

Submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review, September 2020

Putting food and farming at the heart of the economic recovery

From Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming

Sustain is the UK alliance for better food and farming. We represent around 100 not-for-profit national organisations and many more at local level. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Sustain and its member organisations have been supporting community groups, food enterprises, food aid groups, schools and their caterers, local authorities, and government and industry liaison on the emergency food response. Sustain campaigns include the Food Poverty UK network, Food Power, Sustainable Food Places, Sugar Smart UK and Veg Cities.

This submission complements that made by our Children's Food Campaign presenting five ways the Comprehensive Spending Review can improve children's access to healthy food.

Contact: Ben Reynolds, Deputy Chief Executive of Sustain, email: ben@sustainweb.org.
<https://www.sustainweb.org/>

Summary of recommendations

From fishing to food factories, from barns to bars, food and farming is the UK's largest employer, with 4.1 million people working in this sector in 2018. Or put a different way it's 1 in 7 of the UK's workforce. It has the biggest manufacturing sector (valued at £121 billion)ⁱ with food exports valued above £23 billionⁱⁱ. In previous recessions it has been one of the most resilient sectors, and is likely to prove so again as we move into a period of economic instability, which many predict will see mass unemployment. We have put together a set of recommendations where food, farming and fishing can help with an economic recovery, whilst also delivering on Government's other aims to tackle the climate and nature emergency, obesity and diet related disease and improve social welfare. We are recommending that Government:

- Ensures that all older people across England can access at least one good meal every day in part by investment in a modernised meals on wheels service.
- Maintains the level of funding for farm support at £3billion for ELMS beyond this Parliament, as well as investment in key areas where growth would support Government's green economic recovery aims, including new entrants, horticulture, peri-urban agriculture, and infrastructure for agro-ecological production.
- Creates a package of support, including financial aid, to support food SMEs to rebuild and increase diversity in the supply chain
- Invests to recover marine ecosystems and in turn to create jobs in the domestic fishing industry and provide a sink for carbon in our oceans.

These recommendations are particularly focused on achieving the Comprehensive Spending Review's priorities of strengthening the UK's economic recovery from COVID-19 by prioritising jobs and skills which would support the government's ambition to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The proposals also aim to improve the nation's health, in turn supporting the NHS, whilst also aiming to level up economic opportunity across all nations and regions of the country.

Recommendation 1: Older People's Food

That Government ensures that all older people across England can access at least one good meal every day in part by investment in a modernised meals on wheels service.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic more than 1.3 million people over 65 in the UK were malnourished or at risk of malnutritionⁱⁱⁱ. Yet in recent years provision of meals on wheels has drastically declined to less than half of local authority areas. We estimate that a £7.5million annual contribution across 150 upper tier local authorities would kickstart a revitalised nationwide service, removing the current postcode lottery. This would lead to dispersed employment across the UK and provide huge savings for the NHS.

As such we are recommending that Government commits to ensuring all older and disabled adults have access to at least one good meal every day. This should be delivered by a) a statutory requirement on local authorities to meet this need and b) the necessary government investment. Our desired outcome is that investment in a modernised meals on wheels service would provide a valuable strand of social care, create dispersed employment around the UK, reduce costs for the NHS, and provide improved care for older and disabled people.

Policy rationale: Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic more than 1.3 million people over 65 in the UK were malnourished or at risk of malnutrition. A lack of preventative measures such as meals on wheels services lead to vicious cycles: lack of nourishment increases frailty, which in turn makes people less able to provide nourishing food for themselves. The cost of older people's malnutrition to the public purse is well documented; it accounts for nearly £20bn of health and social care spending in England alone^{iv}, due for example to falls, hospital readmissions, and more frequent GP visits. Conversely where meals on wheels services are available, they help facilitate independence, good mental and physical health, connectedness to community and risk mitigation, as well as faster and more successful recovery. These multiple benefits are incurred because meals on wheels are frequently delivered as a 'more than a meal' approach. Deliveries include welfare checks, regular social interaction, and are offered alongside complimentary services such as nutrition and hydration screening, falls prevention and 'active aging' classes.

Costs: We estimate that an ongoing contribution to delivery could be roughly £50,000 per area, depending on the local population size and context. Applied across the 150 upper tier local authorities in England this would cost approximately £7.5million annually. This would hugely outweigh NHS savings alone, and a significant proportion of customers would also be able to pay in part or full for the service.

