



The Food and Fairness Inquiry

The Food Ethics Council wants a fair future for food and farming. It has commissioned an Inquiry to understand what this means in practice for government, businesses and the British public.

1. Terms of reference

Food offers a window onto the perennial challenge of building a fairer society. From fair trade to global hunger, it has seen some of the boldest attempts to promote social justice and some of worst problems of inequality and exploitation.

The Food Ethics Council has commissioned an Inquiry to examine whether, in government, businesses and the public, we are doing enough to ensure food is produced and distributed fairly. What are our responsibilities and what are their limits?

The Inquiry is intended to increase the profile and the clarity of debates about food and fairness. It is prompted by the global food crisis, the controversy over 'food miles' and other issues that have highlighted tensions between fairness and other social, environmental or economic goals.

The Inquiry is led by a committee of sixteen. Half the members are drawn from the Food Ethics Council, a charity that provides independent advice on ethical issues in food and farming (www.foodethicscouncil.org). Half are leading figures from sectors and communities with a stake in food and farming.

The committee will:

- Call for evidence of fairness and injustice in the global food system.
- Examine the root causes of success stories and failures.
- Seek to understand the responsibilities of UK government, businesses and citizens in promoting a fair global food system.
- Report its key findings and recommendations, highlighting consensus and differences between the committee members.

The Inquiry will hold public hearings in September, October and November, reporting in the Spring of 2010.

2. Call for evidence

The committee invites interested parties to submit any written evidence that they consider relevant to the Inquiry. Submissions are welcome at any time up to the **end of 2009**, but the committee is keen to receive evidence as early as possible, in order to make full use of it over the course of the Inquiry.

Written evidence may be submitted electronically or in hard copy. We would prefer to receive evidence as a Rich Text Format (.rtf) document attached to an email message. People submitting evidence should include their name and contact details, stating clearly whether they are writing on behalf of an organisation or in a personal capacity, and whether they wish their evidence to be confidential to the committee. By default, written evidence will be made publicly available.

Please send evidence to:

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To prompt submissions, the committee has identified the following questions and examples of relevant evidence, grouped under two main headings. The questions cover different ways of defining fairness, from approaches which focus on equal outcomes, to others which focus on equal opportunities or on people's power and freedom. We refer to the 'global food system' as a shorthand for the markets, institutions and activities that connect and differentiate people's experiences of food, whether as producers or consumers, across a table or across continents.

1. How fair is the global food system?

1.1. How far does the global food system provide equally for people's **needs and rights**?

Relevant issues include:

- Hunger, malnutrition and food-related ill-health, including health and safety at work in food and farming.
- Relationships between wealth and food consumption.
- Whether food is better seen as a necessity or as a right.
- The contribution of food and farming to quality life.
- Tensions between the rights of consumers and producers.
- The effect of food price levels and volatility on food access.

Examples of relevant evidence:

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- Local, regional, national or global scale statistics on nutrition, disease incidence, workplace health and employment relating to food.
- Qualitative research on food poverty.
- Debates on 'basic needs' and human rights.
- Comparative access to resources and debates on 'ecological space'.
- Statistics or qualitative analysis on vulnerability to shocks such as climatic events or price volatility.
- Well-being indicators and their relationship to food and farming.
- Agriculture and food-related human rights violations included in human rights monitoring reports or evaluations.

1.2. For and against whom does the global food system **discriminate**?

Relevant issues include:

- Differences in the distribution of the benefits and burdens of food and farming systems by gender, ethnicity, nationality, age or other factor.
- Winners and losers from the restructuring of food supply chains and agricultural markets.
- Power relationships between different stakeholders in food and farming.
- The effects of production standards, trade rules and other factors on access to resources and markets.
- Labour exploitation.

Examples of relevant evidence:

- Statistical analysis of differences in income from food or diet according to factors such as gender, ethnicity or age.
- Analysis of inequalities in factors that affect opportunity such as levels of resource use or access to markets.
- Analysis of power, for example using 'value chain analysis'.
- First-hand accounts of discrimination, such as labour exploitation.
- Analysis of the effect of 'ethical' or other quality standards on small suppliers and workers.
- Discussions of how to distinguish between 'difference' and 'discrimination'.

