

# Should the UK have a Food Policy Council?

A Briefing for the Agri-Food Network<sup>1</sup>

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## Key Arguments and Recommendations

Since its election, the Labour Government has initiated a process of reforming food governance that is profoundly important. The creation of the Food Standards Agency, the abolition of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the creation of the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, merging MAFF and bits of the former Department of the Environment are highly significant.

This briefing suggests that this is unfinished business and that if the Government wants to bring governance and institutions into shape to meet the real challenges of Food Policy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it needs to create better co-ordination across the new institutions.

These changes in UK food governance can best be understood as a political response to three salient phenomena:

- a crisis in public confidence about government priorities;
- the internationalisation of supply routes following trade liberalisation within and beyond the EU (the EU Single Market post 1987 and the new phase of globalisation after the 1994 GATT);
- the slow revolution in food production and distribution methods (particularly in the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century).

The UK has not been alone in responding to these three changes in food policy context. There has been a wave of change and institutional reform across the world, driven by the developed world but having considerable impact too on food production and trade in and from the developing countries. In 2000, the European Commission announced the creation of a new European Food Safety Authority. At the global level, the World Trade Organisation, with its delegation of food standards powers to the UN's Codex Alimentarius Commission, now means that developing countries have to dance to new terms of trade and engagement within an institutional context which has itself been contentious. Accession countries to the EU, for instance, are having to introduce new international standards and procedures (such as traceability) into supply chains which were previously more local. Even within the EU, Member

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<sup>1</sup> The Agri-Food Network was created in 2001 as a discussion and research forum for people working in Universities, NGOs, think-tanks and as independent researchers. Interests range across the food spectrum.

States with high standards such as the Netherlands and Finland have had to respond to changes and consider creating a food agency.

Within Whitehall and Westminster, there is already a view that the UK is in the lead in this reform process. The UK, the argument goes, has already put in place adequate institutional reform. All that is required is some fine-tuning. The UK government, for instance, has recently announced a review of DEFRA, chaired by Lord Haskins (former Chair of Northern Foods plc, the giant food processor).

This Briefing, however, argues that the institutional reform is unfinished business. Welcome though some aspects of the Whitehall reorganisation process are, there is a major gap in the policy-making and intelligence gathering process. Although the Commission on the Future of Farming and Food chaired by Sir Don Curry (former Chair of the Meat & Livestock Commission) offered a vision for UK food plc, it had serious weaknesses, notably around its failure to address the issues of public health, long-term externalised costs and social justice. This was regrettable since it was these issues – particularly the impact of food on health – which helped bring to a head the crisis of food policy in the first place. The Curry Commission's vision centred on a governmental commitment to efficiency and trade liberalisation, into which was injected some important and welcome environmental and conservation measures. The Curry package required an additional £0.5 billion state funding.

This Briefing argues a different position. It suggests that:

- Ministerial control over the policy-making process is still fragmented.
- Although problems of co-ordination are inevitable in any complex and cross-departmental area of policy like food, there is still a need for some body or committee which would be a channel of information and advice to integrate the parts of food policy.
- The challenge is to improve co-ordination both horizontally, i.e. *within* any level of governance, and vertically, i.e. *between* levels of multi-level governance (local, regional/national, UK-wide, regional/EU, international).
- Now that the major departmental reforms are complete, there should be a mechanism to provide strategic reviews. The Haskins review of DEFRA is in pursuit of efficiency and not looking at policy coherence. This function was the original vision of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA) but was lost and then abolished.
- The creation of the Food Standards Agency has added complexity to an already fraught relationship between the old MAFF and DH. Whereas there were failures of co-ordination between just two departments in the past, there is a real danger of tensions between three (FSA, DH, DEFRA).
- Key challenges over the next 30 years such as climate change, the cost of diet-related ill-health (obesity, diabetes, cancers etc) require much better integration of intelligence and policy ideas. It could be provided by the Cabinet Office's PIU but might be better provided directly to the relevant departments, much as committees such as the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) now provides for nutrition.
- There ought to be a debate within and outside Government as to how the UK currently does or does not integrate and set priorities for policy goals. There are now three key government bodies (DEFRA, DH, FSA) with core stakes in food policy where there used to be two (MAFF and DoH).
- Although there is a welcome upsurge of consultation and stakeholder groups and (Advisory) Boards, there is no one body which is responsible for overview of national food policy.

## What are Food Policy Councils?

The term 'Food Policy Councils' (FPCs) is used in policy circles to refer to a variety of mechanisms designed to integrate overall policy thinking.

There is some *international* experience of Nutrition Councils, particularly in Scandinavia. These emerged for different reasons. Norway, for instance, set up a Council after the creation in 1976 of its ambitious food policy. Its advice system has evolved with new political demands. They may be set up *nationally* to provide Ministers with a mechanism for specialist advice. In that respect, national FPCs are advisory and in keeping with the Whitehall tradition.

There is also some experience of *local* bodies designed to improve food policy co-ordination. The Health Department of the City of Toronto, Canada, created the Toronto Food Policy Council in the late 1980s as what would now be called a stakeholder body. Its task has been to inject better coherence within the City's existing institutions and to involve and listen to outside bodies. In West Sydney, Australia, also there have been important policy initiatives designed to co-ordinate innovation, health and food supply chain with environmental goals.

## Could other bodies meet this need for coherent advice?

It could be argued that the policy advice function highlighted in this Briefing, if accepted as real and lacking, could be provided by other bodies. As ever, there are three analytic options:

- there is not a problem in the first place, so there is no need for action;
- there is a problem but an existing body could deal with it, or be modified to do so;
- there is a problem and a new body is needed.