Benefits: Sustain [research](#) with local authority staff identified a general consensus that meals on wheels services are preventative and provide multiple health and social benefits, and are cost-saving when public expenditure is looked at holistically^v. A recent study has found that over 90% of recipients receiving a Nutritional and Wellbeing Service, offered by the HILS meals on wheels service, maintained or improved their nutritional status over time. The proportion of recipients identified by the Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool (MUST) as being at low risk of malnutrition improved noticeably from 57% to 73%.^{vi} If meals are procured and produced in accordance with the Government Buying Standard then any

investment by government will aid other government aims to encourage healthy food buying from sustainable British producers.

Deliverability of proposal: Across the UK examples of robust, cost-effective and dignified meals on wheels services exist. For examples, see Sustain's research on [national services](#) and [London services](#), as well as the examples below^{vii}. The social enterprise [Hertfordshire Independent Living Service \(HILS\)](#) is available to any Hertfordshire resident who requires the service. It is supported and part-funded by Hertfordshire County Council and is linked with adult social care services and hospital discharge teams. HILS focuses on enabling independence through a 'more than a meal' approach, which includes welfare checks and a range of complimentary services.

Fit with Comprehensive Spending Review Priorities: This policy would meet CSR priorities as follows:

- *Strengthening the UK's economic recovery from COVID-19 by prioritising jobs and skills* - The policy would create jobs across the UK. Jobs in this sector predominantly attract people previously employed in retail and hospitality, and require minimum formal education or qualifications, so will benefit people currently at high risk of unemployment.
- *Improving outcomes in public services, including supporting the NHS* - Meals on wheels services are preventative public services which alleviate stress from related services, especially the NHS. Older people are at particular risk from Covid-19 and flu. Policies and services which enable older people to self-isolate or minimise contact with others will be vital in the coming months, as are policies which improve the overall physical and mental health of older people through nutrition. Meals on wheels service decrease hospital admissions, ambulance call outs, and GP visits.

Recommendation 2: Farming:

That Government should maintain the level of funding for farm support at £3billion for ELMS beyond this Parliament, as well as investment in key areas where growth would support Government's green economic recovery aims, including new entrants, horticulture, peri-urban agriculture, and infrastructure for agro-ecological production.

Farming and land use – Changing the way we farm and use land could allow the UK to produce more of our own food, which is better quality, and provides more land-based and food processing jobs. This is the perfect time to do so. The government is embarking on a new system for how it supports farming as the UK leaves the EU Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). The proposed new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) in England, farm support schemes in the nations, and other policies could deliver on these aims. If well designed, the majority of farmed land could and should be delivering environmental, heritage, public engagement, and other outcomes with taxpayer support. There should be a commitment to maintain the current level of farm support at £3 billion per year for ELMS beyond this Parliament to provide long-term security and farm business planning opportunities into agroecology.

Sustainable Productivity - There should be a commitment to provide a productivity grant scheme such as Defra's 2018 'Adding Value to Agri-Food' RDPE scheme^{viii}. This should be

targeted towards sustainability and supporting 'food hub' and on-farm processing infrastructure^x. We need the new support schemes to focus on the whole farmed environment, to support agro-ecological approaches, to cover all farming sectors (including those not previously receiving much support such as horticulture), and to provide training advice and demonstration for farmers - an essential element for the major transitions ahead. These should also help facilitate farmer collaboration in delivering outcomes which is likely to lead to greater farmer cooperation in other areas such as sharing costs of inputs or in working together to build better market opportunities. Such agro-environmental schemes can be significant in terms of socio-economic impacts. A study by Gloucester University found that every £1 spent on similar environmental farming stewardship schemes delivers £1.42 in economic benefits to the local community^x.

New enterprise and new entrants into farming - It is particularly crucial also to provide support for new entrants into farming through incentives for those with land or leaving the sector to pass farms onto new farmers or through protection of existing tools such as the County small holdings estate (which are being sold off by local authorities). We need a specific young farmers' support scheme which should include funding for farmers to upskill in agroecology approaches. This can include an apprenticeship grant (for example: £17,800 per year per person for advanced or degree-level^{xi}) and a postgraduate scholarship (for example: £11,222 per person^{xii}) scheme targeted for young people who want to become agroecology farmers. The Landworkers Alliance estimate that £5 million would provide start up grants for 100 new entrants at an average grant of £50,000. If this program were to run for 10 years we would see 1000 new farms supported for a total cost of £50 million^{xiii}.

