



House of Commons  
Environment, Food and Rural  
Affairs Committee

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# Food security: demand, consumption and waste

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**Sixth Report of Session 2014–15**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

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## Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its associated bodies.

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Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry page](#) on the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

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## Summary

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The myriad choices millions of people make every day over what food to buy and from where to buy it shape the nation's food production and supply systems. It is essential to harness these decisions to support the public policy goal of enabling all to access healthy and affordable food. Both supply and demand issues must be managed if a growing world population is to be fed at a time when environmental impacts, including those of climate change, are constraining food production. Our July 2014 Food Security report addressed methods to improve the production and supply of food. In this report we make recommendations on managing consumer demand, such as by encouraging the purchase of sustainably sourced products or the most nutritious food in order to help to deliver environmental and health goals.

We do not argue that there should be any further degree of compulsion on individuals. Rather information and advice, not only from central government but also from local government, the third sector and, importantly, retailers should be better deployed to influence and support consumer behaviours that help deliver policy objectives. For example consumers should be encouraged:

- to purchase more British products to help secure the future of national farming. Whilst not in itself a guarantee of secure food chains, British food production forms a vital component of a diverse supply system under which risks to disrupted supply chains are mitigated and consumers can have a wide range of product choices; and
- to increase the level of consideration people give to the impact of their food choices on their health. As well as being beneficial to individuals, this could have significant national economic and social benefits through healthier diets leading to reduced incidence of illnesses linked to poor nutrition and in particular to excessive consumption.

Information and advice programmes by central and local government, in partnership with retailers and charities, have produced some results but much more needs to be done. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has the central responsibility for food security and should co-ordinate work more effectively across government and with other stakeholder partners on encouraging optimum food choices. People make choices on what to buy when out shopping in a matter of seconds so better labelling is needed to provide clearer information on health aspects and on the origin and sustainability of products so that consumers can easily compare options. Further, the food sector, including retailers, should be more pro-active and innovative in providing information and building on current consumer demand to promote sustainably sourced and healthy products.

It is of concern that the nation continues to waste food on a significant scale. Programmes such as those run by the Waste and Resources Action Programme have made notable inroads into reducing food waste and we welcome the Government's support for such

approaches. It is vital that the momentum is maintained and this will require ongoing government funding as well as increased contributions from wider society. Nonetheless, this investment will reap economic results well in excess of its cost. Efforts need to apply across food supply chains from farm to fork to cut waste and generate economic, social and environmental benefits.

Food poverty cannot be divorced from poverty overall, the causes of which encompass broad income, expenditure and lifestyle issues. However, Defra's food security remit means that it is a core Defra responsibility to ensure that nutritious food is available at an affordable price. There is a lack of robust data on the extent to which people are unable to afford to feed themselves adequately, and the limited research undertaken to date on the drivers for increased use of foodbanks has been inconclusive. Defra should rectify this. Work by charities and others to redistribute surplus food via foodbanks is welcome but the amount redistributed is pitifully small in the context of the amount of surplus food that currently goes to waste. Whilst local approaches, driven by community-based organisations, can best meet locally specific needs, national approaches are needed to deliver a step-change in the amount of surplus food diverted from all parts of the supply chain to feed those in need. Defra must lead joined-up, national approaches. The Department should appoint a Food Security Co-ordinator, one of whose key roles would be to bring together key agencies and support the development of effective systems to distribute far greater volumes of food that would otherwise go to waste.

# 1 Introduction

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1. The UK currently enjoys a high level of food security.<sup>1</sup> However, globally pressure on food supplies is increasing with population numbers rising at the same time that production of some foodstuffs is being jeopardised by the impacts of climate change, such as more frequent and intense droughts and floods and changing patterns of crop diseases. Ensuring that all UK citizens have access to sufficient healthy and safe food at an affordable price is therefore a challenge which is likely to become more acute in the future unless action is taken.

2. Our Food Security report published in July made recommendations on actions the Government, food producers and suppliers, together with the research community, can take to help secure the nation's production and supply of food in this challenging global situation.<sup>2</sup> In this inquiry we address the other side of the equation for ensuring food security—how demand can be met sustainably and how individuals' need for affordable and healthy food can be met. Our separate Food Supply Networks inquiry has tackled securing safe food supplies.<sup>3</sup> Details of those who gave written and oral evidence to this inquiry are set out at the end of this report. We thank them and our Special Adviser, Professor Brian Revell of Harper Adams University, for their assistance.

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1 The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation defines food security as “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.

2 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2014–15, [Food Security](#), HC 243

3 Oral evidence taken on [18 November 2014](#), HC (2014–15) 771

## 2 Consumer choice and food security

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3. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) concluded in its 2012 Green Food Project that the future sustainability of food production was tied to demand-side issues.<sup>4</sup> Our inquiry started from this point: the way in which consumers' actions affect their own and others' access to sustainable supplies of affordable and healthy food.

4. Retailers told us that consumers' purchasing decisions play a central role in driving food production systems. Tesco, for example, said that "customers have always influenced our procurement and supply chain practices".<sup>5</sup> Farmers and other food producers and processors have a similar set of market drivers spurring their production and marketing decisions so that procurement decisions along the whole food supply chain aim to fulfil customers' demands closely. This consumer demand can be used to promote sustainable food supplies, as the Government has recognised. Defra's Sustainable Consumption report published in 2013 recommended actions to change both consumer and producer behaviours, and noted that a key question was how consumer demand could be influenced so as to deliver so-called 'public good'.<sup>6</sup> However, individuals' food purchasing decisions reflect varied needs, wishes and constraints. Consumers report that price is by some margin their top consideration on food issues, against which other factors ranks as lower priorities. However, other factors including food waste and health issues are cited as considerations.<sup>7</sup> Tesco noted that customers valued a range of things and did not simply chose the cheapest products: "price matters but so does quality, freshness, range, availability, service, trust and convenience". Tesco noted, however, the underlying truism that customers buy based on "what matters most to them".<sup>8</sup> Hence if sustainability matters to a consumer, for example in terms of a product's impact on the environment or on British farming, retailers will have an incentive to supply products that meet this criterion.

5. Although UK food supply systems are largely market driven, they operate within institutional and policy frameworks that shape supply chains. Regulatory frameworks set certain minimum national and EU standards pertaining amongst other things to production, competition, market and trade regulation, quality and safety of food. These rules serve to constrain individual choice in some respects and may also directly or indirectly affect the security of the food chain. In particular, the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) have an extensive impact on food supply. For example, CFP quotas limit the catch of specific fish stocks and new CAP

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4 Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, [Green Food Project Conclusions](#), July 2012

5 Q120

6 Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, [Sustainable Consumption Report: Follow-Up to the Green Food Project](#), July 2013

7 Food Standards Agency, [Biannual Public Attitudes Tracker](#), Wave 8, May 2014, reports that the top wider food issues of total (spontaneous plus prompted) concern were food prices (51%), the amount of sugar in food (48%), and the amount of salt in food (47%).

8 Tesco ([FS2 04](#))



greening rules may promote growth of certain crops such as legumes; this in turn influences the availability and hence price of those products.<sup>9</sup>

6. Food critic Jay Rayner argued that, with 95% of the food retail market controlled by just nine companies, larger retailers' market dominance gave them a "massive social responsibility" as "custodians of the food supply". He considered that the Government had a "role to mediate that supply" so as to guarantee future supplies.<sup>10</sup> However, we received no evidence arguing for the development of further specific regulatory mechanisms to constrain consumer choice in the interests of national food security. George Eustice MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, told us that he did not see it as the Government's role to "tell people what they should buy" but rather to support the choices people make.<sup>11</sup> This approach is consistent with an overall deregulatory approach at national level to reduce the bureaucratic burden on businesses and at EU level to open agricultural production more to market forces.<sup>12</sup>

7. The myriad decisions made by millions of individual consumers every day cumulatively play a considerable role in determining how the UK sources its food. Harnessing these decisions to align with 'public good' objectives can be a powerful way of ensuring the delivery of public food security goals but this should not be achieved through heavy-handed rules or unnecessary constraints on choice.

