

# Policy Options for a National Food Strategy

## About the National Food Strategy

The process of designing a [National Food Strategy](#) is being led by Defra non-executive director Henry Dimbleby. The Terms of Reference for the strategy have been released, along with a call for evidence that will inform the strategy's objectives and vision, and subsequent policy proposals that are envisaged by Spring 2020.

## About Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming

Sustain is the UK's alliance for better food and farming, a UK charity bringing together hundreds of third-sector, business groups, local authorities and communities at national and local level to improve the food we eat and the way it is produced, so that it is better for people and the planet. We champion policies to improve children's health; farmer and food worker livelihoods; and the impact of production on the environment and nature; grassroots work to alleviate food poverty, support community growing and enterprise skills; and promotion of vibrant food cultures, good food education and traditional production techniques.

The following paper stems from a consultation with Sustain's members, staff, and working parties of subject experts. Over Spring 2019 these networks were asked to feed in policy options, which were then put back out to Sustain's membership for comments and prioritisation. The points in bold were those that came out top in this process.

These are detailed under the headings of the Strategy's own Terms of Reference, although many policies speak to multiple priorities.

## 1. Deliver safe, healthy, affordable food, regardless of where people live or how much they earn

The public sector feeds millions of UK citizens every day through school meals, hospital food and meals on wheels. It also encourages good nutrition through support and advice. The Government should officially recognise the Right to Food, particularly for children and establish a watchdog to ensure the right is realised, and implement the following to improve access to good food:

- Mandatory public sector catering standards (such as Food for Life Served Here bronze award as a minimum). For example, only 50% of NHS hospitals currently meet the Government's food standards.
- The UK should become a leader on breastfeeding rates, with actions and investment to support an increase so that 75% of infants at 6-8 weeks receive some breastmilk and 50% are exclusively breastfed, with support to continue breastfeeding throughout the first year.
- Eligibility for Free School Meals should be extended to all children in low-income families, with Government insisting that all meal providers allow unspent allowance to be rolled over. Low-income households are currently missing out on £65 million in Free School Meals each year.
- The Department of Health should improve Healthy Start uptake, as currently low income households are currently missing out on £28.6million of unspent vouchers. No one should lose free fruit, veg and milk vouchers when switching to Universal Credit, and the value should increase to reflect the rising cost of food. Any unspent budget nationally should be reinvested in promotion and training so that local public health teams are well equipped to ensure all eligible pregnant women and children receive the vouchers.
- An ambitious plan for installation of tens of thousands of drinking fountains nationally would help increase water availability and reduce plastic bottle waste. Tooth decay is the number one reason for children being admitted to hospital (including 26,000 5-9 years olds), with sugar and fizzy drinks being key culprits.
- **A national standard for eligibility for meals on wheels should be introduced, with a duty on government to see this provided, reversing the cut of a third of services over the last three years.**

The Soft Drinks levy has raised approximately £340m in its first year, but there are no commitments for continued ring-fencing of this money for health promotion as promised. The sugary drinks levy should be extended to other products that contribute to poor nutrition, with levy proceeds ring-fenced to improve children's health, particularly where the Government's voluntary reformulation targets have not been met.

Polling by YouGov shows that 69% of people agree that children seeing junk food marketing contributes to childhood obesity, and 72% support a 9pm watershed on junk food advertising during popular family TV shows. National and local government can shift food culture by more targeting of food that is high in fat, salt, and/or sugar, and promoting alternatives:

- Increase restrictions on promotion and marketing of unhealthy food to children, including sports sponsorship and use of child-friendly characters.
- Give more power to local areas to impose restrictions on unhealthy food advertising to meet local priorities.
- **Make food education mandatory in all schools - no exemptions**

## 2. Is robust in the face of future shocks

Commitments to increasing UK production of healthy, climate friendly foods would help create a robust food system that mitigates climate change, restores nature, and contributes to health and wellbeing, prioritising the following:

- **Make horticulture more attractive for farmers by strengthening public sector food procurement rules for health and sustainability, making it mandatory to use fresh and seasonal fruit and veg in schools, NHS hospitals and government funded food schemes, such as the £40m fruit and veg in schools scheme, and £160m Healthy Start fruit and veg vouchers budget. This would pump prime British food producers and support thriving local supply chains.**
- With 59 being the average age of farmers, introduce tax breaks for those who make some land available to new entrants or enterprises supporting new entrants, especially horticulture and orchards.
- Doubling the amount of UK orchards as part of a plan of investment in horticulture, and increasing opportunities for community-supported agriculture and community food growing.
- Innovative national education and promotional campaigns for eating seasonal British fruit and veg are needed to increase healthy and climate-friendly diets. There is plenty of scope for import substitution. The UK imports £11.1bn of produce that is in season in UK. Only 17% of fruit consumed in the UK is produced domestically, and self-sufficiency in veg has dropped from 83% 30 years ago to 54%.
- Support the development of community food growing sector to be able to meet and stimulate demand, and deliver public health outcomes in towns and cities, as well as provide routes to employment, build communities and create sustainable models of funding.

We should also encourage resilience by diversity throughout the supply chain, by means of:

- **A national action plan for increasing retail diversity with investment in street and covered markets, co-ops, box schemes, independent and symbol group shops towards a 10% target of food retail share. Every £1 spent with a local supplier returns £1.76 to the local economy.**
- Allocate funds to research, training and on-farm trialling to significantly increase the genetic diversity of crop, seed and livestock breed varieties grown and reared in the UK, which are suited for agroecological production - to support resilience in farming, enhanced biodiversity and healthier, more varied diets. Scientific bodies are warning that lack of crop diversity undermines the resilience of the global food system to changes in climate, weather, water and disease.
- Bringing into UK law the new EU directive on unfair trading practices, which often squeeze smaller businesses out of the market, as they are less able to cope with late payments and cancelled orders.

## 3. Restore and enhance the natural environment for the next generation in this country;

The UK food system needs to operate within a 'one planet diet', linked to the UK's commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, also addressing the public's rapidly growing awareness and concern about the 'climate and nature emergency' we are all facing. Systematic action necessitates reporting on measurable targets, such as halving food loss and waste. All existing and future Government investment and spend on food and farming should be assessed against its impact on climate change and the natural environment, by:

- **Ensuring the £3bn of farm support is used to deliver on a wide range of public goods, including whole farm systems like organic that deliver multiple outcomes, including public health and soil health.**
- Prioritising sustainability in work funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (repatriating between £6bn and £10bn of EU structural funds; the Food and Drink Sector deal; and funding for research and innovation).
- **Applying mandatory climate- and nature-friendly standards to all of the £2.4bn public money spent annually on food in public sector catering, including less and better meat and dairy; more seasonal fruit and veg; zero waste; certified sustainable ingredients; and verifiably sustainable fish.**
- Providing funding (and other incentives, promotion and market access) to stimulate lower impact sustainable fishing and fish farming methods. The market for sustainable fish is growing ten times faster than for fish with questionable sustainability credentials, and British fishers lose out on £62 million business because they are not able to demonstrate robust sustainability.
- Consulting on the introduction of a pesticide tax to drive more sustainable use of pesticides in the future, with revenue reinvested into supporting sustainable agriculture.

We must systematically shift the market towards sustainably produced food, recognising that leaving this to individual consumer choice is an inadequate response to the challenges facing us, by:

- **Committing to a plan for increased sale of organic and other agro-ecologically produced food to 10% of the retail and foodservice market, and progressively more over time.**
- **Changing the advice on what people should eat by, for example, updating UK dietary guidelines to include sustainability as a core indicator.**

#### 4. Is built upon a resilient, sustainable and humane agriculture sector

Supporting farmers to make the transition to more sustainable, agro-ecological, climate-friendly production must be treated as an absolute priority, and many of the recommendations under other headings are intended to help achieve this aim. We must systematically build a profitable market for sustainably produced food. We also need:

- A target of at least 10% of land certified organic by 2030, with investment to help farms to go into conversion, alongside turbo charging other climate and nature-friendly schemes.
- Tax relief and targeted support for farmers and growers using agro-ecological systems and/or levies and increasing regulation on systems that are ecologically damaging.
- A plan for a net-zero contribution from farming and land use to climate change by 2040.
- **Removal of the ban on using commercial catering waste and surplus food as feed for pigs and chickens; which has vast emissions benefits and has been achieved for half of all food waste in Japan.**

Ensure, where appropriate, British food is recognised internationally for creating a new benchmark for the highest standards of production and transparency. This could be helped by:

- Blanket data collection for all UK fisheries to improve management (costing £30m annually); currently data-poor fisheries miss out on markets because they cannot prove sustainability. Sustainable fisheries could be worth an additional £1.4bn to the UK economy if stocks were allowed to recover.
- A ban on the routine preventative use of antibiotics in groups of healthy animals, and a dramatic cut (sometimes ban) on the farm use of antibiotics critically important to human medicine.
- **Mandatory food labels, especially for meat, fish and dairy, on where and how it is produced and processed, helping to stimulate public awareness, consumer choice and the market for higher welfare food.**

#### 5. Is a thriving contributor to our urban and rural economies, delivering well paid jobs and supporting innovative producers and manufacturers across the country

Thriving local economies need to provide diverse enterprise opportunities, jobs with decent pay and conditions, and access to the natural and other resources necessary to help food producers and enterprises flourish. We need government to support local economies and wider aims of the National Food Strategy, by:

- Ensuring the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (replacing EU structural funds post-Brexit) supports an investment plan for local food infrastructure such as abattoirs, processing facilities, wholesale markets, local food hubs and community-supported agriculture schemes, especially benefiting coastal and rural communities.

- Reallocating fishing quotas to benefit small-scale fleet, coastal communities and based on robust sustainability of marine management and fishing methods. The UK government currently grants a third of its licences to just five large fishing businesses. Conversely the small-scale fleet, which makes up 79% of fishers, only receives 2% of quota.
- **Support for local and artisan producers by the maintenance of current protected name status (protected geographical indications and designations of origin) that is worth £1bn to the UK economy, and introduction of legal definitions for food names and marketing terms, e.g. in bread having definitions for sourdough, artisan, wholegrain, heritage, craft, and fresh – which could lead to more jobs per loaf.**
- **Support for, and acknowledgement of the role of, food partnerships to translate the National Food Strategy into action in local areas and communities across the UK, via the thriving Sustainable Food Cities network.**

We also need support for good quality jobs in the food sector including wages, standards, skills and training, by:

- Creation of a plan, with policy and investment commitments, for the improvement of food skills through the food system and general public.
- Creation of a national business advice programme targeting SME food businesses and social enterprises to enable systematic growth in this area, focused on sustainability e.g. those enterprises creating viable market outlets for agro-ecologically produced food.
- Targets for adoption of certified (real) Living Wage employers across the whole food sector, with tax breaks for those companies renewing certification.
- Establishment of a new collective bargaining body to protect existing farm workers in England and enhance the status of farm work to attract recruits into the industry.

## 6. Delivers all this in an efficient and cost-effective way

We believe the current food system values efficiency and minimising prices over the other terms of reference for the National Food Strategy. And yet with one third of food produced going to waste, for a range of reasons including perceived consumer cosmetic preferences and avoidance of empty shelves, inefficiency seems to be built into mainstream supply chains.

So how can the National Food Strategy ensure our current food system better marries these priorities together with considerations such as the environment, health and livelihoods. It is crucial then that the National Food Strategy does all that it can to maintain or improve standards relating to these issues, that might be undermined by trade deals which might allow cheaper produce of lower standards to be imported.

International trade in food provides great opportunities to support lower income countries and keep UK diets varied. However, 71% UK consumers have said they wouldn't knowingly buy food of lower standards in the future, even if it was cheaper. We must ensure that food imports support and do not undermine high standards, by:

- **Ensuring imported food is subject to high climate, sustainability, safety, health, animal welfare, labour, and antibiotics stewardship standards, certainly no lower than those that apply to domestically produced food.**
- **Ensuring that trade deals are transparent and are subject to proper scrutiny.**