Incentives to release land for sustainable horticulture near cities. Increasing sustainable horticulture would deliver more jobs and make our farming system more diverse, particularly if focused near to the market and workforce in our towns and cities. This will not happen without investment, support and training alongside a shift in supply chain demand to support growth in production. Much of the land that could be growing food is currently underutilised and often becomes degraded. At present the UK has a large production deficit in the fruit and vegetables it consumes, including products we can grow well here. We need to incentivise making more land accessible and available for sustainable food growing at a variety of scales, including freeing up land for environmentally beneficial fruit and nut tree planting, community food and small farm enterprises, especially in horticulture. Small scale agriculture appears not to have experienced the same urgent staff shortages as larger farms as they provide quality, year-round jobs compatible with family life. Creating investment that leads to releasing land for these enterprises, especially council owned land nearer to urban conurbations, could also provide access to land to respond to the demand from those living in cities, otherwise unable to pursue a career in farming. Peri-urban farming in London, Bristol and other cities has shown how it can support skills development. This could be delivered within the schemes above and/or via an access to land loan scheme of £20 million, at a low interest rate of 2% and on a 15 year repayment, to catalyse the creation of 160 new agro-ecological holdings for new entrants^{xiv}.

Recommendation 3: Food Supply

That Government creates a package of support, including financial aid, to support food SMEs to rebuild and increase diversity in the supply chain

Retail and supply diversity: A focused drive on supporting supply chain diversity particularly in food retail SMEs will help reverse some of the decline in this sector and with it open up many new job opportunities as well as revitalise local economies 33. A target e.g. of

10% market share for non-multiples, accompanied by policies to achieve this would drive development of new routes to market and a growth in street, farmer and covered markets (see also market proposal below), co-ops, box schemes, independent, local on-line and symbol group shops and/or short supply chains. This would help address many of the problems for smaller farm businesses who have no option but to grow or go out of business in order to supply fewer larger supply chains. It would also support local economies and jobs and infrastructure particularly in rural communities. A special focus should be given to increasing the number of Better Food Traders that are, by mission and design, social enterprises that are able to deliver a fair system for producers and workers, as well as the planet. Some of the policies needed to support this are detailed in our briefing on food retail diversity.^{xv} The need to create a more diverse food supply is a key part of the vision in the National Food Strategy, part 1^{xvi}. This diversity would ensure resilience against different types of future crisis, allowing for flexibility and innovation, where a more consolidated supply chain may be brittle or present a higher risk should any part of it fail.

Markets: Markets are one of many sectors that will be building back from a virtual standstill during lockdown, with roughly two thirds of markets closed for long periods even after Government had clarified that most markets could open for essential traders^{xvii}. With the predicted wave of unemployment we need not only for all these markets to be supported to reopen, but new ones too, better distributed across the UK as they provide flexible spaces to support small or start up enterprises. Despite having almost 50,000 towns and cities in the UK, there are only just over 1000 markets^{xviii}.

We need an ambitious long-term plan that would spread the opportunities that markets provide. If only 10% of UK towns and cities had a market, this would mean almost 4000 new markets. A slightly more conservative quadrupling of markets could lead to 100,000 new business opportunities, or at least expansion of (32,400) existing businesses, not to mention the extra trade created for nearby businesses on market days. This will require funding, and buy-in particularly from local government, and most importantly it needs high profile national leadership to give this vision the profile needed for it to succeed.

Recommendation 4: Fishing

That Government invests to recover marine ecosystems and in turn to create jobs in the domestic fishing industry and provide a sink for carbon in our oceans.

This can be done by investing in two things: 1) paying fishers to catch less in the short term to recover stocks as quickly as possible and 2) funding improvement projects and sustainability certification.

At the moment, demand for UK fish is very low and market prices are depressed. In some cases it makes sound economic sense to financially support fishers to leave fish in the sea for now, so ecosystems and stocks can recover while the market recovers as well. The quicker our fish stocks recover, the sooner we will see the benefits and such investment would give much-needed support to coastal fishing communities like Cornwall, the east coast of England, west Wales and northern Scotland.

Recovering fish stocks would significantly increase fish catches in the medium term (probably by nearly 30 per cent^{xix}), create thousands of jobs^{xx} and improve the marketability

of our fish. These jobs would be in some of the most economically deprived parts of the UK. The additional tourism^{xxi} and recreational fishing^{xxii} from thriving marine wildlife could add another 4000 jobs. It would also help a fast-growing and low-investment carbon sink, as marine kelp forests sequester up to 20 times more carbon per acre than forests on land^{xxiii}.