Three examples suggest that there is a real problem in co-ordinating and delivering policy coherence for consumers and the food supply chain:

- Fish. Current nutrition advice is to eat a reasonable amount of fish, particularly oily fish (for the omega fatty acids). Yet environmentally, fish consumption is increasingly recognised to be highly problematic. Which is right? How can the circle be squared?
- Fruit and vegetables. The welcome rise in fruit and vegetables has been achieved largely by importation of foods. Yet, this has significant pressure on transport systems, climate change and represents a policy failure for British agriculture. No-one expects UK farmers to grow bananas or mangoes, but why is production of appropriate fruit like apples and pears in such long-term decline?
- Cost internalisation. A number of national and EU fiscal measures have begun to introduce the principle of cost internalisation into the world of food governance. Illustrations are the climate change levy, the waste directive and demands to recycle packaging. Yet the pressure on the food chain are to compete ruthlessly on cost reduction.
- Physical activity. The UK, like other societies, is experiencing an explosion of obesity. This is laying down huge health problems for the future. Yet UK society is now largely unable to walk or cycle to its food shops, due to an understandable but now regrettable policy to facilitate 'hypermarketisation'. Food ought to be the fuel, not fuel used to get the food.

It can safely be assumed, then, that there is a real problem. Who then might best help improve policy coherence and advice?

*Leave it to Ministerial responsibility?*

It could be argued that policy coherence is a Ministerial and political responsibility, which clearly it is ultimately. But the reality is that Ministers cannot have the time to explore complex longer-term challenges and functions. As both Labour and Conservative governments have learned, food policy can deliver serious political headaches. So surely, it is in the interests of Ministers to have some mechanism or body to act as a buffer? As the examples above show, the issue is not one of science alone but of policy. What is needed is a *policy* committee, one which gathers intelligence and takes a variety of channels of communication: science, social, industry, education, and one which ranges widely, from short- to long-term.

#### *Create a Task Force or Royal Commission?*

DEFRA, interestingly, in 2001 appointed a Horizon Scanning Task Force which reported in 2002. One of its conclusions was in tune with this function, namely that government requires some standing body and process whereby it trawls the national pool of academic, industry and other stakeholders to review matters of concern. The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution provides one model, a standing body which takes, shifts and proffers expert advice on a complex area.

#### *Widen an existing Committee?*

It could be argued that an existing committee could take on this task. SACN, for instance, which has been accorded a tight scientific brief on nutrition (not food), could be asked to provide more policy advice. This would be a return to the policy role originally mapped for COMA, and is probably not a 'runner'. SACN has a full agenda and might resent being asked to look more widely at policy integration far away from nutrition, such as in the environmental or social policy spheres.

#### *Expand the FSA's remit?*

The Food Standards Agency also could be given a wider remit. Although currently focused on standards (and heavily safety-oriented), the FSA is a realistic option. But this would require its legal powers to be altered. At the time of its creation, 1997-99, some argued that the FSA should be a Food Agency – i.e. less fixated on microbiological standards but taking a more holistic remit. But the Government was determined to initiate the FSA with a focussed remit. This may have been understandable at the time – food safety had delivered the previous government endless bloody noses, after all. It might be worth considering giving the FSA a broader role. The Danes, after all, first created their agency in response to environmental food concerns, then gave it a public health role, and then added the food safety dimension. It would be helpful if the FSA was given a wider remit anyway. The FSA is charged with pursuing and informing the consumer. But its remit excludes key dimensions of modern consumerism such as environmental or ethical considerations in food. Yet all down the food supply chain know, demands informed by such considerations are now extremely formative in the marketplace. Tensions have already been manifest, for instance, over the case of whether to introduce environmental considerations into the school fruit scheme (should there be local suppliers? Should fruit be organic?), and over whether support for organic agriculture flies in the face of nutritional or epidemiological public health evidence. These are problems not just of evidence but of policy.

#### *An inter-departmental food policy group?*

Another possible institutional route would be to create an interdepartmental food policy group. This would mean the creation of a body within closed Whitehall doors. It would be surprising if

the Haskins review did not offer some such recommendation. Such a body would undoubtedly be useful and would build on what already happens as a matter of civil service routine when key policy development unfolds. But this model would lose the need for transparency and engagement with public discourse.

### **Deepening the case for FPCs**

Initially, then, there appear to be good grounds for the UK to set a FPC (or devolved FPCs). It can also be noted that clear answers are available when posing questions as to why? (purpose), what? (structure), how? (process) and where? (location / comitology).

#### *Learning from history*

The idea of having a mechanism through which integration of policy can be helped, monitored and encouraged is not new. The UK in fact has a rich tradition of introducing such 'joined-up' food policy but mainly in time of war. The reflex of the British state has been reluctant intervention. The compact with first farm and then trade and then industrial/retail powers in the food chain is a fascinating saga, with tensions which emerged particularly well documented in World Wars I and II.<sup>2 3</sup> War has historically forced the UK State to 'loosen' up and to think more holistically, and even to encourage lateral thinking.<sup>4 5</sup> It is unclear whether present UK emergency planning procedures (for times of war) include such a function. As has already been noted, a separation of powers across Whitehall – notably between health (DH), food safety (FSA plus DEFRA), agriculture and environment (DEFRA) and industry (DTI) – ushers an inevitable danger of policy fragmentation and poor implementation.

#### *Pragmatism*

There is a pragmatic case for the creation of a FPC, too. The current model of consultation is creaking at the edges. Privately, NGOs and other organisations now receive a wave of consultation documents to which they cannot possibly give due attention. Only the larger NGOs can begin to address the range that now emanates from Whitehall and the devolved bodies. But even they have to take strategic choices about which consultations to put energy into replying to. There is a real danger of consultation fatigue. Government needs to recognise that NGOs and other stakeholders such as industry are increasingly cynical about being consulted. Consultation has to steer between the Scylla of tokenism and the Charybdis of being manipulated. Bodies outside government are not government. They want clear guidance and ideas. This is precisely what a FPC would help government do, by reviewing evidence, outlining policy options and making recommendations.