**8. We do not argue in this report for a regulatory shift towards compulsion over consumers' food purchasing decisions. We therefore make recommendations for more co-ordinated and focussed actions by the Government, food producers and suppliers, and the third sector to support consumer choices that enhance the ability of all to obtain sufficient safe, healthy and affordable food. We support a robust regulatory framework for the nation's food production and retail systems; consumers must be able to make their choices about what food to buy and from where to buy it knowing that there are strong measures in place to protect their interests.**

## Sourcing our food

### *Buying British*

9. Defra policies and programmes such as the National Farmers' Union (NFU) Back British Farming Charter aim to encourage consumers to buy British products in the interests of supporting UK farming.<sup>13</sup> Morrisons highlighted its purchase of only British beef, pork and lamb for sale under its own brand label saying that sourcing UK products had beneficial impacts on the sustainability of UK farming and food production.<sup>14</sup> In

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9 Q185

10 Q6

11 Q173

12 See Government Red Tape Challenge agriculture theme webpages on UK approaches, and Europa [webpages](#) on CAP reform.

13 See NFU website, [Back British Farming Charter](#)

14 Q35

addition, maintaining UK sources of foodstuffs contributes to secure food supply chains. Professor Chris Elliott, the author of the Government's Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks,<sup>15</sup> told us during our Food Supply Networks inquiry that the more steps there are in the supply chain the greater the number of risks.<sup>16</sup> Sourcing food from the UK rather than from more remote international markets usually leads to shorter supply chains and, although this may not necessarily reduce the number of steps, retailers' procurement approaches suggest that they view sourcing local (UK or near European) products as an important part of their risk management. Tesco told us that it is shortening supply chains and buying British where possible. For example it sources all its beef from Britain and Ireland because that is "what customers find to be the appropriate answer" as they are interested in its "direct local provenance".<sup>17</sup>

10. Retailers recognise that consumers frequently demand UK products. Morrisons told us that "we know it's important to our customers [to find British meat]. If it's good for customers and there is a preference in the marketplace for British products it's also likely to be good for British farmers".<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, Tesco cautioned that stocking only British products across many of its ranges, such as all of the chicken in ready meals, would cause planners and farmers concern that it might distort the market and farmers might not have capacity to meet demand.<sup>19</sup> Further, the consequence of a diverse source of supplies is that consumers can benefit from access to a wider choice of products.

11. The complex operation of supply chains means that it is not simple to map the relationship between UK customers' demands for British produce and the security of the nation's food supplies. Nonetheless, if UK consumer demand for national produce were to increase, this could enhance the sustainability of British farming.

**12. We endorse the work of the Government together with farmers, food producers and processors, and retailers to promote UK food to consumers to help ensure the long-term future of national food production.**

13. In terms of ensuring environmental sustainability, many make the assumption that local produce, with fewer 'food miles' from farm to fork, is the more sustainable choice. The Minister took this view noting that "if we can buy locally produced food, that generally has better environmental outcomes".<sup>20</sup> However others, such as food critic Jay Rayner, considered that a simple measurement of 'food miles' could produce a misleading indicator.<sup>21</sup> The relative sustainability of a product will depend not only on a vast range of inputs, including nutrients, energy, water, transport, packaging and labour, but also on how these have been supplied and how efficiently they are used. Mr Rayner noted that a

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15 HM Government, [Elliott Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks](#), July 2014

16 Oral evidence taken on [18 November 2014](#), HC (2014–15) 771, Q6

17 Q120

18 Wm Morrison Supermarkets plc ([FS2 01](#)) para 9

19 Q120

20 Q178

21 Q3

range of factors affected whether sourcing food from the UK was more or less environmentally sustainable than importing the same product. He considered it was not harmful, for example, to import apples and lamb from New Zealand but questioned the sustainability of imports of some other products such as asparagus.<sup>22</sup> Mr Rayner argued that international trade in foodstuffs could ensure that products were grown in the most appropriate places so that buying imports should not be portrayed as necessarily less sustainable. The Sustainable Restaurant Association also told us that purchasing indigenous-type imported foods may sometimes have a lower carbon footprint than those produced within the UK.<sup>23</sup>

14. There has been a growth in the number of local markets such as farmers' markets which can provide an effective route to supply fresh, local produce. This can deliver benefits to the local economy and environment as well as improving individuals' access to healthy food.<sup>24</sup>

15. Technological and process advances have allowed UK consumers to choose to buy home-grown products such as soft fruits for longer periods of the year, as we noted in our previous Food Security report.<sup>25</sup> The Government's response to that report outlined a range of work to support this, including by the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board and by commercial organisations including supermarkets and fruit growers, in areas such as the production of apricots, which had not previously been grown on a major scale.<sup>26</sup>

**16. We welcome the co-ordinated efforts of those producing and retailing fresh produce to exploit longer growing seasons for some fruit and vegetable products. Defra, together with the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, should continue to work closely with producers and retailers to develop and widen markets for these products.**

## Securing a healthy diet

17. One aspect of the definition of food security is that individuals should have access to sufficient healthy food. However rising levels of diet-related health problems, notably those linked to obesity, indicate that many UK citizens are not eating a healthy diet.<sup>27</sup> The Faculty of Public Health of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom reported that children and adults eat 50% more saturated fat, and children eat 50% more sugar, than the recommended levels.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, children eat only one quarter and adults only half the amount of fruit and vegetables recommended. The Waste and

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22 Jay Rayner, *Greedy Man in a Hungry World*, (London 2013), chapter 7

23 Q15

24 See LocalFoods.org [webpages](#)

25 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2014–15, Food Security, [HC 243](#)

26 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Fourth Special Report of Session 2014–15, [HC 702](#)

27 "[Diet and obesity are a crisis for NHS and families](#)" Daily Mail, 12 June 2014

28 Faculty of Public Health of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom, [Food poverty and health Briefing Statement](#)

Resources Action Programme (WRAP) estimated that the health impacts of poor diets and unhealthy lifestyles cost the UK more than £16 billion a year, a figure which could rise to £50 billion by 2050.<sup>29</sup>

18. As we discuss below, there are affordability constraints for some people in accessing healthy food. Recent research by the University of Leeds found, for a range of typical meals, that the healthiest in dietary terms cost £6.63, about double the £3.29 price of the least healthy meal.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, UK citizens in the main have a vast array of choices over the food they buy and eat, with many healthy options available at the same time as less healthy options. However, a large number of people who can afford to choose healthy options do not make healthy food choices as effectively as they might. There appears to be no shortage of advice and guidance, based on a range of robust scientific research, such as the ‘Change4Life’ programme,<sup>31</sup> and the 5 A DAY campaign promulgated by the Department for Health advising people to eat a healthy diet including sufficient fruit and vegetables.<sup>32</sup> Public Health England produces a range of promotional and information material to support its ‘EatWell’ plate depicting the components of a healthy diet,<sup>33</sup> and local government is active in promoting healthy eating to help fulfil its public health duties.<sup>34</sup> For example, many initiatives are taking place in schools to help educate children of all ages on how to cook and eat healthily.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, retailers play a significant role in promoting healthy diets. For example Sainsbury’s provides extensive healthy eating advice including recipes and links to Government campaigns such as 5 A DAY.<sup>36</sup> Morrisons told us about a local store initiative to highlight its fruit and vegetable section including life-size cardboard cut-outs of local health professionals with messages to buy more of these products. Over a five week period sales of fresh fruit and vegetables rose by 20% and of frozen versions by 26%.<sup>37</sup>

19. However, despite these efforts by a range of public and private organisations, witnesses were critical of their impacts. For example, the Fresh Produce Consortium told us that whilst programmes such as 5 A DAY had achieved results, a more ambitious programme was needed to tackle obesity and other public health issues, including promoting fresh fruit and vegetable consumption since people still ate only 3.9 portions a day on average.<sup>38</sup> At the same time households are throwing away about a fifth of the fresh produce they buy. Furthermore, the University of Oxford’s Food Climate Research Network told us that the food system was currently failing in its primary purpose “to feed us adequately”, noting that

