon footprint of the UK food chain elsewhere in the EU and worldwide.

This work should explain the baseline for measurement and the progress to date. It should explain how the sectoral carbon budgets allocated across Whitehall will affect the food chain, the schedule of targets in the year ahead and where additional measures will be required.

In setting the future ambition, there should be a strong lead from the Prime Minister to set out the national approach and areas of economic priority. Defra and the devolved administrations should then set out a new, common goal and what they require from the food industry.

Small task forces should then be set up covering major food areas (livestock, fresh produce, grain crops etc) and given deadlines to come up with action plans to meet targeted reductions. There is a need also to assess the support that small businesses in the food chain, including farms, will need in order to adjust efficiently and at the speed required. The extent to which private sector R&D investment on emissions reduction is likely to emerge also needs to be examined.

8.2.2 We cannot rely on technological change alone - changes in consumption will also be needed

Significant technical advances will be needed in food production if the UK is to meet its carbon reduction targets. Important areas include carbon sequestration, production systems, plant and animal breeding, refrigeration efficiency, packaging reduction and use of lighter materials, and transport. However, there is an emerging consensus that these alone will not be enough and that action is required to change patterns of consumption.

Different food choices could deliver emissions savings but at present the public are not engaged in this debate. Food is relevant to everyone and action in the food sector can be a catalyst for behavioural change across all sectors. But food habits take a long time to change, reinforcing the need for action now.

Collectively we should be:

- Looking for opportunities where health benefits and climate change benefits coincide;
- Developing evidence-based schemes to help customers make more informed choices about what they are buying and eating; and
- Trying to raise awareness of the issues to drive behaviour change.

8. A greenhouse gas emissions reduction plan for the food chain

8.2.3 Here in the UK, as globally, maintaining current livestock production levels means that larger emission cuts will be required elsewhere in the economy if we are to stay within our overall carbon budgets

It is impossible, with current technology, for the livestock production sector to achieve the level of reductions scheduled in the long term for other parts of the economy. If technological solutions cannot be developed, choices will have to be made as to whether to support the livestock sector as an important part of the food economy (and find the necessary GHG savings elsewhere), or sacrifice part of it.

There is an important set of related questions about how far, and in which product markets, meat and dairy consumption patterns will need to change as part of the process of reconciling greenhouse gas emissions with overall carbon budgets. Getting robust answers to such questions is a complex task in the context of inter-connected global markets for both farm inputs and food products.

These challenges need to be addressed in a way that recognises the important contributions made by the sector – to the economy, biodiversity, landscape, amenity and so forth. If not designed well, interventions here could displace emissions to other countries. There is a need to avoid policies that simply result in environmental impacts being exported, domestic markets being served by imports rather than local production and UK export trade being lost²⁸. We need to find ways to produce high quality products in ways that have lower impacts than those generated by production elsewhere. We also need ways to help consumers understand the impact of the decisions that they make.

In this context, technologies and techniques that reduce livestock emissions should be an R&D priority. Farmers will need to be given clear guidance on best practice. Some investment will be needed to communicate these best practices and to help farmers establish them.

²⁸ UK exports of meat, dairy and livestock products in 2009 are provisionally estimated at £1.61 billion.

There is a robust moral as well as practical case for the UK to apply its resources and influence to food issues in the developing world

The UK is a successful developed economy. It is in a position to do more than most to catalyse change in the food system for the better, at home, in the EU and globally. It has taken a leading position on climate change, international development, and promoting global health and freer markets.

There is a clear moral case for international action to improve the state of the global food system. Government not only *can* push for change, but *should* do so.

Its core aims in this regard should be to:

- Continue to support the Millennium Development Goals;
- Promote positive changes that include new R&D and technology transfer (which can be achieved through joint efforts by Defra and DFID); and
- Lead in reducing global climate change impacts.

It should pursue the following goals:

- Protecting the most vulnerable people;
- Minimising environmental harm and avoiding irreversible environmental damage;
- Making effective use of public food procurement options;
- Improving access to world markets for poor producers; and
- Ensuring that food and food production practices are safe for consumers and workers in agriculture and the food industry.