#### *Simplicity out of complexity*

Another argument for a FPC is that some body is needed to help bring some simplicity to food policy. Food governance, like all governance that crosses policy sectors, is highly complex. Whichever way ministerial or departmental responsibilities are set, there are inevitably problems of need for integration and collaboration. Although an advance, the creation of the FSA has

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<sup>2</sup> Beveridge W (1928). *Food Control*. Oxford: Clarendon Press

<sup>3</sup> Hammond R J (1950). *Food*. London: HMSO

<sup>4</sup> Boyd Orr J (1943). *Food and the People*, Target for Tomorrow no 3, London: Pilot Press

<sup>5</sup> Le Gros Clark F, Titmus R M (1989). *Our Food Problem and its Relation to our National Defences*. Harmondsworth: Penguin

made this already difficult juggling act even more difficult by turning the central creative tension in Whitehall between MAFF and DoH from a duo into a trio.

### *Beyond incrementalism*

A persistent criticism of UK food policy is that it is incremental rather than visionary, i.e. lacks any broad intention other than to support market mechanisms.<sup>6</sup> Too often policy exists despite and without evidence when it would be more effective with it. A channel for feeding evidence into the policy-making process is therefore desirable.

In this respect, the situation has worsened since the World War II experience when co-ordination was a matter of life and death. With the demise of the significantly named Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA), and its replacement by SACN as part of the re-organisation engendered by creating the FSA, there is now no body charged with a core advisory function on food policy. Given the strategic importance of food, this is surprising. In truth, COMA had not often pursued its overview functions in food policy and had increasingly been medicalised. But it was abolished just when that broad policy advice function was once more emerging as a need.

In Whitehall there is no channel for consideration of the 'big overview'. In theory, this is a political task and the responsibility of Ministers and the political process. But with fragmentation of food governance, there is little chance for the food policy jigsaw to be seen together.

### **The International dimension**

As was stated earlier, the UK is not alone in facing complex challenges in the sphere of food policy. Both of the United Nations' big food policy conferences – the International Conference on Nutrition of 1992 and the World Food Conference of 1996 (and its recall five years on – held in 2002!) - acknowledged the need for food to have a multi-focus. Appendix 1 gives an informal WHO summary of what makes for successful food and nutrition policies.

As has already been argued, the UK when considering the creation of a FPC or other body should take note of existing experience at both national and sub-national levels. Nationally, the best experience is in the Nordic countries: Iceland, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, all have rich traditions in experimenting for policy integration instruments. Sweden, for instance, is now developing a long-term vision for reducing energy use throughout its food supply chain by a factor of four in 20 years.

In 2000, the World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe produced a background paper for the Regional Committee, encouraging member states to give high priority to the creation of national Food and Nutrition Action Plans. The WHO-E drew member states attention to the value of FPCs. Further details are given in Appendices 2, 3 & 4 to this Briefing. The UK, with the other 50 member states of WHO-Europe, made a commitment to create a regional policy drawing on national actions to integrate three 'pillars' of food policy: food safety, nutrition and sustainable food supply. The need to have some policy integration mechanism to help deliver this policy goal becomes important. A European Ministerial conference will occur in 2005, by which it would be helpful if the UK had a FPC.

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<sup>6</sup> See forthcoming collection of articles in *Political Quarterly* themed issue on the Politics of UK Food Policy December 2002, eds D Barling & T Lang

## The Local dimension

The Government looks set to pursue further regionalism. Although a strong supporter of globalism and liberalisation, it is aware of the need to deliver locally. A new localism is talked about. Certainly, other EU member states have stronger devolution of powers. In the field of public health, for instance, many national states are decentralising some public health functions to the city or regional level. In these cases, FPCs and other policy integration functions may become increasingly relevant.

Since the 1980s, there has been a flowering of local food projects. Localities such as Sandwell and Somerset have benefited from strong local commitment and networks. Such projects have largely occurred within the voluntary sector but often with local authority or health authority support and funding. These projects are a rich source of information and experience on the case for integrating practice but there is no coherent channel through which they can be heard. The variety of local food experience has already received some excellent exploration and conceptualisation.<sup>7 8 9</sup>

Internationally, there is some excellent experience of what makes for successful local FPCs. The creation of broad alliances is key. Besides the pioneering work of the London Food Commission in the 1980s and of the Toronto Food Policy Council which for over a decade promoted a health-led focus on food supply improvement, there is a rich experience in the developing world.

In the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte, for example, the local authority has reduced child malnutrition through a strategy which included portable, flexible markets. Realising that location is everything, it built movable shelters for stalls and experimented with where their appeal was greatest. Without granting autonomy in thinking, and finance, such improvements are hard to deliver. In the USA, a local project like the Hartford Food System is now over two decades old.<sup>10</sup> Although a local food supply system, it is now formally linked to a local (council) food policy Commission and with other local service departments such as Social Services. In the UK, local projects too often suffer from short-term funding and hand-to-mouth existence. The creation of local FPCs could create a local institutional structure which would help bed these excellent projects into local governance. Although a local project, the Hartford Food System, for instance, is part of the state-wide Connecticut Food Policy Council, which was created by state (not federal) legislation.

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland offers another interesting line of enquiry. It argued that good food governance requires strong social networks among relevant professionals at the local level. Without creating formal structures, the FSAI encouraged the setting up of routine meetings at sub-national level at which different professional heads with responsibility for diverse sectors of the food policy scene meet. The argument proposed by the FSAI is that by setting up such a forum, the capacity of people to work out what their locality needs will help prevent long-term problems. At the very least, it will also encourage mutual trust and knowledge which will be highly beneficial in times of food crises.