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29 Waste and Resources Action Programme ([FS03](#)) para14

30 University of Leeds, *What is the cost of a healthy diet? Using diet data from the UK women’s cohort study*, July 2014

31 See Change4Life [webpages](#)

32 See NHS 5 A DAY [webpages](#)

33 See Public Health England EatWell [webpages](#)

34 See for example Gateshead case study on salt reduction, in the Local Government Association, *Changing behaviours in public health: to nudge or to shove?* October 2013

35 See for example Food Standards Agency [School-based food initiatives](#)

36 See Sainsbury’s healthy eating [webpages](#)

37 Q38

38 Fresh Produce Consortium ([FS2 06](#)) para 16

policy makers focussed too often on “producing more food” rather than addressing multifaceted “environmental, health and equity challenges”.<sup>39</sup> The Network criticised the lack of a strategic policy framework to underpin the diverse activities of many interested parties, urging the Government to provide “policy leadership to set the direction of travel on sustainable food consumption” and support investment in research into “actions effective in shifting consumption patterns in healthier and more sustainable directions”.<sup>40</sup>

***20. Despite efforts to promote healthy eating, the UK is still experiencing high levels of health problems linked to poor diet, in particular problems caused by excessive consumption. While we welcome the work of a range of government departments, local authorities and retailers to promote healthy food choices there needs to be greater integration between the bodies, with firm strategic leadership from the Department for Health. The Government must ensure that innovative local approaches are disseminated to enable far greater numbers of councils, supermarkets and local NHS bodies to develop more effective means of targeting messages.***

21. Defra collects and publishes a range of data on food consumption,<sup>41</sup> alongside that published by other government departments including Public Health England.<sup>42</sup> However, these data do not take into account wastage, even though Defra accepts that some 22% of edible fruit and vegetable purchases are not eaten.<sup>43</sup>

***22. Government policies require a robust evidence basis, yet Defra currently uses data that do not reflect consumption accurately. The Department should use data published by Public Health England on nutritional intakes to refine its own estimates so as to take into account food bought but not subsequently consumed.***

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39 Food Climate Research Network, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford ([FS2 07](#))

40 Food Climate Research Network, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford ([FS2 07](#))

41 For example, Defra publishes an annual [Family Food](#) report on household food purchases

42 For example, Public Health England, [Food and Nutrition Survey](#)

43 Defra, [Family Food](#) 2012, p54

### 3 Supporting effective consumer choices

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23. Consumer choices are not made in a vacuum but reflect needs and desires shaped by cultural norms and values, which are in turn influenced by messages from many interested parties. These include commercial bodies such as producers and retailers but also public bodies including the Government, local authorities and the NHS. These messages come in various forms and via many channels, including marketing and advertising, point-of-sale information such as labelling and in-store promotion, public information campaigns and personal contact. Brands also have a key role since consumer judgments on individual products are often based on their overall trust and support for a brand.

24. Many people say they are prepared to factor so-called ‘public good’ considerations into their food purchasing decisions with, for example, more than half of consumers saying they are willing to pay more for sustainable and ethical products.<sup>44</sup> The Sustainable Restaurant Association told us that sustainability was one factor amongst many considered by consumers when deciding where to eat out, and that in 2013 key topics of interest to their patrons had been food waste and health and nutrition.<sup>45</sup> However, whatever people may say matters to them, their day-to-day buying decisions frequently do not reflect their stated aspirations. For example 17% of consumers actively seek out information on a product’s sustainability.<sup>46</sup> Translating broad aims into a specific choice is an imperfect art since, quite apart from any constraints over the cost and availability of products, a consumer will not only typically make a large number of food purchasing choices each week, but will also do so from a vast range of options. The bulk of food purchase decisions are made in stores and typically each product choice takes a consumer a matter of seconds, with more than a minute being unusual.<sup>47</sup> This means that point-of-sale information must be quickly assimilated if it is to influence decisions.

25. Tesco told us that it tried not to overwhelm customers with information, flagging up selected key aspects on labels, such as the catch method for tuna, but providing further information by other means for those wishing to check other factors such as provenance.<sup>48</sup> These included customer service contacts and the company website. It has also piloted ‘nudge’ tactics of placing healthy products near checkout areas to encourage customers to choose healthy products.<sup>49</sup> However, Tesco called on the Government to ensure consistency in sustainability labelling to give customers assurance that all products labelled as sustainable met the same standards. Tesco supported schemes such as the Red Tractor

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44 [“Influencing consumer choice”](#), ENDS report, November 2014, refers to the 2014 Nielsen survey [“Doing well by doing good”](#)

45 Q10

46 Accenture and Havas Media, [The consumer study: from marketing to mattering](#), June 2014, p9

47 J Duncanm Herrington, Louis M Capella, [Shopper reactions to perceived time pressure](#), International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, Vol. 23 Issue 12, pp.13–20

48 Q114

49 [“Tesco unveils plans to push healthier options”](#), The Grocer, October 2013

and Freedom Foods schemes which people trusted to give appropriate endorsement and confirmation.<sup>50</sup> The Minister told us that voluntary accreditation had been “very successful” and could drive consumer behaviour.<sup>51</sup> The Sustainable Restaurant Association uses a star system to rank its members, with about 10% of restaurants covered, so as to allow customers to decide where to eat based on an independent assessment of an establishment’s sustainability.<sup>52</sup>

26. Food critic Jay Rayner argued that consumers had insufficient information, and considered that it would “require the involvement of Government” to make businesses be “very clear and upfront” about the sustainability of their products.<sup>53</sup> Mr Rayner deemed the “narrative” around sustainability to be founded on insubstantial metrics. It “venerated the small-scale and artisanal,” and the use of words such as “local, seasonal and organic” did not stand up to examination (as indicators of sustainability).<sup>54</sup> He considered that a product should be labelled with its ‘sustainability rating’ both in terms of its own sustainability against similar products and against other types of product in the basket.<sup>55</sup> However, this would be complex to achieve. Although some environmental impacts of some products are measured and reported, there is no universally agreed metric currently available to assess the overall environmental impact of a product. Even assessment of a single factor, such as the lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions of a product—its ‘carbon footprint’—is not simple. Indeed retailers such as Tesco have trialled this for a small selection of products but have not chosen to undertake it in a widespread manner because of the complexity of the task and the fact that consumers found the information confusing.<sup>56</sup> Defra told us it was working with EU counterparts to assess the potential to require the labelling of products with their environmental footprint.<sup>57</sup>

***27. Consumers must make a large number of rapid decisions over myriad purchasing decisions every day, so any information provided at the point of sale must be clear and easily assimilated. We recommend that Defra review with retailers the effectiveness of labelling regulations in informing consumers on key provenance and sustainability factors. Price and brand are easy signals to interpret so drive many consumer decisions. We recommend that Defra seek with retailers to provide equally clear, informative and accurate signals on provenance, sustainability and nutrition.***

***28. Further the Department should commission research into the use of sustainability claims on products in order to assess the accuracy of such labelling. Defra should promote the use of accreditation schemes with high levels of quality assurance, such as Red***

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50 Qq 116,117 See [Red Tractor](#) and [Freedom Food](#) webpages

51 Q170

52 Q 11 See also [Sustainable Restaurant Association](#) webpages

53 Q7

54 Q3

55 Q8

56 Q118 A carbon footprint will vary according to, for example, type of production system, efficiency of the farmer and location of production

57 Q183 [Gordon Friend]

***Tractor, since they allow customers to make choices of products based on the scheme brand.***

29. The growth of internet food shopping allows retailers to offer online shoppers a wide range of information to explore, should they wish to do so, before deciding which groceries to buy. Furthermore the internet offers the opportunity to peruse information in advance of visiting a store in person. Although research suggests that consumers only use online information to a limited extent, principally when undertaking longer-term planning or looking for inspiration rather than actually clicking through their order, nonetheless, some 30% of people surveyed by Morrisons looked online before going to a grocery store.<sup>58</sup>

30. Retailers who go beyond minimum regulatory requirements, such as those on labelling, in order to provide enhanced information about the provenance, health and sustainability of their products are able to better support consumers' choices. Pro-active retailers are using varied means of improving the information they provide to customers such as through provision in-store and online of detailed product information. Online purchasing offers the opportunity to provide consumers with in-depth information on the health and sustainability of products in easily accessible form which consumers can interrogate in varying levels of detail as they wish.