1.3. How does the global food system give people **freedom to shape their own lives**?

Relevant issues include:

- Public participation in food policy decisions.

- Policy initiatives to increase transparency and accountability.
- Private sector measures that enhance participation such as social auditing and multi-stakeholder initiatives.
- Efforts to promote the interests of farmers in the global south such as fair trade.
- International and intergenerational justice.

Examples of relevant evidence:

- Studies of how much control consumers or producers feel they have over their lives.
- Examples of initiatives to involve people in policy, business or community decisions that will affect them.
- Discussions of how actions today can enhance the opportunities facing future generations.

2. **How can people in the UK make the global food system fairer?**

2.1 Where do **controversies or dilemmas** highlight barriers to fairness?

Examples of relevant evidence include case studies and first hand experience of tensions between:

- Different groups of people.
- This generation and future generations.
- Workers in the food industries and worker inequalities in society more generally.
- Economic, social, environmental or animal welfare objectives.

Case studies are encouraged to describe the following elements:

- Fair and unfair outcomes.
- Tensions between social groups or objectives.
- Root causes of tensions and outcomes.
- Levers for change.

2.2. What **factors** cause discrimination?

Examples of relevant evidence:

- Social and cultural analysis of issues such as gender discrimination and racism as they relate to food and farming.
- Political and economic analysis of factors that affect the distribution of power and opportunity in the food system, for example corporate concentration and the deregulation of financial markets.
- Discussions of whether such factors are unique to food and farming.

2.3. Where are there **specific opportunities** to promote social justice?

Examples of relevant evidence:

- Recommendations for government, business or society that would resolve tensions, eliminate discrimination or promote participation in decision-making.
- Examples of opportunities in areas of policy such as finance, competition, trade, labour, innovation and international development.
- Analysis of the capacity of different institutions to influence systematic change.
- Case studies of measures that have promoted social justice in the food and farming sectors, in the UK or other countries.
- Examples of measures that have promoted social justice in other fields and offer lessons for food and farming.

3. Further information

The members of the committee are:

- Helen Browning OBE, Director of Food and Farming: Soil Association; Chair of the Food Ethics Council
- Charlie Clutterbuck, Director: Environmental Practice at Work; Trustee of the Food Ethics Council
- Elizabeth Dowler, Professor of Food and Social Policy in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick; Trustee of the Food Ethics Council
- Jeanette Longfield MBE, Coordinator: Sustain - the alliance for better food and farming; Member of the Food Ethics Council
- Ben Mepham, Special Professor in Applied Bioethics: University of Nottingham; Visiting Professor in Bioethics, University of Lincoln; Member of the Food Ethics Council
- Kevin Morgan, Director: Regeneration Institute, Cardiff University; Member of the Food Ethics Council
- Chris Ritson, Professor of Agricultural Marketing: University of Newcastle upon Tyne; Treasurer of the Food Ethics Council
- Geoff Tansey, Joseph Rowntree Visionary for a Just and Peaceful World; Trustee of the Food Ethics Council
- Andrew Jarvis, Principal: GHK and Senior Research Fellow, Chatham House
- Dr Susan Jebb, Head of Nutrition and Health Research: MRC Human Nutrition Research
- Harriet Lamb, Chief Executive Officer: Fairtrade Foundation

- Melanie Leech, Chief Executive, Food and Drink Federation
- Paul Whitehouse, Chair, Gangmasters Licensing Authority
- Richard Macdonald, Director General, National Farmers' Union
- Andrew Opie, Food Policy Director, British Retail Consortium
- John Vidal, Environment Editor, The Guardian

Alongside this Inquiry, the New Economics Foundation is undertaking a research project called 'An institutional analysis of social justice within the UK food system'. The Food Ethics Council and the New Economics Foundation have established a Joint Initiative on Food and Social Justice to create a shared network of expertise relevant to the two projects.

This Inquiry has been made possible by funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

For further information about this Inquiry, please contact:

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