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<sup>7</sup> particular honour should go to the work of Prof Ken Dahlberg of the University of West Michigan in the USA, in this respect. See <http://unix.cc.wmich.edu/~dahlberg/> Also to Audrey Maretzi of Penn State University and Rod MacRae formerly of the Toronto Food Policy Council.

<sup>8</sup> McGlone P, B. Dobson, E. Dowler, M. Nelson (1999). *Food projects and how they work*, York: York Publishing for Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>9</sup> Dowler E, Caraher M (2002). 'Local Food Projects – the new Philanthropy?', *Political Quarterly*, forthcoming

<sup>10</sup> Hartford Food System, 509 Wethersfield Ave., Hartford, CT 06114, USA

## **A summary of the advantages of FPCs**

The advantages of FPCs are that they:

- Help create an integrated policy approach;
- Enable breadth not just depth of analysis;
- Provide policy options for Ministers;
- Help create evidence-based policy;
- Act as a channel for communication and reflection between general public, academic and scientific communities and the government process;
- Act as a buffer for the political process;
- Take a food supply chain (vertical) as well as multi-factorial (horizontal) approach;
- Are very cost-effective, being a committee with secretariat.

## **A summary of the disadvantages of FPCs**

The disadvantages of FPCs include:

- They could lack any institutional ‘leverage’ and be just another talking shop;
- They could be seen as a threat to politicians and civil servants if they gave unwelcome advice;
- They could be lost in the committee jungle;
- They could lack core focus and suffer from the ‘tyranny of structurelessness’.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Despite potential difficulties, serious consideration should be given to the creation of a Food Policy Council in the UK. The Government should not be fooled into thinking that its food policy problems are likely to go away. On the contrary, the growth of interest in food and the growth of external pressures from international and regional involvement all mean that food policy issues will continue to press for Ministerial attention.

This internal dynamic is compounded by the continuing economic drivers. The revolution in food production and distribution methods, the acceleration of scientific and technological insights and the rising evidence of immanent environmental pressure, all mean that the food policy area is likely to be ‘live’.

It is not just Ministers who need to bring some focus to this discourse. A Food Policy Council would be invaluable in helping create the level playing field and policy framework that commerce also requires. And the public too requires some confidence that the political process is being accorded its due significance and rounded attention.

For these and the previous reasons, it may be concluded that:

- a UK Food Policy Council should be created as an advisory body.
- This should provide advice primarily to the key food-related government departments, DEFRA, DH and the FSA but also to other relevant bodies with a food role such as DfID, DTI and DfES.
- This advice should be made available to the public, except in extreme emergency situations such as war.
- Its primary task should be to provide overview and coherence.

- The Food Policy Council should have a devolved structure, with linked counterpart bodies in the national bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- As and when regional government bodies emerge in England, the regional bodies should also create Regional Food Policy Councils tasked with providing the local dimension.
- International experience (notably in Scandinavia) in linking various policy areas affected by food should be drawn upon.
- Local experience should be built upon and liaised with.
- Further consideration should be given to location and structure but useful models exist within existing bodies in Government.

## **Appendix 1: Key elements for successful development of national food and nutrition plans and policies<sup>11</sup>**

In 1999, the World Health Organisation conducted a review in the South East Asia and Western Pacific Region. This reviewed the progress in a number of countries of their food and nutrition policies and plans since the 1992 International Conference on Nutrition. This review drew out a number of important conclusions.

### **Key elements for successful development of national food and nutrition policy & plans**

1. Political commitment
  - need for an influential ‘parent’ ministry to lead the process
  - have a high profile advocate
2. Focussed approach
  - identify targeted priorities
3. Consultation with stake-holders

### **Key elements for successful translation of food and nutrition policies and plans into action**

While many countries have policies, they have not always found ways of turned them into action. The list below gives the lessons from those countries that have successfully managed this transition.

1. Official Government adoption of the policy and plan
2. Establishment and good working of an intersectoral co-ordinating committee
  - location in the government structure
  - specifically allocated budget
  - members from all concerned sectors and interests
  - effective structure
  - ability to prioritise
  - periodic reviews
3. Designation of responsible ministries
4. Prioritisation of activities
5. Incorporation of Monitoring and Evaluation
6. Availability of national food, nutrition and health information

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<sup>11</sup> Source: Dr Chizuru Nishida, World Health Organisation, Geneva, *Personal Communication*, 2000

## Appendix 2: Norway's national food policy since 1975

*Adapted from:* Tansey G, Worsley T (1996). *The Food System*. London: Earthscan.

Norway's food and nutrition policy was formalised in 1975 but the process began around a decade earlier. This preparatory process clarified the areas of agreement that found expression in the final law. By the mid 1970s, Norway had set four main goals for its comprehensive food policy:

1. encourage a health-promoting diet, reducing fat consumption, especially saturated fats, and replacing them with polyunsaturated fats, whole grains and vegetables;
2. promote domestic food production and reduce food imports, increasing national self-sufficiency from 39% of total calories to 52% by 1990;
3. promote agricultural development in the country's less advantaged, outlying regions with due regard for preserving the environmental resource base;
4. contribute to world food security, promoting production & consumption in poor countries.

The idea was to integrate a number of policy objectives: food supply, public health, social cohesion, and consumers. By the early 1990s, much progress had been made, especially on dietary habits, regional development and the contribution to world food security aspects. Dietary changes were most evident in fat consumption, with average total fat consumption dropping from over 40% to under 34% of total calories; death from heart disease fell.