***31. We recommend that Defra work with retailers and their representative bodies to promulgate best practice on online information provision such as tools to allow customers to search for the healthiest products when compiling an online order.***



## 4 Tackling food waste

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### Reducing food waste

32. According to WRAP, 15 million tonnes of food are wasted each year, of which nine million tonnes is avoidable.<sup>59</sup> Food wastage can occur at any stage of the food chain from farm to fork. Half the UK's food waste (around seven million tonnes) occurs in the home, with the average UK household throwing away the equivalent of six meals every week at a cost of £250–£400 a year.<sup>60</sup> In total, £12.5 billion of food bought by consumers is wasted each year.<sup>61</sup> Some 22% of the edible fresh produce bought by householders is not eaten.<sup>62</sup> Retail and distribution operations produce only 3% of the UK's food waste (0.4 million tonnes annually) with manufacturing generating some 27% (4 million tonnes a year).<sup>63</sup> Programmes such as those run by WRAP have driven reductions of 21% in avoidable household food waste since 2007.<sup>64</sup> However, there is a need to decrease levels further, not least to meet EU targets of reducing food waste by 30% by 2025 (compared to 2007).<sup>65</sup> Since the inquiry finished taking evidence, the EU Commission has published a work programme for 2015 under which the circular economy proposals which covered food waste have been withdrawn, pending revised proposals to be produced in 2015.

33. Retailers told us that commercial pressures meant they had developed effective distribution, storage and retail operations so that there was very little wastage at these stages. Tesco reported that it had reduced waste to less than 1% of products in its stores and distribution centres.<sup>66</sup> Morrisons also had low levels of such waste, at 0.3% of sales value in its stores.<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, FareShare noted that even tiny percentages of waste from food companies with large-scale systems could represent a significant amount of food wasted.<sup>68</sup> Retailers told us they were working with their suppliers to reduce waste early in the supply chain. For example, Tesco cited its advance commitment to purchase 80% of its suppliers' grapes to give growers certainty their produce would be bought and told us about its work to reduce the wastage of potatoes through a range of measures including reviewing customer preferences when making decisions on which varieties to order.<sup>69</sup>

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59 Waste and Resources Action Programme (FS03) para 7

60 [Food Waste](#), Standard Note SN07045, House of Commons Library, December 2014

61 Waste and Resources Action Programme (FS2 03) para 27

62 Fresh Produce Consortium (FS2 06) para 14

63 [Food Waste](#), Standard Note SN07045, House of Commons Library, December 2014

64 Waste and Resources Action Programme (FS03) para 29. WRAP defines food waste as avoidable if the food could, at some point prior to disposal, have been eaten

65 As above, para 41

66 Tesco plc (FS2 04)

67 Wm Morrison Supermarkets Plc (FS2 01)

68 Q66

69 Tesco plc (FS2 04)

34. Morrisons is one of many retailers and other organisations supporting the Courtauld Commitment which has delivered reductions in food waste over three phases to date.<sup>70</sup> In parallel, the voluntary Hospitality and Food Service Agreement is delivering improvements in that sector,<sup>71</sup> including packaging reductions of 2.5%, food and packaging recycling increases of 7%, and a 23% increase in food for redistribution. However, the Sustainable Restaurant Association told us that half a kilo of waste is generated from each restaurant meal with some 30% of the annual 600,000 tonnes of restaurant waste coming directly from diners' plates. The Association argued for more widespread practical approaches that enable customers to waste less, such as the use of doggie bags.<sup>72</sup>

35. WRAP noted the importance of influencing consumer choices and of the supply chain supporting optimum behaviours through the way food is promoted, designed, packaged and labelled.<sup>73</sup> The organisation had adopted a set of principles for helping consumers to change behaviours including using real-life examples and making advice clear, without over-simplifying it. Key moments of change in people's lives, such as house moves or the departure of teenagers for college, could be opportunities to shift behaviours. Underpinning WRAP's approach was an overall aim to change culture such that it is not seen as normal to waste food.<sup>74</sup>

36. Witnesses such as food critic Jay Rayner had some specific suggestions for reducing retail food waste, such as banning the sale of bagged fruit and vegetables in supermarkets, or putting a levy on waste.<sup>75</sup> The promotion by supermarkets of multi-buy deals such as 'buy one get one free' offers has been highly criticised by many commentators.<sup>76</sup> However, WRAP noted that there were now fewer such offers and there was no clear evidence they were a key source of household food waste.<sup>77</sup> Mark Linehan from the Sustainable Restaurant Association referred to approaches in the Netherlands where the second product of a multi-buy deal could be obtained at a later date, enabling consumers to have products with a greater shelf-life.<sup>78</sup>

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70 The Courtauld Commitment is a voluntary agreement aimed at improving resource efficiency and reducing waste within the UK grocery sector. Phase one ran from 2005 to 2010, phase two ran from 2010 to 2012, and phase three of the agreement runs to 2015. Between them, the three phases aim to cut household food waste by 20%. See WRAP information sheet, [Courtauld Commitment](#), November 2013

71 The [Hospitality and Food Service Agreement](#) is a voluntary agreement to support the hospitality and food service sector in reducing waste and recycling more between 2012 and 2015. It has over 200 signatories and supporters covering over 25% of the UK sector by food and drink sales.

72 See [Sustainable Restaurant Association](#) webpages

73 Q91

74 Q97

75 Q25

76 See for example Institution for Mechanical Engineers' [written evidence](#) to House of Lords European Union Committee, 10th Report of Session 2013–14, [Counting the Cost of Food Waste: EU Food Waste Prevention](#), HL Paper 154

77 Q102. See also para 18, [Government response](#) to: House of Lords European Union Committee, 10th Report of Session 2013–14, [Counting the Cost of Food Waste: EU Food Waste Prevention](#), HL Paper 154

78 Q25

37. The Government set out its views on waste reduction in its response to an April 2014 House of Lords report into food waste prevention.<sup>79</sup> The response:

- noted Government support for a voluntary, non-legislative approach such as that enshrined in the Courtauld Commitment. Phase 3 of the Commitment is due to commence in 2016 and to run until 2025 with a focus on helping consumers and businesses;
- re-iterated a commitment to the waste hierarchy of prevention first, with redistribution for human consumption where possible next and then for animal feed (under strict conditions). The Government supports the use of unavoidable food waste as a feedstock for anaerobic digestion; and
- noted the Government's agreement that consumers have a key role to play in reducing food waste. The WRAP 'Love Food, Hate Waste' campaign has become a "recognised brand" in providing advice to consumer, retailers and local authorities.<sup>80</sup>

38. Despite progress on reducing waste, WRAP told us that there was still a "lot more" that could be done.<sup>81</sup> It considered the EU target of reducing food waste by 30% to be "challenging" but achievable.<sup>82</sup> This must be achieved against Defra cuts in WRAP funding from £48.1 million in 2010–11,<sup>83</sup> to £17.6 million in 2014–15. Funding for 2015–16 is anticipated to be £15.5 million. WRAP has achieved charitable status, which could allow it access to wider funding such as from trusts and charities.<sup>84</sup> The organisation highlighted that returns from its investment in waste reduction are to the benefit of "individuals, local authorities, businesses and the UK as a whole".<sup>85</sup> The organisation's Chief Executive told us that every £1 of public money spent on programmes to reduce household food waste generated £250 worth of savings in the home.<sup>86</sup> Dr Goodwin said that while "clearly I could say we could do more if I had more resources but there are also a lot of resources being put in by others" including retailers as part of a collective effort.<sup>87</sup>