Specifically, the Council supports:

- Policies that put a price on carbon across the food system;
- Actions that encourage companies to discover and disclose the water embedded in the products that they source and sell; and
- Actions that help developing countries raise quality and safety standards to facilitate trade and the avoidance of unnecessary standards that pose barriers to trade.

International inaction will only perpetuate poverty, exacerbate the health issues that plague life for many in the developing world, and reduce the pace of tackling global progress on climate change.



10. Better coordination for greater effect

Effective development and delivery of food policy will demand better coordination and engagement – with the industry, within Whitehall, across the UK, with the rest of Europe and globally

10.1 The organisation of food policy and government policies and ambitions need to be simplified and better explained

As the UK faces up to the global challenges of climate change, population growth and diet-related illness, it is vital that all aspects of food policy are centrally co-ordinated and that farmers, growers, processors, manufacturers, retailers and caterers have clarity about the Government's policy objectives.

Food 2030 sets out a much clearer framework for government food policy than previously existed, but it does not clarify cross-government accountabilities explicitly. The food policy landscape is complex and fragmented. It is difficult for government 'insiders' to navigate, and often baffling for those on the outside.

Greater clarity is vital if we are to move efficiently to a more robust, sustainable and competitive food system. Confusion about policy priorities and responsibilities blunts the ability of the UK food sector to respond to global trends and the demands of the Government of the day.

The present model and allocation of responsibilities reflects evolving needs but also the lessons of past experience, good and bad. The priority today should not be a major reallocation of responsibilities but rather to prioritise how government departments can work better together to tackle cross-functional issues. Dialogue is required, and clear and transparent mechanisms for joined up policy thinking and joint-working, building on the *Food 2030* priorities.

There is a need to:

- Do more to explain who does what;
- Review arrangements, from the perspective of external stakeholders as well as those in government, to identify where they can be simplified, made more efficient and otherwise improved; and
- Consider, in particular, how coordination and learning can be improved within the UK by more effective cooperation between Whitehall, the devolved administrations and the English regions.

10.2 Links between different parts of the UK need to be strengthened in the interests of efficiency and learning

Devolution of powers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the strengthening of the English regions, has created space for diverse approaches to food policy issues across the UK. This provides a 'policy laboratory' that is potentially very valuable, if the arrangements for exchange of experience and learning are in place.

As part of the review of food policy arrangements, the UK Government should look at how research and evaluation in food policy can best be organised to ensure resources are used effectively and learning is maximised, recognising that different parts of the UK will have different priorities but that the overall vision is shared.

Devolution also creates new day-to-day challenges for the food chain. Policy makers need a better appreciation of the way in which policy can vary across the UK. Those differences can also create complexity and cost for businesses, which have to adjust to more variation in operating conditions across the countries.

10. Better coordination for greater effect

10.3 The Government should be promoting the UK's thinking and approach in Europe and beyond

It is in Brussels that many of the policies and much of the legislation that shapes the UK food system are set, from food safety and animal welfare laws to the economic incentives provided by the Common Agricultural Policy. Now that the Government has worked out its vision for the future, it should be working much more actively to propagate that framework, thinking and agreement on priorities in Europe.

The UK should also be working in a similar way in international forums and with international organisations such as the UN and WTO to promote a more joined-up approach to health, agriculture, food safety, food security, and climate change.

Achieving a food policy that is right for both people and planet is not easy; but getting it right is essential. For a long term strategy to be successful the issues set out in this report must be addressed now.

Players throughout the food chain will have to act differently; each needs to be clear what that difference must be.

Food habits change slowly. Everyone in the food system – not least consumers – need time to adjust.

There is a vital role for government in this process of change. It has set the direction. It now needs to set the pace, and do so without further delay.

This is no time to be complacent. The food sector is large, it is essential to the economy, essential to our health and it has a major role in tackling climate change.

Annex A: Council membership

Dame Suzi Leather (Chair)
Sir Don Curry
Sue Davies, MBE
Professor Elizabeth Dowler
Professor Gareth Edwards-Jones
Iain Ferguson, CBE
Paul Kelly
Professor Tim Lang
Professor David Leaver
Guy McCracken, LVO
Claire Pritchard
Dame Fiona Reynolds
Geetie Singh, MBE
Tim Smith
Professor Bruce Traill

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