There is much to learn from Norway's experience of developing a policy within national borders. This has been a government-led food and nutrition policy. Its experience is useful for others trying to develop policy. Norway has learned much about the difficulties, strategies and policy instruments needed to implement a broad-ranging food policy. One assessment concluded that the Inter-ministerial Council, which was set up to coordinate policy implementation and which had the power to do so, was relatively passive. The advisory body, the National Nutrition Council, became the force pushing the policy along, using information as a key weapon.

While much has changed in Norway, the complex interactions between the different factors continue. Both official and consumer groups are continuing their efforts to meet the goals. The whole process, however, has led to former opponents of the policy, such as the food and agriculture industries, becoming much more willing to listen to arguments from nutritionists and health authorities.

### **Further sources of information on Norway's food and nutrition policy:**

Helsing E (1987). *Norwegian Nutrition Policy in 1987: what works and why?* Report from a research seminar, Vettre, Norway 27-28 April. Copenhagen: WHO.

Milo N (1990). *Nutrition Policy for Food-Rich Countries, A Strategic Analysis*, Baltimore MD: John Hopkins University Press

National Nutrition Council (1994). *The Norwegian Diet and Nutrition and Food Policy*, Oslo:

Norum K (1997). 'Some aspects of Norwegian nutrition and food policy' in Shetty P, McPherson K, eds, *Diet, Nutrition and Chronic Disease: Lessons from contrasting worlds*. Chichester: J Wiley and Sons,

Oshaug (1992). *Towards Nutrition Security*, Country Paper for Norway, International Conference on Nutrition, Oslo: Nordic School of Nutrition, University of Oslo

Royal Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture (1975). *On Norwegian nutrition and food policy*, report no. 32 to the Storting. Oslo: Royal Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture

## Appendix 3: The wider Nordic experience of integrating policy goals<sup>12</sup>

A number of Nordic countries - Finland, Sweden and Norway - have tried to integrate a public health dimension to their food supply in an attempt to reduce the incidence of food-related ill-health. The very first documents were produced in 1962. These dealt with fat intake.<sup>13</sup> The first set of Nordic dietary goals or guidelines were compiled by a group of Nordic nutrition professors and published in Swedish in 1969 but they only became official government policies years later.<sup>14</sup> The Nordic experiments are show that:

- governments can take a lead;
- policy battles can be won by health interests;
- public and environmental health can be fused with food and agricultural policy;
- improvements in health can go hand in hand with sound economies;
- challenges continue in the new era of globalisation.

### Norway – a pioneer in changing food supply

In the mid 1970s, Norway set four main goals for its comprehensive food policy:

- encourage a health-promoting diet, reducing fat consumption, especially saturated fats, and replacing them with polyunsaturated fats, whole grains and vegetables;
- promote domestic food production and reduce food imports, increasing national self-sufficiency from 39% of total calories to 52% by 1990;
- promote agricultural development in the country's less advantaged, outlying regions with due regard for preserving the environmental resource base;
- contribute to world food security, promoting production & consumption in poor countries.

In Norway the farm lobby saw the value of adapting to the emerging diet-health paradigm and helped introduce an effective national food policy, linking policies on agricultural, food processing, consumers, health and rural affairs.<sup>15 16 17 18</sup>

### Heart disease in Finland

In the early 1970s, Finland had the highest recorded coronary mortality in the world.<sup>19</sup> And within Finland, the region of North Karelia had the worst record. The

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<sup>12</sup> This section is adapted from: Lang T, Heasman M (2003). *Food Wars*. London: Earthscan, forthcoming

<sup>13</sup> Norum K, Johansson L, Botten G, Gunn-Elin A B, Oshaug A (1997). 'Nutrition and Food Policy in Norway', in A Bendich, R J Deckelbaum, eds. *Preventive Nutrition*, Totwa NJ: Humana Press Inc. 455-469

<sup>14</sup> Truswell AS (1996). 'Emerging issues on establishing nutrient goals' in Pietinen P, Nishida C, Khaltaev N, eds *Nutrition and Quality of Life: Health Issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Geneva: World Health Organisation. 23-37

<sup>15</sup> Helsing E (1987). *Norwegian Nutrition Policy in 1987: what works and why?* Report from a research seminar, Vettre, Norway 27-28 April. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe

<sup>16</sup> RNMA (1975). *On Norwegian nutrition and food policy*, report no. 32 to the Storting. Oslo: Royal Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture

<sup>17</sup> Milio N (1990). *An analysis of the implementation of Norwegian Nutrition Policy 1981-1987*, First European Conference on Food and Nutrition Policy, Budapest, 1-5 October 1990, Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe. EUR/ICP/NUT 133/BD/1

<sup>18</sup> Oshaug A (1992). *Towards Nutrition Security*, Country Paper for Norway, International Conference on Nutrition, Oslo: Nordic School of Nutrition, University of Oslo

<sup>19</sup> Pietinen P (1996). 'Trends in Nutrition and its consequences in Europe: The Finnish Experience' in Pietinen P, Nishida C, Khaltaev N, eds *Nutrition and Quality of Life: Health Issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Geneva: World Health

North Karelia project was set-up by the Finnish government. The project targeted smoking, blood pressure control and diet, and started preventive activities throughout the country. Over 20 years, the dietary intake of Finns has been monitored and has vegetable consumption has doubled. Fruit and berry consumption - the latter culturally important within the Finland also increased. The proportion of saturated fats in total fat consumption declined, while fish consumption rose.

The health agencies worked with the food industry to alter the food supply, thereby linking the push of supply with the pull of demand. The result is a culture which encourages Finns to eat for life, not a premature grave. A 55% decline in Finnish male mortality from coronary heart disease, for example, has been recorded in the period 1972-92. Changes have been even greater for women.<sup>20</sup> The secret has been close integration between health and other agencies, for instance dietary guidelines were designed for schools, other mass catering institutions and other social groups including old people and the armed forces.