39. The Minister highlighted WRAP's contribution to waste reduction achievements such as its work on labelling aimed at discouraging retailers from putting unnecessary date labels on products.<sup>88</sup> He noted that there had been progress such that by 2015 or 2016

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79 [Government response](#) to: House of Lords European Union Committee, 10th Report of Session 2013–14, [Counting the Cost of Food Waste: EU Food Waste Prevention](#), HL Paper 154

80 [Government response](#) to: House of Lords European Union Committee, 10th Report of Session 2013–14, [Counting the Cost of Food Waste: EU Food Waste Prevention](#), HL Paper 154

81 Q91

82 Waste and Resources Action Programme ([FS03](#)) para 41

83 WRAP, [Update: WRAP budget](#), 21 December 2010

84 [Food Waste](#), Standard Note SN07045, House of Commons Library, December 2014

85 Waste and Resources Action Programme ([FS03](#)) para 41

86 Q86

87 Q95

88 Q210

household waste of food and its packaging would have reduced by around 20% since 2007.<sup>89</sup>

**40. Despite reductions in recent years, the UK continues to waste significant volumes of food, and the amount of edible food being disposed of remains unacceptably high. At a time when global food systems are under pressure and the UK faces its own food security challenges, this level of waste is unacceptable economically, socially and environmentally. There is no magic bullet for tackling this; rather measures must be diligently applied across the food supply chain from producer to consumer in order to achieve steady results.**

41. We commend the work undertaken over the past seven years by those such as the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to spur food waste reduction. Less waste in production, processing and distribution delivers a more efficient food supply chain and this benefits consumers. But there is still some way to go, particularly in reducing household food waste since this makes up half of all UK food waste.

*42. It is essential that the Government provides the Waste and Resources Action Programme with sufficient public funding such that, alongside investment from other sources such as trusts and charities, it has adequate resources to enable it to maintain momentum in its food waste reduction programmes. This makes good economic sense even in times of financial constraint, since programmes to reduce food waste deliver both public and private benefits beyond their costs.*

## 5 Securing affordable food

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### How affordable are UK food supplies?

43. A key element of the UN definition of food security is access by individuals to sufficient, affordable food. Alongside incomes, food prices are a key element affecting affordability. The Minister noted that food prices had fallen by 1.4% in the last year and that the proportion spent on food by the lowest-income households had fallen from 16.8% to 16.6% between 2008 and 2012 despite “persistent food price inflation”.<sup>90</sup> The Office for National Statistics has also reported that oil prices fell by 6% in the year to September 2014 leading to lower transport costs which could have a downward pressure on food prices.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, food prices have risen in total by 36% since 2007, an average inflation rate of 4.4% per year.<sup>92</sup> This rise outstripped the 3.2% rise in the Retail Price Index and occurred despite ‘price wars’ between some retailers driving down prices on some foodstuffs. Furthermore, when the trend in food price rises is compared with that of incomes, it is clear that since 2007 there has been a rise in the proportion of household income spent on food. Some 11.6% of household expenditure now goes on food and non-alcoholic drink purchases.<sup>93</sup> Although the gap has decreased slightly over the same period, the proportion of income spent by the poorest households on food remains higher than average (at 16.6% for the poorest 20% of households and 11.6% for all households). However, we also heard evidence from food critic Jay Rayner asserting that food prices were in many instances too low, since they undercut the costs of production and threatened the viability of food production systems.<sup>94</sup> In the long term, less robust UK production systems could lead to higher food costs.

44. We received evidence indicating that many people find it hard to afford adequate nutrition. FareShare told us that charitable food donations were being used to meet the short-term food needs of an increasing number of people.<sup>95</sup> The Trussell Trust estimated that nationally some 913,000 people had received foodbank support in 2013–14.<sup>96</sup> The charity had provided some 350,000 food parcels in 2012–13, doubling its previous year’s donations.<sup>97</sup> It attributed this increase to “rising food and fuel prices, static incomes, under-employment and changes to benefits”.<sup>98</sup> The Fresh Produce Consortium told us that 51% of people had concerns over food prices,<sup>99</sup> and that low-income households purchased

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90 Q205

91 “*What is affecting prices in the UK in 2014?*” Office for National Statistics, 7 November 2014

92 Price rise 2007 to third quarter 2014. Office for National Statistics, [ONS](#) webpages

93 Spend in 2012 was 11.6%, up from 10.5% in 2007. Defra, [Food Pocket Book](#), 29 May 2014

94 Q15

95 FareShare ([FS2 02](#)) para 4.2

96 See [The Trussell Trust](#) webpages. A foodbank is a place, frequently run by a charitable organisation, where stocks of food, typically basic provisions, are supplied free of charge to people in need.

97 HC Deb 17 December 2014, Col 1480

98 See [The Trussell Trust](#) foodbank project webpages

99 Fresh Produce Consortium ([FS2 06](#)), para 11

some 16% less fresh fruit than an average income household.<sup>100</sup> Oxfam estimates that one in six parents have gone without food themselves in order to feed their family.<sup>101</sup>

45. Witnesses noted that food poverty could not be addressed without tackling overall poverty.<sup>102</sup> This was also the view underpinning the All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty's December 2014 report *Feeding Britain*, which outlined a wide range of factors leading to people experiencing food poverty including budgeting skills, debt, welfare payments, cost of utilities and other necessities, and individual crises.<sup>103</sup> The Minister told us that he considered that tackling poverty as a whole, particularly through helping people back into work, was the most effective approach.<sup>104</sup> With the focus of this inquiry on food demand and consumption, wider poverty issues such as income levels are outside the scope of our report but we address elsewhere in this report and in our July 2014 Food Security report measures to support robust food supply systems which aim to make nutritious food more affordable for all within sustainable UK and international production frameworks.<sup>105</sup>

## Data on food poverty

46. Defra published research about household food security in February 2014. However, this was inconclusive since it identified a gap in information in a number of respects, noting in particular that, beyond public information from national charities, there is little evidence available as to “the relationship between receipt of food aid and severity of household food insecurity”.<sup>106</sup> The Minister told us that his Department's research had not “ascertained precisely” what was driving the use of foodbanks but noted that other countries were experiencing similar increases.<sup>107</sup> Academic research has also found there to be a lack of consistently collated statistical data on the prevalence and distribution of food poverty.<sup>108</sup> However, the Minister considered that creating a reporting requirement on voluntarily run organisations would be burdensome and divert them from their core task.<sup>109</sup>

47. The Government uses no official definition of ‘food poverty’.<sup>110</sup> It has adopted a definition of fuel poverty: someone is said to be fuel poor if their income is below the poverty line once their energy costs have been taken into account and if these costs are

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100 Fresh Produce Consortium ([FS2 06](#)), para 12

101 See [Oxfam](#) webpages

102 Q24 [Jay Rayner]

103 All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty, [Feeding Britain](#), Report by the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, December 2014

104 Qq 196,197

105 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2014–15, [Food Security](#), HC 243

106 Food Ethics Council and University of Warwick, Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid: [Final Report](#) February 2014

107 Q207

108 Elizabeth Dowler, [Submission to the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom](#), June 2014

109 Q207

110 Q196

higher than the average bills of a similar household.<sup>111</sup> The Department of Energy and Climate Change uses this definition to help it gather data and inform energy policies and programmes. It would be possible to adopt a definition for food poverty, such that a person would be considered to be in food poverty if their income fell below the poverty line once their costs of obtaining an adequate diet have been taken into account. However, more nuanced approaches may be appropriate for measuring the extent of food poverty since a complex of socio-economic and cultural factors drive demand for emergency food aid.<sup>112</sup> The United States, Canada and the Republic of Ireland monitor trends in household food insecurity and food poverty through survey questionnaires. Incorporating similar questions in the Living Costs and Food Survey would enable the gathering of more detailed data on whether individuals have experienced problems in obtaining sufficient food.

