

Food Ethics Council
Submission to National Food Strategy for England call for evidence

The design and operation of food systems has potential to cause good or harm. Urgent, joined-up responses are needed to ‘knowns’ e.g. global heating, biodiversity loss, diet-related disease, hunger and malnutrition. To serve current and future generations, UK’s food system needs to be sustainable and resilient, with ethics at its centre¹, and diversity in diets and nature.

EMBED OVERARCHING FRAMEWORK AND PRINCIPLES - to increase policy coherence, fairness, long-termism and resilience

- **Base the strategy on the RIGHT TO FOOD** - enshrine the right to food in law, acknowledging government’s responsibility to ensure everyone can access adequate, sustainable, healthy and culturally appropriate food.
- **Use FOOD SOVEREIGNTY framework** – “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” – from this, layer a suite of policies
- **Embrace AGROECOLOGY** - Lead the transition to biodiverse agroecology, crucially underpinned with significant, targeted investment and learning lessons from leading countries e.g. France and its Agroecology Project.
- **Adopt a ‘TRUE COST PLUS’ approach**, internalising externalities associated with ways food is produced and consumed; **plus** – to ensure food is accessible to all - measures to get more people into meaningful employment, real living wages and properly functioning social security system
- **Commit to PRECAUTIONARY AND POLLUTER PAYS PRINCIPLES**

A MENU FOR CHANGE: TEN BIG IDEAS

We also encourage implementing strong recommendations from RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission and the People’s Food Policy² - and propose ten big ideas for National Food Strategy (‘NFS’) to transform UK food systems³.

1. COMMIT TO, AND DELIVER ON, BOLD, WORLD-LEADING TARGETS

- **Ensure UK meets, and plays a leading role in others’ meeting, international commitments**, including but not limited to SDGs, Right to Food and Paris Climate Agreement.
- **Commit to UK being in top five of Food Sustainability Index⁴ by 2025**
- **Introduce bold targets on healthy, sustainable diets in relation to public procurement of food** – to build sustainable, diverse food and farming markets and confidence to invest. Learn from world-leading examples in France (at least half of all food bought by the public sector must be organic or locally-produced or come with quality label, by 2022) and Denmark (60% organic by 2020).
- **Set a target to end household food insecurity in UK by 2030** – including incorporating relevant findings from Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty⁵

¹ We recognise wellbeing, autonomy and justice as core values.

² <https://www.peoplesfoodpolicy.org/>

³ Note – We assume planned bills such as the Fisheries Bill and Agriculture Bill (underpinned by a public money for public goods approach) are introduced, hence not covered here.

⁴ <http://foodsustainability.eiu.com/>

⁵ <http://foodandpoverty.org.uk/>

- **Commit to world-leading position on farm animal welfare**, with mix of input and outcome measures – crucially including welfare of aquatic creatures. Farm animals are entitled to a life worth living and humane death.

Embed plans to deliver on targets.

- 2. ALIGN RESEARCH STRATEGIES WITH THE NFS**, so food and farming research (agriculture, horticulture, social sciences, public health and fisheries) supports delivery of NFS. Restructure research priorities (including UKRI, Defra) and funding to agroecological-based, open access and link farming systems to promote nutritious, biodiverse food production. Ensure inclusive research setting processes, transparent research agenda and research that enables a paradigm shift to fair, healthy, humane and sustainable food systems.
- 3. INTRODUCE REGULATION AND INCENTIVES TO TRANSFORM OUR FOOD ENVIRONMENTS**
 - **Rigorously explore the idea of a tax on ultra-processed food.** Over half of food bought in UK is ‘ultra-processed’⁶ 14.2% in France⁷. Any such tax should have clear definitions; revenue ringfenced and used to support those worst affected⁸; the benefits clearly communicated to the public⁹; link it to an existing mechanism (e.g. VAT) or introduce it separately; and ensure poorest are supported/ empowered to participate in fair food systems.
 - **Use fiscal measures to incentivise a transition to less intensive livestock production systems that are climate, nature-friendly and not reliant on routine use of antibiotics or animal feed that drives deforestation** e.g. import tariffs on feedstuffs, carbon taxes, nitrogen taxes and subsidies. This would need detailed consideration in light of WTO rules.
 - **Introduce strong regulation on packaging and food and drink claims**, in what is allowed or not (e.g. ban cartoon animations used on pack to market unhealthy products to children) and strictly enforce.
 - **Introduce method of production labelling for meat and dairy.**
 - **Promote and support breastfeeding.** Develop comprehensive National Infant Feeding Strategy and implementation plan, including actions to promote, protect and support breastfeeding in all relevant policy areas, as advocated by First Steps Nutrition Trust.
- 4. GIVE CITIZENS A GENUINE SAY IN FOOD POLICY** e.g. through citizens’ assemblies and juries to consider contentious issues and hold government to account.
- 5. SUPPORT BRITISH FARMING**
 - **Recreate an independent, free-to-use advisory service to translate research outcomes to best agroecological practice and support policy objectives**
 - **Invest in UK horticulture and support transition to ‘only the best’ livestock, meat & dairy** - We support RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission *“Healthier and life-enhancing diets mean more and better fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts and wholegrain food, less and better meat and dairy, with livestock products coming from climate and nature-friendly production, and zero food waste.”*¹⁰

⁶ As defined by Monteiro CA, Cannon G, Levy RB et al. NOVA. The star shines bright. [Food classification. Public health] World Nutrition January-March 2016, 7, 1-3, 28-3

⁷ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/public-healthnutrition/article/household-availability-of-ultraprocessed-foods-and-obesity-in-nineteen-european-countries/D63EF7095E8EFE72BD825AFC2F331149/core-reader#>

⁸ to help everyone, including those on low incomes, to eat well in a dignified way; and support farmers and producers to transition towards healthy, sustainable food systems.

⁹ e.g. learning from Mexican food tax where revenue earned went towards (highly visible) water fountains in public areas

¹⁰ RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (2019) https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/images/projects/ffcc/1.-our-future-in-the-land_executive-summary_july19.pdf

6. INTRODUCE MEASURES TO TACKLE POWER AND FAIRNESS CONCERNS

- **Extend regulation to entire supply chain**, in the mode of Groceries Code Adjudicator – whose remit and powers should be increased - to tackle unfair purchasing practices in food retail sector
- **Measures to allow small food/ farming businesses to thrive** and short food chains to flourish, provide environmental, social and local economic benefits
- **Invest in establishing local/ regional food system infrastructure** e.g. local (and/ or mobile) abattoirs

7. ENSURE TRADE STANDARDS DO NOT UNDERCUT DOMESTIC STANDARDS

c.70% of environmental footprint of UK food falls outside of UK's borders. It is vital to take an internationalist approach and ensure high consumption and production standards, with fair and environmentally sustainable import and export regulations.

8. Introduce equivalent of Scotland's GOOD FOOD NATION BILL to encourage joined-up action

9. Introduce equivalent to Wales' WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT – to ensure impacts of future generations are considered in decision-making.

10. EMBED FOOD SUSTAINABILITY INTO EDUCATION AND LEARNING

- Ensure comprehensive education on all aspects of food (farming, cooking and healthy, sustainable diets) embedded in curriculum for all children and young people, and that Ofsted recognises school leadership.
- Develop international food sustainability learning exchange to share inspiring examples of holistic policy approaches and practice with a positive impact on food sustainability.