### **Food safety and the environment in Sweden**

Sweden's entry into a linked food and health policy stemmed from a food crisis. It began to introduce a tough pro-active food hygiene policy, following a dreadful bout of salmonella which killed 100 people in the early 1950s. This led to the setting up of its National Food Administration and much more effort to link good, safe production with high health standards. Such integration was helped by the progressive stance of its farming organisation, but it also stems from responding to pressure for change from consumers and other interests outside the food/agricultural economy.<sup>21</sup>

Agriculture and Environment Ministries are developing re-orientation programmes to reduce fossil fuel / energy use and to meet health targets.<sup>22</sup> This is based on the Factor Four approach of the Club of Rome,<sup>23</sup> trying to increase efficiency fourfold by increasing technological sophistication.

Sweden intends to halve resource use by 2021.<sup>24</sup> Sweden is also exploring how to achieve tough targets on reducing greenhouse gases from food consumption<sup>25</sup> – one of the public health recommendations of the WHO, the World Meteorological Organisation and the United Nations Environment Programme.<sup>26</sup> On current evidence, it is nowhere near meeting those targets. One comprehensive audit of the consequences of eating and travelling in Sweden has shown that far more energy is

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Organisation.67-71

<sup>20</sup> Pietinen P (1996). 'Trends in Nutrition and its consequences in Europe: The Finnish Experience' in Pietinen P, Nishida C, Khaltvaev N, eds *Nutrition and Quality of Life: Health Issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.67-71

<sup>21</sup> Vail D (1994). 'Sweden's 1990 Food Policy Reform' in McMichael P, ed, *The Global Restructuring of Agro-Food Systems*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 53-75

<sup>22</sup> Commission on Environmental Health (1996). *Environment for Sustainable Health Development – an Action Plan for Sweden*. Stockholm: Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. Swedish Official Reports Series 1996: 124

<sup>23</sup> von Weizacher E, Lovins AB, Lovins LH (1997). *Factor Four: doubling wealth, halving resource use*. London: Earthscan

<sup>24</sup> Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (1999). *A Sustainable Food Supply Chain: a Swedish Case study*. Stockholm: SEPA. Report 4966

<sup>25</sup> Carlsson-Kanyama A (1998). 'Climate Change and Dietary Choices: how can emissions of greenhouse gases from food consumption be reduced?', *Food Policy*, 23, 3, June.

<sup>26</sup> McMichael AJ, Haines A, Slooff R, Kovats RS, eds. (1996). *Climate Change and Human Health*. Geneva: World Health Organisation, UN Environment Programme, World Meteorological Organisation

used than fits proposed energy quotas. This implies “substantial lifestyle changes”.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Whole new methodologies are required to improve energy auditing in food systems.

### **Challenges to Nordic policy**

How is this more health-oriented food policy faring under globalisation? Observers have argued that the progressive Nordic direction must inevitably be curtailed in the process of adapting to globalisation and the GATT.<sup>29</sup>

In all the Nordic countries, the effort to integrate food/agricultural policies with health goals has taken considerable energy and debate.

Sweden and Norway permit no TV food advertisements for children under 12 years of age,<sup>30</sup> a policy much admired elsewhere for its protection of children from junk food advertising. This is now under attack in the name of creating a common EU-wide framework on advertising.

All Nordic countries are already globalised and internationalist in their economic outlook but there are differences. Sweden and Norway, for instance, took different positions on regionalisation, with Sweden voting to join the EU and Norway voting to stay out. In Norway, concerns about the EU undermining its food and agriculture policies featured centrally in the political debate but by signing on to the 1994 GATT, its ban of food colourings, for instance, which has been in place since the 1970s as part of the national food policy desire for ‘real food’, has now been altered by acceptance of Codex Alimentarius Commission’s more permissive stance on food colourings.

Norway is arguing a strong case for being able to support national agriculture in the name of food security.<sup>31</sup> Sweden has also been analysing the health implications of the Common Agricultural Policy.<sup>32</sup> Clearly, the Nordic attempt to marry food and health is still facing challenges.

### **Lessons of policy integration**

Nordic policy integration is as inspirational as it is rational and not easy. Giving a higher priority to health met with considerable resistance. Norway has a food and nutrition policy that is integrated with agricultural, fishery, price, consumer and trade policies as well as educational and research policy. However, the Norwegians themselves point out that the improvements have not been as marked as they wished and took longer than expected.

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<sup>27</sup> Carlsson-Kanyama A (1999). *Consumption Patterns and Climate Change: consequences of eating and travelling in Sweden*. Doctoral thesis. Stockholm: University of Stockholm Dept of Systems Ecology

<sup>28</sup> Carlsson-Kanyama A (1998). ‘Climate change and dietary choices: how can emissions of greenhouse gases from food consumption be reduced?’, *Food Policy*, 23, 3 / 4, 277-293

<sup>29</sup> Vail D (1994). ‘Sweden’s 1990 Food Policy Reform’ in McMichael P, ed, *The Global Restructuring of Agro-Food Systems*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 66

<sup>30</sup> EASA (1995). *Survey on self-regulation for advertising and children in Europe*. Brussels: European Advertising Standards Alliance. October

<sup>31</sup> Royal Ministry of Agriculture (1999). *Food Security and the role of Domestic Agricultural Production*. Oslo: RMA. 4 June.