***48. Charities provided us with their own evidence of a growing number of people accessing emergency food aid, yet there is no national collation of this data nor sufficient analysis on how usage of foodbanks may be linked to rising food prices or constraints on incomes. We recommend that Defra commission further research into why more people are using foodbanks to provide an evidence base to inform and enhance policy responses. We recommend that the Government collect objective and statistically robust data on the scale of household food insecurity, including through the use of questions in the food costs sections of the UK's Living Costs and Food Survey. It should also monitor trends over time so that the effectiveness of policies can be accurately gauged and any necessary changes made in response to evidence of need. In its response to this report Ministers should set out detailed proposals for how it will work with partners to gather data, the timescale for establishing a work programme and its anticipated outputs.***

## Geographical variations

49. Aggregate statistics disguise variations in individuals' food security related to a range of factors, including where they live. Retailers do not locate in a geographically uniform pattern and so-called 'food deserts' can occur where there are few retail outlets in some local communities. In these areas people find it hard to buy affordable nutritious food, particularly fresh fruit and vegetables. However, the extent to which food deserts cause problems for UK citizens is debated.<sup>113</sup> Tesco told us that food deserts were not a worry for the UK as much as for other countries since UK citizens could buy fruit and vegetables from their local convenience store.<sup>114</sup> The Minister told us that there was a "wide choice" of places to shop for most people in the country hence "the last thing we want to do is have some sort of command and control to decide which supermarkets go where".<sup>115</sup> Despite

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111 Department for Energy and Climate Change, [Fuel Poverty: A Framework for Future Action](#), July 2013

112 All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty, [Feeding Britain](#), Report by the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, December 2014

113 Steven Cummins, Anne Findlay, Mark Petticrew, Leigh Sparks, [Healthy Cities](#): The Impact of Food Retail-led Regeneration on Food, Access, Choice and Retail Structure, Published in: Built Environment, volume 31, issue 4 Planning Healthy Towns and Cities, Winter 2005

114 Q129

115 Q203

this, the planning system does determine where retailers locate. In particular the role of planning in enabling local authorities to meet their obligations to promote the health of communities, including through access to local services, is enshrined in the National Planning Policy Framework. This makes it clear that local planning authorities have a responsibility to promote healthy communities,<sup>116</sup> and that local plans should “take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all”.<sup>117</sup> An example of how planning can be used to promote health is the application of development constraints over where fast food outlets may be located, for example to exclude them from the vicinity of schools, as set out in a policy document promoted by the Department for Communities and Local Government.<sup>118</sup> Retailers themselves also take these factors into consideration, with supermarkets such as Tesco developing strategies with local authorities to gain planning for stores in areas in need of regeneration.<sup>119</sup>

50. Although in an age of internet shopping some people are able to access good deals online regardless of where they live, this is not universally the case. There are constraints on some consumers such as those with poor access to IT, including efficient broadband, or an inability to qualify with retailer requirements such as spending a minimum amount or living in a location to which retailers will deliver. Witnesses submitted evidence to our Rural Broadband inquiry on rural communities’ needs for effective broadband services, and a number highlighted problems with current arrangements for its provision in their areas.<sup>120</sup>

**51. People living in areas, both rural and urban, with few retail outlets can find it difficult to buy affordable, healthy food, particularly if they have limited mobility or travel budgets. It is therefore vital that local authorities work with retailers to ensure that store development plans take into account the needs of all in their communities and that councils are pro-active in using planning to meet their public health objectives. Technological developments such as internet shopping have a role to play in enabling access to affordable food supplies, and it is vital that communities are not disadvantaged by poor broadband service.**

## Surplus food redistribution

52. A key short-term measure that can be taken to help those in emergency need of food is the distribution of food that would otherwise be wasted via charitable foodbanks such as the 420 operated by The Trussell Trust. Individuals also contribute via supermarkets and direct to charities food they have bought specifically for redistribution via foodbanks. Foodbanks redistribute such food to those in short-term need, typically providing

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116 Department for Communities and Local Government, [National Planning Policy Framework](#), 2012

117 See DCLG [Planning Portal](#)

118 Public Health England, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and Local Government Association, [Obesity and the Environment: regulating the growth of fast food outlets](#), March 2014

119 Steven Cummins, Anne Findlay, Mark Petticrew, Leigh Sparks, [Healthy Cities](#): The Impact of Food Retail-led Regeneration on Food, Access, Choice and Retail Structure, Published in: Built Environment, volume 31, issue 4 Planning Healthy Towns and Cities, Winter 2005

120 See Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Rural broadband and digital only services](#) inquiry webpages



recipients with a few days' supply of basic foodstuffs. FareShare supplies more than one million meals a month through 1,290 foodbank charities.<sup>121</sup>

53. According to WRAP nine million tonnes of avoidable food waste goes into the waste stream each year.<sup>122</sup> This typically is disposed of either in landfill or used in anaerobic digesters or for composting, yet a considerable proportion is fit for consumption when it is discarded. FareShare estimated that in the UK each year 400,000 tonnes of waste food could have been eaten, yet only 2% is redistributed.<sup>123</sup> The charity criticised this low level noting that France redistributed 20 times the volume of surplus food redistributed in the UK.<sup>124</sup>

54. Witnesses outlined a number of reasons for relatively low levels of redistribution. FareShare noted the difficulty in changing a culture generally accepting of waste. The charity told us that “every single food business that we work with ends up saving money but it is unbelievably hard work to get that culture shift”.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore there are practical barriers. Although, as FareShare told us, retailers including Sainsbury's, ASDA and Tesco provided “enormous support” to foodbanks,<sup>126</sup> supermarket operations are geared towards minimising waste, and such quantities of food that are deemed surplus can only be redistributed under strict health protection rules. Morrisons told us it supported 150 foodbanks nationally despite finding it a challenge, since there was very little food wasted in its stores that was fit for human consumption. It noted the strict rules on use-by dates (as distinct from best before dates) which prevented some food going for redistribution but, whilst considering the current regime conservative, it considered food safety must remain “paramount”.<sup>127</sup> Mark Linehan from the Sustainable Restaurant Association also told us that “there are all sorts of hygiene, health and safety, and logistical reasons” that make it “incredibly difficult” for restaurants to contribute significant amounts of surplus food. He further told us that in any case, whilst wholeheartedly supporting foodbanks, he was concerned that society should rely on food surplus to ensure that people living in poverty could be adequately fed.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, the social enterprise Company Shop told us that its growing collaboration with the food industry indicated a “real appetite” to redistribute food to “use surplus to make a difference”.<sup>129</sup>

55. Whilst much attention is focused on retailers, redistributors have taken steps to engage food producers and processors, with for example Thanet Earth contributing 123 tonnes of otherwise waste fruit and vegetables to FareShare. However, FareShare noted that this represented a tiny proportion of its output.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, although it had conducted

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121 FareShare (FS2 02) para 2.2

122 Waste Resources and Action Programme (FS2 03) para 7

123 FareShare (FS2 02) para 2.1

124 Q71

125 Q71

126 Q66

127 Wm Morrison Supermarkets Plc (FS2 01)

128 Q22

129 Company Shop (FS2 09)

130 Q66

some programmes such as one with Gleaning UK, it had yet to work at scale with producers.<sup>131</sup>

56. Distribution is a barrier for those with surplus food providing it to those in need. The organisation Plan Zeroes told us that food supply infrastructure is not designed to prevent food, from catered events for example, being wasted. The organisation told us of a high level of willingness to share knowledge, and outlined its work to match those with surplus food with those who could distribute it.<sup>132</sup> Retailers have also taken steps to rectify distribution problems, with ASDA for example providing some £200,000 to cover costs of the company's manufacturers wishing to donate surplus food.<sup>133</sup>

57. Witnesses made recommendations for increasing levels of redistribution. FareShare urged the Government not only to measure how much food is surplus yet goes to waste but to develop action plans to tackle it as part of its waste policy.<sup>134</sup> FareShare noted that, despite 59% of charities reporting an increase in the use of their foodbanks over the previous year, some 42% were experiencing funding cuts.<sup>135</sup> It made a number of recommendations including funding of £3 million for five years to establish effective surplus food redistribution networks in order to save the public sector £280 million a year. The charity urged the Government to access £30 million of funding available through the EU Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) programme.<sup>136</sup> The Minister told us that incentives such as the cost of disposing of waste were “already powerful enough” to spur redistribution.<sup>137</sup> He noted that a Government assessment had concluded that the “burden and cost of trying to access” EU FEAD funding outweighed the anticipated benefits.<sup>138</sup> FareShare also called for tax breaks for companies donating food to charities,<sup>139</sup> although this option was rejected by retailers on the grounds that it could have the unintended consequence of increasing food waste.<sup>140</sup> The Minister also rejected the concept of such tax breaks.<sup>141</sup>

58. A practical approach that is gaining traction in the UK is that of the community shop. Company Shop told us that it was extending its national retail network model which did the “hard work to make redistribution simple for retailers, manufacturers and brands” to communities in need through setting up community shops. The model entails redistributing, with the endorsement of retailers, products ordered from manufacturers but

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131 FareShare (FS2 02) para .5.3.1. See Gleaning Network UK [webpages](#) for information on its work to co-ordinate teams of volunteers, local farmers and food redistribution charities to salvage for redistribution produce which would otherwise be wasted.