The cost to deliver these proposals fully would be just over £350 million initially, dropping to £220 million in following years, but would increase GDP by an estimated £2billion per year^{xxiv}, but they could be staggered over time or targeted to specific fisheries. This investment would complement the new Fisheries Bill which aims to bring all fish stocks up to sustainable levels. The Fisheries Bill is currently going through parliament and will set out the vision for future fishing policy. In light of Covid - which has hit fishing so badly - we believe there is a very strong case for injecting investment into the sector now.

ⁱ DEFRA (2020). Food Statistics in your pocket Summary. GOV.UK

ⁱⁱ FDF (2020). Facts and stats > Stats at a Glance. FDF public site

ⁱⁱⁱ ENHA, BAPEN, ILC-UK (2006). Malnutrition among older people in the community: policy Recommendations for Change

^{iv} Elio M. on behalf of the Malnutrition Action Group of BAPEN and the National Institute for Health Research Southampton Biomedical Research Centre, (2015), The cost of malnutrition in the UK and potential cost savings from nutritional interventions

^v Sustain (2020) Meals on Wheels for the 21st century

https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/meals_on_wheels_for_21st_century/

^{vi} Dewar, M., Dickinson, A., & Smeeton, N. (2020). Tracking and treating malnutrition: A retrospective observational study of the nutritional status of vulnerable people accessing a meals-on-wheels (MOW) service. *Primary Health Care Research & Development*, 21, E19.
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^{vii} Sustain (2018) Meals on wheels: good practice case studies.

https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/meals_on_wheels_good_practice_case_studies/

^{viii} DEFRA (2018) Rural Development Programme for England Countryside Productivity Scheme Adding Value to Agri-food Handbook

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719288/Adding_Value_to_Agri-food_Handbook_v3_nowclosed.pdf

^{ix} Food Research Collaboration (2019) Food Hubs in the UK: Where are we and what next?

<https://foodresearch.org.uk/publications/food-hubs/>

^x DEFRA, CCRI and Natural England (2013) Estimating the Incidental Socio-Economic Benefits of Environmental Stewardship Schemes <http://www.ccri.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/IncidentalSocioEconomic-ImpactsEnvironmental-Stewardship.pdf>

^{xi} UCAS. What is an Average Apprenticeship Wage? Site accessed 24 September 2020

<https://www.ucas.com/understanding-apprenticeships/discover-how-apprenticeships-work/average-apprenticeship-wage>

^{xii} UK Government website. Master's Loan. Site accessed 24 September 2020.

<https://www.gov.uk/masters-loan/what-youll-get>

^{xiii} Landworker's Alliance (2019) Supporting the next generation of farmers.

<https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/New-Entrants.pdf>

^{xiv} *ibid*

^{xv} Sustain (2019) Champion a target of 10% of the UK Grocery market to be from non-multiples

<https://www.sustainweb.org/resources/files/responses/FoodretaildiversityplanNFSCallforEvidencefinal.pdf>

^{xvi} National Food Strategy Part 1. 2020. Notably chapter 6 <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NFS-Part-One-SP-CP.pdf>

^{xvii} National Market Traders Federation Survey 2020 <https://www.nmtf.co.uk/coronavirus/surveys/>

^{xviii} Mission 4 Markets <https://www.mission4markets.uk/>

^{xix} Oceana (2018) More food, more jobs and more money in the UK. Oceana's recipe for fish recovery.

<https://europe.oceana.org/en/publications/reports/more-food-more-jobs-and-more-money-uk-oceanas-recipe-fish-recovery>

^{xx} NEF. Jobs Lost at Sea. https://b.3cdn.net/nefoundation/e966d4ce355b7485c1_a7m6brn5t.pdf

^{xxi} NEF. Turning Back to the Sea. <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/NEF-Blue-New-Deal-AP-HighRes.pdf>

^{xxii} The Angling Trust

<http://data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/Environment,%20Food%20and%20Rural%20Affairs/Scrutiny%20of%20the%20Fisheries%20Bill/Written/93047.html>

^{xxiii} Hurlimann. 2019 How kelp naturally combats global climate change.

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^{xxiv} Natural Capital Committee. The State of Natural Capital: Restoring our Natural Assets. March 2014.

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