<sup>32</sup> Whitehead M, Nordgren P, eds. (1996). *Health Impact Assessment of the EU Common Agricultural Policy*. F-serien 8, 1996. Stockholm: National Institute of Public Health

Norum (1997) suggests some of the reasons for this.<sup>33</sup> :

*“Two main reasons were that the dairy and meat industry were against the policy, and that the National Nutrition Council had little power and political influence. The dairy industry tried to counteract the policy by producing foreign experts who claimed milk, butter and other dairy products had no influence on risk factors for CHD, and that therefore the Norwegian nutrition policy was built on false premises...”*<sup>34</sup>

Despite such friction, both in Finland and Norway, government policy built around public health and food have made measurable changes in the composition and availability of the national food supply. They have achieved health-promoting shifts in food production subsidies, provided incentives for low-fat milk and lean meat production, improved the quality of vegetables, promoted access to fish, enhanced the content and accuracy of food labelling, enlarged and improved public information as well as professional and school-based nutrition education, and expanded nutrition programme and policy-related research.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Norum, K. (1997). ‘Some aspects of Norwegian nutrition and food policy’ in Shetty P, McPherson K, eds *Diet, Nutrition and Chronic Disease: Lessons from contrasting worlds*. Chichester: J Wiley and Sons, 195-206

<sup>34</sup> Norum K. (1997). ‘Some aspects of Norwegian nutrition and food policy’ in Shetty P, McPherson K, eds *Diet, Nutrition and Chronic Disease: Lessons from contrasting worlds*. Chichester: J Wiley and Sons p198

<sup>35</sup> Milio N. (1993). ‘After the Big Bang: structure of food and nutrition policy-making processes in Europe’. in van der Heijl DG, Lowik M, Ockhuizen Th., eds, *Food and Nutrition Policy In Europe*, Wageningen: Pudoc Scientific Publishers

## Appendix 4: NORDIC FOOD AND NUTRITION ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

**Source: World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe Nutrition Programme, August 2000**

Note: Tables 5.4.1 to 5.4.3 are drawn from information provided to the WHO. They illustrate similarities and differences in the various Nordic countries. Table 5.4.4 is drawn from information provided at the Malta consultation on Food and Nutrition Action Plan, November 1999

**Table 5.4.1 NORDIC ADVISORY OR ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES (Q3-3.3)**

| Member State   | 3. Has a special <i>administrative</i> structure responsible for the implementation of the nutrition policy been set up |   | 3.1 Does country have a nutrition council/advisory structure/body responsible for providing scientific advice to national policy-makers? |         | 3.2 Full name of advisory body |                                 |                   |  | 3.3 When was advisory body first established |                             |
|----------------|---|---|--|---------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|--|--|-----------------------------|
|                | 1994/95   | 1998/99   | 1994/95  | 1998/99 | English                        |                                 | National language |  | 1994/95                                      | 1998/99                     |
| <i>NORDIC</i>  |   |   |  |         |                                |                                 |                   |  |  |                             |
| <b>Denmark</b> | Working groups under the Ministry of Health   | No  | Yes  | Yes     | n/a                            | The Danish Nutrition Council    | n/a               | Det Statslige Ernæringsråd             | 1969   | 1997                        |
| <b>Finland</b> | National Nutrition Council  | No information  | Yes  | Yes     | n/a                            | National Nutrition Council      | n/a               | Valtion ravitsemusneuvottelukunta      | 1938   | 1952                        |
| <b>Iceland</b> | Nutrition Council, a secretariat and a five-member body   | No special structure set up, Ministry of Health is responsible  | Yes  | Yes     | N/a                            | Icelandic Nutrition Council     | n/a               | Manneldisráð Islands                   | 1978   | 29 <sup>th</sup> April 1978 |
| <b>Norway</b>  | No  | National Nutrition Council<br><br>Norwegian Food Control Authority<br><br>Ministry of Health and Social Affairs | Yes  | Yes     | N/a                            | National Nutrition Council      | n/a               | Statens ernæringsråd                   | 1946   | 30th August 1946            |
| <b>Sweden</b>  | Indirectly through the National Food Administration and the Public Health Institute                                     | No information  | Yes  | Yes     | N/a                            | Expert Group on Diet and Health | n/a               | Expertgruppen for kost-och hälsöfrågor | 1970   | 1969                        |

**TABLE 5.4.2 NORDIC ADVISORY AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE (Qs 3.4 –3.9)**

| Member State   | 3.4 When did advisory body last meet |                                 | 3.5 How many members does the advisory body have |         | 3.6 Whom do the members of the advisory body represent |   | 3.7 Does advisory body have a written mandate or terms of reference |         | 3.8 Does advisory body have a budget to cover its activities |         | 3.9 Who finances this budget |  |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---------|--|---|---|---------|--|---------|------------------------------|--|
|                | 1994/95                              | 1998/99                         | 1994/95  | 1998/99 | 1994/95  | 1998/99   | 1994/95   | 1998/99 | 1994/95  | 1998/99 | 1994/95                      | 1998/99                                      |
| <b>Denmark</b> | n/a                                  | December 1998                   | It is an agency                                  | 15      | n/a  | Relevant Medical Research Societies   | Yes   | Yes     | n/a  | Yes     | n/a                          | Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Fisheries |
| <b>Finland</b> | n/a                                  | September 1998                  | 18   | 12      | n/a  | Ministry of Health<br>Ministry of Agriculture<br>Public Health Institute<br>Food Research Institute<br>NGOs<br>Agricultural Producers | Yes   | Yes     | n/a  | Yes     | n/a                          | Ministry of Agriculture                      |
| <b>Iceland</b> | n/a                                  | 10 <sup>th</sup> September 1998 | 5  | 5       | n/a  | Ministry of Health<br>University of Iceland<br>Faculty of Medicine & Faculty of Food Science<br>Teachers College                      | Yes   | Yes     | n/a  | Yes     | n/a                          | Government                                   |
| <b>Norway</b>  | n/a                                  | October 1998                    | 14   | 23      | n/a  | Independent people chosen for personal skills   | Yes   | Yes     | n/a  | Yes     | n/a                          | Ministry of Health and Social Affairs        |
| <b>Sweden</b>  | n/a                                  | 28 May 1998                     | 18   | 13      | n/a  | University Institutions<br>National Institute of Public Health<br>National Board of Health & Welfare<br>National Food Administration  | Yes   | Yes     | n/a  | No      | n/a                          | No information                               |