132 Q87

133 “[ASDA extends food redistribution initiative](#)” Resource Management, 11 December 2014

134 FareShare (FS2 02)

135 FareShare (FS2 02) para 4.2

136 Q73. Information on The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived is at Europa [website](#).

137 Q214

138 Q215

139 Qq71,72

140 Q55

141 Q214

not in the event required by the retailer. These products may be of high quality and meeting all regulatory requirements, but have been rejected by the retailer perhaps due to imperfect packaging or labelling. A pilot in Goldthorpe, South Yorkshire launched in December 2013 has enabled 500 members with income constraints to buy heavily discounted products from its store as well as to access support for wider problems.<sup>142</sup> The organisation opened a second shop in Lambeth in December 2014.<sup>143</sup>

59. Defra told us that it prioritised food redistribution in the waste hierarchy and had taken steps to promote this such as organising a roundtable with food retailers and charities which had led to a WRAP working group that had reported on a range of case studies for effective redistribution.<sup>144</sup> With the group inactive since publication of its report in March 2014, Company Shop urged Defra to revive it.<sup>145</sup> Since we finished taking evidence, Defra has stated that it will hold a roundtable meeting to “bring together representatives from the food sector to discuss progress, and options for additional action to increase the amount of surplus food which is redistributed for human consumption”.<sup>146</sup>

60. In our Food Security report we recommended that Defra appoint a Food Security Co-ordinator in order to ensure effective joined-up action across the range of government departments whose policies impact on food security.<sup>147</sup> Given the Department’s lead role, it would be appropriate for this post to sit within Defra and be funded by it.

**61. Food which is edible but surplus to requirements should not become waste. We welcome the efforts of a large number of charities to redistribute such food to people in need, but little surplus food is being redistributed and the vast majority is discarded. Redistributing food, particularly fresh food, is a logistical challenge: donors need an incentive to provide surplus food in the first place and it must be matched with the right recipients quickly while still edible. We welcome the food donations being made by producers and retailers, but organisations could donate higher quantities if they were more pro-active in finding outlets for surplus food in a timely manner. Retailers should work with charities such as Plan Zheroes who are playing a growing role in finding practical solutions. Moreover supermarkets must ensure all their outlets have a sound understanding of how to make surplus food available safely and legally but without being unduly risk-averse.**

**62. We welcome the work of social enterprises such as Company Shop in developing innovative models to provide quality food at affordable prices to those with income constraints. There is considerable potential for these approaches to be scaled up. However achieving a step-change in the level of redistribution requires concerted**

142 Company Shop ([FS2 09](#))

143 “[Social supermarket launched in London](#),” The Guardian, 15 December 2014

144 Q213

145 Company Shop ([FS2 09](#))

146 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2014–15, [Waste Management in England](#), Government Response, HC 921

147 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2014–15, [Food Security](#), HC 243

action that it would be difficult for a diffuse set of largely voluntary organisations to deliver.

*63. Whilst approaches must be based on local requirements and driven by local communities, Defra should set up a task force to co-ordinate national work by charities, local authorities, retailers, food producers and manufacturers to establish an effective food redistribution network across the country. This should be a key remit of a Food Security Co-ordinator, who should also ensure that food and waste policies inter-link effectively.*

# Conclusions and recommendations

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## Consumer choice and food security

1. We do not argue in this report for a regulatory shift towards compulsion over consumers' food purchasing decisions. We therefore make recommendations for more co-ordinated and focussed actions by the Government, food producers and suppliers, and the third sector to support consumer choices that enhance the ability of all to obtain sufficient safe, healthy and affordable food. We support a robust regulatory framework for the nation's food production and retail systems; consumers must be able to make their choices about what food to buy and from where to buy it knowing that there are strong measures in place to protect their interests. (Paragraph 8)
2. We endorse the work of the Government together with farmers, food producers and processors, and retailers to promote UK food to consumers to help ensure the long-term future of national food production. (Paragraph 12)
3. We welcome the co-ordinated efforts of those producing and retailing fresh produce to exploit longer growing seasons for some fruit and vegetable products. Defra, together with the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, should continue to work closely with producers and retailers to develop and widen markets for these products. (Paragraph 16)
4. *Despite efforts to promote healthy eating, the UK is still experiencing high levels of health problems linked to poor diet, in particular problems caused by excessive consumption. While we welcome the work of a range of government departments, local authorities and retailers to promote healthy food choices there needs to be greater integration between the bodies, with firm strategic leadership from the Department for Health. The Government must ensure that innovative local approaches are disseminated to enable far greater numbers of councils, supermarkets and local NHS bodies to develop more effective means of targeting messages.* (Paragraph 20)
5. *Government policies require a robust evidence basis, yet Defra currently uses data that do not reflect consumption accurately. The Department should use data published by Public Health England on nutritional intakes to refine its own estimates so as to take into account food bought but not subsequently consumed.* (Paragraph 22)

## Supporting effective consumer choices

6. *Consumers must make a large number of rapid decisions over myriad purchasing decisions every day, so any information provided at the point of sale must be clear and easily assimilated. We recommend that Defra review with retailers the effectiveness of labelling regulations in informing consumers on key provenance and sustainability factors. Price and brand are easy signals to interpret so drive many consumer decisions. We recommend that Defra seek with retailers to provide equally clear, informative and accurate signals on provenance, sustainability and nutrition.* (Paragraph 27)

7. *Further the Department should commission research into the use of sustainability claims on products in order to assess the accuracy of such labelling. Defra should promote the use of accreditation schemes with high levels of quality assurance, such as Red Tractor, since they allow customers to make choices of products based on the scheme brand. (Paragraph 28)*
8. *We recommend that Defra work with retailers and their representative bodies to promulgate best practice on online information provision such as tools to allow customers to search for the healthiest products when compiling an online order. (Paragraph 31)*

### Tackling food waste

9. *Despite reductions in recent years, the UK continues to waste significant volumes of food, and the amount of edible food being disposed of remains unacceptably high. At a time when global food systems are under pressure and the UK faces its own food security challenges, this level of waste is unacceptable economically, socially and environmentally. There is no magic bullet for tackling this; rather measures must be diligently applied across the food supply chain from producer to consumer in order to achieve steady results.(Paragraph 40)*
10. *It is essential that the Government provides the Waste and Resources Action Programme with sufficient public funding such that, alongside investment from other sources such as trusts and charities, it has adequate resources to enable it to maintain momentum in its food waste reduction programmes. This makes good economic sense even in times of financial constraint, since programmes to reduce food waste deliver both public and private benefits beyond their costs. (Paragraph 42)*

### Securing affordable food

11. *Charities provided us with their own evidence of a growing number of people accessing emergency food aid, yet there is no national collation of this data nor sufficient analysis on how usage of foodbanks may be linked to rising food prices or constraints on incomes. We recommend that Defra commission further research into why more people are using foodbanks to provide an evidence base to inform and enhance policy responses. We recommend that the Government collect objective and statistically robust data on the scale of household food insecurity, including through the use of questions in the food costs sections of the UK's Living Costs and Food Survey. It should also monitor trends over time so that the effectiveness of policies can be accurately gauged and any necessary changes made in response to evidence of need. In its response to this report Ministers should set out detailed proposals for how it will work with partners to gather data, the timescale for establishing a work programme and its anticipated outputs. (Paragraph 48)*
12. *People living in areas, both rural and urban, with few retail outlets can find it difficult to buy affordable, healthy food, particularly if they have limited mobility or travel budgets. It is therefore vital that local authorities work with retailers to ensure that*

store development plans take into account the needs of all in their communities and that councils are pro-active in using planning to meet their public health objectives. Technological developments such as internet shopping have a role to play in enabling access to affordable food supplies, and it is vital that communities are not disadvantaged by poor broadband service. (Paragraph 51)

13. Food which is edible but surplus to requirements should not become waste. We welcome the efforts of a large number of charities to redistribute such food to people in need, but little surplus food is being redistributed and the vast majority is discarded. Redistributing food, particularly fresh food, is a logistical challenge: donors need an incentive to provide surplus food in the first place and it must be matched with the right recipients quickly while still edible. We welcome the food donations being made by producers and retailers, but organisations could donate higher quantities if they were more pro-active in finding outlets for surplus food in a timely manner. Retailers should work with charities such as Plan Zheroes who are playing a growing role in finding practical solutions. Moreover supermarkets must ensure all their outlets have a sound understanding of how to make surplus food available safely and legally but without being unduly risk-averse.(Paragraph 61)
14. We welcome the work of social enterprises such as Company Shop in developing innovative models to provide quality food at affordable prices to those with income constraints. There is considerable potential for these approaches to be scaled up. However achieving a step-change in the level of redistribution requires concerted action that it would be difficult for a diffuse set of largely voluntary organisations to deliver.(Paragraph 62)
15. *Whilst approaches must be based on local requirements and driven by local communities, Defra should set up a task force to co-ordinate national work by charities, local authorities, retailers, food producers and manufacturers to establish an effective food redistribution network across the country. This should be a key remit of a Food Security Co-ordinator, who should also ensure that food and waste policies inter-link effectively.* (Paragraph 63)

# Formal Minutes

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**Wednesday 14 January 2015**

Members present:

Miss Anne McIntosh, in the Chair

Mrs Mary Glendon

Neil Parish

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck

Ms Margaret Ritchie

Sheryll Murray

Roger Williams

Draft Report (*Food security: demand, consumption and waste*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 63 read and agreed to.

Summary read, amended, and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair do make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No.134.

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[Adjourned till Wednesday 21 January at 2.30 pm



# Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry page at [www.parliament.uk/efracom](http://www.parliament.uk/efracom).

## Wednesday 22 October 2014

*Question number*

**Jay Rayner**, food critic, and **Mark Linehan**, Sustainable Restaurant Association

[Q1–30](#)

**Steven Butts**, Head of Corporate Responsibility, **Andrew Loftus**, Agriculture Manager, and **Guy Mason**, Head of Corporate Affairs, Wm Morrison Supermarkets plc

[Q31–56](#)

**Lindsay Boswell**, Chief Executive Officer, FareShare, **Adrian Curtis**, Food Bank Network Director, and **David McAuley**, Chief Executive, The Trussell Trust

[Q57–75](#)

## Wednesday 29 October 2014

**Dr Liz Goodwin**, Chief Executive Officer, **Dr Richard Swannell**, Director, WRAP, and **Maria Ana Neves**, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder, Plan Zeroes

[Q76–105](#)

**Tim Smith**, Group Quality Director, Tesco plc

[Q106–146](#)

**Nigel Jenney**, Chief Executive, Fresh Produce Consortium

[Q147–162](#)

## Wednesday 5 November 2014

**George Eustice MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Farming, Food and the Marine Environment), Defra, and **Gordon Friend**, Head of Food Security and Sustainability, Defra

[Q163–216](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry web page at [www.parliament.uk/efracom](http://www.parliament.uk/efracom). FS2 numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 A D Cooper ([FS20014](#))
- 2 Asda Stores Limited ([FS20010](#))
- 3 Company Shop ([FS20009](#))
- 4 Defra ([FS20012](#))
- 5 Defra ([FS20015](#))
- 6 Eating Better ([FS20008](#))
- 7 Fareshare ([FS20002](#))
- 8 Food Climate Research Network, University Of Oxford ([FS20007](#))
- 9 Fresh Produce Consortium ([FS20006](#))
- 10 Mechline Developments Ltd ([FS20013](#))
- 11 Plan Zheroes ([FS20005](#))
- 12 Tesco ([FS20004](#))
- 13 Wm Morrison Supermarkets Plc ([FS20001](#))
- 14 WRAP ([FS20003](#))

# List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/efracom](http://www.parliament.uk/efracom).

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

## Session 2014–15

First Report	Winter Floods	HC 240 (HC 701)
Second Report	Food security	HC 243 (HC 702)
Third Report	Appointment hearing of the Chair of Environment Agency	HC 545
Fourth Report	Waste management in England	HC 241 (HC 921)
Fifth Report	Dairy prices	HC 817

## Session 2013–14

First Report	Draft Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill	HC 95 (HC 637)
Second Report	Vaccination against bovine TB	HC 258 (HC 705)
Third Report	Managing Flood Risk	HC 330 (HC 706)
Fourth Report	Wild Animals in Circuses	HC 553 (HC 746)
Fifth Report	Food Contamination	HC 141 (HC 707)
Sixth Report	Rural Communities	HC 602 (HC 764)
Seventh Report	CAP implementation 2014–2020	HC 745 (HC 1088)
Eighth Report	Appointment of Chairman of Natural England	HC 890
Ninth Report	Departmental Annual Report 2012–13	HC 741 (HC 1283)
Tenth Report	Tree health and plant biosecurity	HC 469 (HC (Session 2014–15) 242)
Eleventh Report	Primates as pets	HC 984 (HC (Session 2014–15) 656)

## Session 2012–13

First Report	Greening the Common Agricultural Policy	HC 170 (HC 654)
Second Report	The Water White Paper	HC 374 (HC 602)
Third Report	Pre-appointment hearing: Chair of the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat)	HC 471-I & -II
Fourth Report	Natural Environment White Paper	HC 492 (HC 653)
Fifth Report	Desinewed Meat	HC 120 (Cm 8462)
Sixth Report	Draft Water Bill	HC 674 (Cm 8643)
Seventh Report	Dog Control and Welfare	HC 575 (HC 1092)
Eighth Report	Contamination of Beef Products	HC 946 (HC 1085)

## Session 2010–12

First Report	Future Flood and Water Management Legislation	HC 522 (HC 922)
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Second Report	The Marine Policy Statement	HC 635
Third Report	Farming in the Uplands	HC 556 (HC 953)
Fourth Report	The draft National Policy statement (NPS) on Waste Water	HC 736
Fifth Report	The Common Agricultural Policy after 2013	HC 671 (HC 1356)
Sixth Report	Implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy: Domestic Fisheries Management	HC 858 (HC 1485)
Seventh Report	Pre-appointment hearing: Chair of Gangmasters Licensing Authority	HC 1400-I & -II
Eighth Report	EU proposals for the dairy sector and the future of the dairy industry	HC 952 (HC 1548)
Ninth Report	The Welfare of Laying Hens Directive—Implications for the egg industry	HC 830 (HC 1664)
Tenth Report	The outcome of the independent Farming Regulation Task Force	HC 1266 (HC 1669)
Eleventh Report	The draft National Policy Statement for Hazardous Waste	HC 1465 (HC (Session 2012–13) 540)
Twelfth Report	EU proposals for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy	HC 1563-I & -II (HC (Session 2012–13) 108)
First Special Report	The National Forest: Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2009–10	HC 400
Second Special Report	Dairy Farmers of Britain: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2009–10	HC 401