



Dishing out failing food standards

How Government Buying Standards for our food
fall below McDonald's fast food standards



November 2011

Contents

1. Government Buying Standards (GBS)
2. How GBS compare to food served by McDonald's
 - Eggs
 - Fish
 - Milk
 - Fairly traded coffee
 - UK production standards
3. Conclusion

1. Government Buying Standards (GBS)

In June 2011, the Government introduced new compulsory 'Government Buying Standards' (GBS) for food bought by public sector institutions in central government. These standards cover all government departments, state-funded prisons and parts of the armed forces. Government Buying Standards do not apply to hospital food which still does not have to meet any compulsory standards, apart from basic food safety.

The standards include nutritional, environmental and ethical criteria and were introduced because this Government stated that it wanted to lead by example to reduce the environmental damage caused by the food we eat in the UK, improve animal welfare standards and support poor farmers abroad. When GBS were launched in June 2011, Food Minister Jim Paice MP said:

"We want to support and develop a profitable and competitive food chain and to ensure a secure, environmentally sustainable and healthy supply of food.... These standards will set an example and provide a clear, credible and workable example for the wider public sector to follow"¹.

In a recent poll of 1,000 people, 66% of respondents said that Government had a responsibility to lead by example when buying food for public sector institutions².

The compulsory environmental and ethical criteria in Government Buying Standards include³:

- "Food must meet UK or equivalent standards of production, subject to no overall increase in costs".
- "Where fresh produce is used, menus must be designed to reflect in-season produce and in-season produce must be highlighted on menus". "In-season" is defined by the Government as "*fresh produce that is out-door grown or produced during the natural growing or production period for the country or region where it is produced*".
- "100% of eggs in shell must be sourced from 'enriched' cage systems as a minimum standard".
- "100% of fish must be demonstrably sustainable with all wild-caught fish meeting the Food and Agriculture Organization Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (includes Marine Stewardship Council certification and Marine Conservation Society 'fish to eat')".
- "At least 10% of food and drink bought must be produced to organic or LEAF Marque⁴ standard or equivalent".
- "At least 50% of tea and coffee must be certified to be fairly traded".

2. How GBS compare to food served by McDonald's

The Good Food for Our Money campaign compared Government standards with the environmental and ethical standards of food served at McDonald's⁵, the global fast food giant. We chose McDonald's not only because it is a world renowned brand, but also because the company prides itself, among other things, on providing meals at affordable prices. In several places the GBS state the standards must be met at no extra cost. While we believe this focus on short-term prices is mistaken, as it may have long-term costs, the comparison with McDonald's shows what can be done on a tight budget. The results of this comparison are summarised in the table below.⁶

	Government	McDonald's	Result
Eggs	Requires that all eggs should be laid by hens living in 'enriched' cages as a minimum standard.	All eggs in McDonald's Breakfast menu are from British free-range farms.	McDonald's fast food standards are higher than the Government's food standards.
Fish	Requires that all fish must be proven to have come from sustainable stocks, using the London 2012 Olympic standards of sustainability ⁷ .	All Fillet-O-Fish meals are certified sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council, which requires the highest standards of sustainability.	Government's food standards are equivalent to McDonald's fast food standards.
Milk	Requires that milk is produced to UK legal minimum standards of production, so long as it can be bought at no extra cost.	All bottled milk is organic.	McDonald's fast food standards are higher than the Government's food standards.
Fairly traded coffee	Requires that at least 50% of coffee is certified fairly traded e.g. Fairtrade or Rainforest Alliance certification.	All coffee is certified to be fairly traded by the Rainforest Alliance.	McDonald's fast food standards are higher than the Government's food standards.
Food meeting UK standards of production	Requires that food should meet UK levels of production where this does not incur any extra cost. The rules do not require that food meets any certification standard but make it compulsory for food which is produced in Britain to be traceable back to the producer.	All beef and pork bought by McDonald's is reared from British and Irish farms. All chicken can be traced to the farm where it was reared but does not have to be British. The majority of potatoes are grown in the UK.	Government's food standards are equivalent to McDonald's fast food standards.

3. Conclusion

The survey compared six new compulsory environmental and ethical standards introduced by the Government for food served by central government public institutions with standards for the food served by McDonald's.

The standard for 'seasonal food' could not be used for comparison because the Government's definition of seasonality is not recognised by retailers and food service providers.

In three cases (eggs, milk and fairly traded coffee) the environmental and ethical standards of food served by McDonald's was shown to be higher than standards introduced by the Government.

In two cases (fish and UK standards of production) the standards for food served by McDonald's was equivalent to standards introduced by the Government.

In summary, the environmental and ethical standard of food served at McDonald's is either higher than or equivalent to 'Government Buying Standards'.

This is not good enough, and particularly not for a Government which claims to be the "greenest ever". The current GBS allow Government to use our taxes to buy food that pollutes the environment, undermines animal welfare and damages the livelihoods of farmers in poor countries. It is time for the Government Buying Standards to at least match, and then rapidly exceed standards that are already routine for McDonald's.

Contact

Alex Jackson
Co-ordinator, Good Food for Our Money Campaign
020 7837 1228
alex@sustainweb.org

www.sustainweb.org/goodfoodforourmoney

¹ Jim Paice MP's Ministerial Statement about Government Buying Standards <http://sd.defra.gov.uk/2011/06/new-government-buying-standards-for-food-and-catering/>

² Good Food for Our Money campaign 'Eggs and animal welfare' survey, 18 August 2011, Toluna QuickSurveys <http://www.tolunaquick.com/register?camp=sustainactivity>

³ Government buying Standards guidance notes, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs <http://sd.defra.gov.uk/documents/GBS-guidance-food.pdf>

⁴ Linking Environment And Farming (LEAF) helps farmers to farm responsibly, including by certifying their produce meets certain environmental standards <http://www.leafuk.org/leaf/consumers/theLEAFmarquecons.eb>

⁵ All McDonald's food standards are available at <http://www.mcdonalds.co.uk/ourfood/index.shtml>

⁶ The Government requires that food should highlight seasonal food on menus. We could not include this seasonality criteria in the survey because the Government's definition of seasonality conflicts with the definition accepted by most scientific experts, as well as retailers and food service providers. Specifically, the Government allows any food to be defined as seasonal so long as it is grown in season in the country where it was produced. The definition of seasonal used by food service providers is linked to locality i.e. food is grown in season near to where it is served.

⁷ Food Vision for the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, December 2009 <http://www.london2012.com/documents/locog-publications/food-vision.pdf>