**TABLE 5.4.3 NORDIC INTER-DISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION (Qs 4-4.5)**

| Member State   | 4. Is there any form of regular government-initiated collaboration between parties responsible for: food production, manufacture & sales, control & legislation and nutrition education |         | 4.1 Who is responsible for the collection of information regarding population dietary patterns |   | 4.2 Who is responsible for dissemination of this information (4.1) to relevant policy-makers |   | 4.3 Who is responsible for nutrition education of the public          |   | 4.4 Is there any form of regular consultation between the Ministry of Health & the Ministry of Agriculture on matters related to nutrition |  | 4.5 Is there any form of regular intersectoral consultation between different governmental, private or voluntary sectors <sup>36</sup> |                |
|----------------|---|---------|--|---|--|---|---|---|--|--|--|----------------|
|                | 1994/95   | 1998/99 | 1994/95  | 1998/99                                   | 1994/95  | 1998/99                                   | 1994/95   | 1998/99   | 1994/95  | 1998/99  | 1994/95  | 1998/99        |
| <i>NORDIC</i>  |   |         |  |   |  |   |   |   |  |  |  |                |
| <b>Denmark</b> | Working groups under the Ministry of Health   | No      | National Food Agency of Denmark  | Danish Veterinary and Food Administration | National Food Agency of Denmark  | Danish Veterinary and Food Administration | The Government Home Economics Council National Food Agency of Denmark | Danish Veterinary and Food Administration<br><br>The National Consumer Agency<br><br>The National Board of Health | n/a  | Yes<br>Steering committees and AD HOC meetings   | n/a  | 1,2            |
| <b>Finland</b> | Ministry of Social Affairs and Health<br><br>Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry<br><br>Ministry of Trade and Industry   | Yes     | National Public Health Institute   | Public Health Institute                   | National Public Health Institute   | Public Health Institute                   | Ministry of Social Affairs and Health                                 | Ministry of Social Affairs and Health<br><br>Ministry of Education  | n/a  | Yes<br>Formal/in formal<br>Through Nutrition Council and through meetings between Civil servants | n/a  | No information |
| <b>Iceland</b> | Ministry of Health<br><br>Ministry of Trade   | No      | Icelandic Nutrition Council  | Icelandic Nutrition Council               | Icelandic Nutrition Council  | Icelandic Nutrition Council               | Icelandic Nutrition Council   | Icelandic Nutrition Council   | n/a  | No   | n/a  | No information |

<sup>36</sup> 1: Ministry of health, 2: Ministry of agriculture, 3: Ministry of Environment, 4: Ministry of education, food Industry, 5: consumers, 6: others (please state)

| Member State  | 4. Is there any form of regular government-initiated collaboration between parties responsible for: food production, manufacture & sales, control & legislation and nutrition education                |   | 4.1 Who is responsible for the collection of information regarding population dietary patterns |                              | 4.2 Who is responsible for dissemination of this information (4.1) to relevant policy-makers |  | 4.3 Who is responsible for nutrition education of the public |  | 4.4 Is there any form of regular consultation between the Ministry of Health & the Ministry of Agriculture on matters related to nutrition |                | 4.5 Is there any form of regular intersectoral consultation between different governmental, private or voluntary sectors <sup>36</sup> |   |
|---------------|--|---|--|------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|----------------|--|---|
|               | Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Industry  |   |  |                              |  |  |  |  |  |                |  |   |
| <b>Norway</b> | Ministry of Health and Social Affairs<br><br>National Nutrition Council<br><br>Norwegian Food Control Authority  | Forum for Nutrition (Ernæringsforum), run by National Nutrition Council, includes meetings and special projects on nutritional questions<br>Food Policy Forum in Ministry of Agriculture<br>The Council of Norwegian Food Control Authority | National Nutrition Council   | National Nutrition Council   | National Nutrition Council   | National Nutrition Council (main responsibility) | National Nutrition Council                                   | National Nutrition Council (main responsibility)                   | n/a  | No information | n/a  | 5,6<br><br>7: National Nutrition Council and Norwegian Food Control |
| <b>Sweden</b> | Ministry of Agriculture<br><br>Ministry of Foreign Affairs<br><br>Ministry of Health and Social Affairs<br><br>Swedish International Development Authority<br><br>National Board of Health and Welfare | A reference group representing 20 different organisations, food production, manufacture, sales, nutrition education. Meets twice a year   | National Food Administration   | National Food Administration | National Food Administration   | National Food Administration                     | Public Health Institute and National Food Administration     | National Food Administration (National Institute of Public Health) | n/a  | No             | n/a  | 6   |

| Member State | 4. Is there any form of regular government-initiated collaboration between parties responsible for: food production, manufacture & sales, control & legislation and nutrition education |  | 4.1 Who is responsible for the collection of information regarding population dietary patterns |  | 4.2 Who is responsible for dissemination of this information (4.1) to relevant policy-makers |  | 4.3 Who is responsible for nutrition education of the public |  | 4.4 Is there any form of regular consultation between the Ministry of Health & the Ministry of Agriculture on matters related to nutrition |  | 4.5 Is there any form of regular intersectoral consultation between different governmental, private or voluntary sectors <sup>36</sup> |  |
|--------------|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|              | National Food Administration  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|              | University of Agricultural Sciences   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |