



PRESS RELEASE:

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## **DEFRA Food and Farming strategy - Picks the cherries, avoids grasping nettles**

The Government has failed to deliver a clear and integrated strategy for a sustained and sustainable farming future in its Strategy launched today (12 December) (1). **Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming is disappointed as over half the initiatives in the new report have already been announced. Out of the 46 recommendations Sustain has identified, 28 were already happening.** [2]

Vicki Hird, Policy Director of Sustain says:

*"We have another fat report on our desks but the problems in the food chain will not be addressed by re-announcing a few initiatives and more consultations and reviews. We need specific commitments, finance to implement them and a firm lead from Government to ensure the whole plan works together for sustainable development."*

This broad grouping [3] - including consumer, environment, international development, animal welfare, health and farming organisations - welcomes many of the initiatives that have been put in place following the tragedy of Foot and Mouth in 2001. Progress, albeit slowly, is being made; for instance in developing an broad and shallow environmental scheme for all farmers, for fostering collaboration between farmers and the launch of the Organic Action Plan.

But tackling the major challenges - such as totally inadequate returns to an ageing and demoralised farming sector, widespread environmental degradation resulting from subsidy led-intensification, constant animal health and welfare problems and increases in diet-related diseases - has been avoided.

Reflecting its members' vision for change, Sustain outlined how health, environmental and economic objectives could all be achieved. [4] Yet the Government's approach appears to be cherry picking a few easy options and leaving the big challenges to the market, which has consistently failed to deliver. The promise of a 'Sustainable Food Industry Strategy' and a 'Food and Health Action Plan' are just more delays in implementing real changes that are long overdue. Why delay, for example, overhauling the Retailer Code of Practice (DTI), getting sustainable food in public canteens, and taking action to achieve a 100% increase in fruit and vegetable production matched by consumption in the UK?

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### Notes:

1. DEFRA will be launching 'Facing the Future - the new farming and food strategy on 12 December 2002, at 14.45, at Nobel House. The report is available at [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)
2. Sustain's analysis of the report show that there are:
  - 44 recommendations in total
  - 28 of which have already been announced. For example, the Entry level Agri-environment scheme has been under discussion for many months, the Organic Action Plan was launched in July 2002, the Food Chain Centre is already established.
  - 9 of which are new initiatives. For example setting up a new industry body the "English Food and Farming Partnerships"
  - 7 are questionable in being "actions" and consist of consultations, reviews or discussions.

A full analysis of the recommendations is available on request from Sustain

3. Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming represents over 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level. [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org).

4. Sustain's recommendations for the Curry Report can be seen on [www.sustainweb.org/pdf/curry.pdf](http://www.sustainweb.org/pdf/curry.pdf)

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