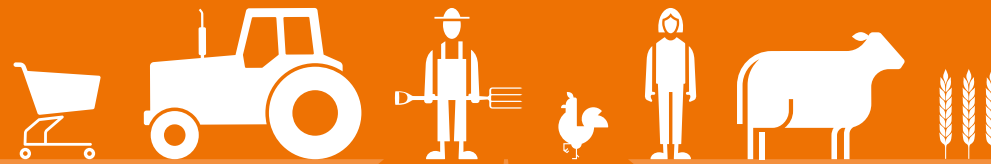


On the road to food justice

A framework for a fair food future



Food Ethics Council

Each day we rely on complex global food systems to put food on our plates. These food systems can bring much good to our lives, like nutritious food, decent livelihoods, and careful land stewardship. They can also cause a range of harms, leaving many in perpetual food insecurity, increasing obesity, eroding the Earth's natural resources, exacerbating climate change, and preventing many farmed animals from living a good life (or having a humane death).

These harms are not distributed equally. This results in food systems which benefit some to the detriment of many others. How we grow, process, manufacture, distribute, market, and advertise food has unequal consequences for different actors, people, groups, animals and the planet. A just food system is one in which these inequities are alleviated, and which serves all humans and non-humans alike, now and for generations to come.

In 2018, then UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, [Philip Alston, wrote of the UK that](#) "14 million people, a fifth of the population, live in poverty. Four million of these are more than 50% below the poverty line, and 1.5 million are destitute, unable to afford basic essentials." More recent estimates paint an even more dire picture. [The FSA's 'The Food and You' survey](#) of household food insecurity in England, Wales and Northern Ireland found that 10% of respondents lived with marginal food security and a further 10% with low or very low food security.

As with the rest of the world, COVID-19 has and will continue to exacerbate household food insecurity in the UK and beyond – both in terms of number and level of insecurity of those experiencing it, pushing more people into higher risk situations.

How do we build justice into our food systems? How do we make sure the benefits of these systems are equally distributed and that all human and non-humans are protected from harm?

The first step is understanding the diverse range of injustices manifest in current food systems. In 2010, the Food Ethics Council organised a Food and Fairness Inquiry, drawing together senior people from a wide range of organisations working in different parts of the food sector. This Inquiry considered evidence from expert witnesses at public hearings and written submissions of the multiple, diverse ways unjust practices manifested in the food system. The Fairness Framework was produced to help identify these injustices [in a report](#) which laid out a series of recommendations to the UK government to embed justice in food and farming policymaking.

The Committee agreed on three key challenges present in the food system: food security, sustainability, and (public) health. The Fairness Framework considers three aspects of social justice within these challenges: 'fair shares' or equality of outcome; 'fair play' or equality of opportunity; and 'fair say' or autonomy and voice. **A decade on, the Food Ethics Council is clear that this rich, detailed investigation of a wide range of food issues is as topical as ever, not least because the injustices in the food system have been exacerbated rather than alleviated.**

Tackling the many challenges in food and farming and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, in particular ending poverty and hunger, require unprecedented levels of international cooperation for the transformation of food systems.

However, multilateralism has been breaking down in recent years. The three core tenets of food justice are being undermined by many national and corporate actors, which are allowing excessive increases in corporate power.

The nature of the imminent Brexit post-EU settlement and terms of associated trade deals will greatly influence how well the aims of food justice are met in the UK and how the UK influences food justice internationally.

Bringing a food justice lens and using the fairness framework can be powerful when considering potential solutions (including policy ideas). A just approach to workers' rights, social and environmental standards, the Right to Food, ending household food insecurity at home and abroad, transformative food and agricultural policies that address the challenges of the climate crisis, biodiversity, biodiversity loss and healthy dietary patterns, can be enhanced and clarified by using this food justice lens. Doing so can tease out the contradictions and synergies that have to be addressed.

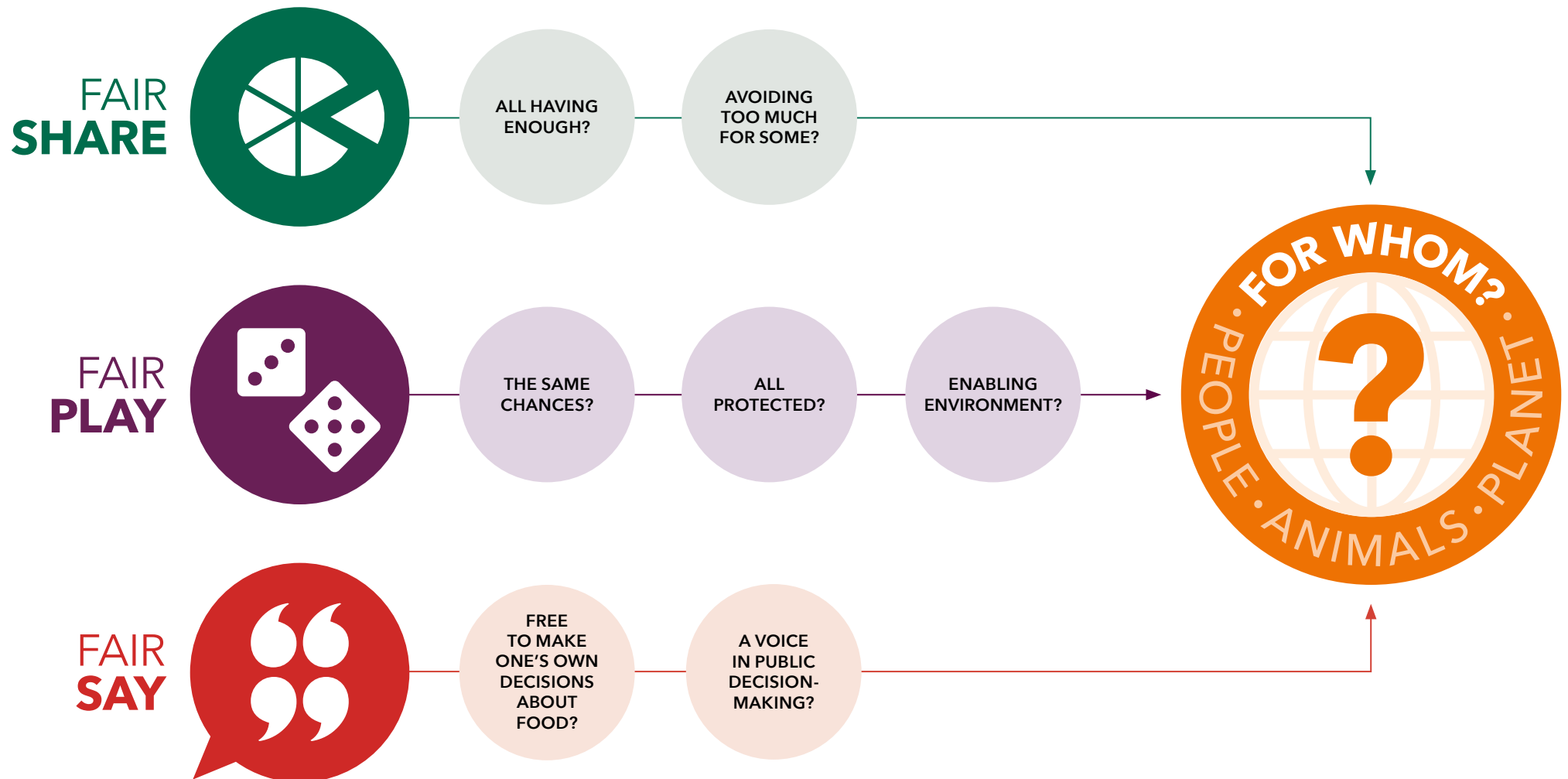
The Fairness Framework serves as a practical tool to empower individuals and organisations in the food sector to understand how multiple injustices manifest. This is the first step to adjusting our practices, programmes, and perspectives to better eliminate these injustices. In light of the current pandemic, and the momentum around #BuildBackBetter, this framework is a timely and relevant instrument to help us all build more just and resilient food systems.

The Fairness Framework

This framework encourages us to consider whether:

- all have enough, whilst avoiding some having too much ('fair share');
- all are protected and have the same chances, supported by an enabling environment ('fair play');
- all are free to make their own decisions about food and have sufficient voice e.g. in public decision-making ('fair say').

For each of these different aspects of fairness in the food system, it is important to consider the question 'for whom is it fair (or unfair)'?



Guiding Questions

These questions all apply to many other aspects of human well-being beyond food; the examples below are specifically relevant to or about food.



ALL HAVING ENOUGH?

Who (or what) is not getting a fair share of positive food outcomes e.g. sufficient food for a healthy life; good jobs in the sector; farmed animals allowed to live a good life? Are workers at all stages of the food supply chain being sufficiently rewarded for their input? What policy environment would empower people so that all have sufficient access to good food outcomes?

AVOIDING TOO MUCH FOR SOME?

Are 'rewards' fairly distributed? Who (person, group, country or organisation) is getting more than their fair share? What measures/policies would help ensure no one has more than their fair share?



THE SAME CHANCES?

How can we ensure all have the same opportunities to participate in food systems? What should change so everyone gets the same chances at jobs which ensure access to sufficient, good food?

ALL PROTECTED?

Are all parties' interests (international, intergenerational and interspecies) taken into account when food decisions are made? How can we ensure rights protect people, planet and animals from harm? How can we enshrine and enforce rights e.g. Right to Food and Farmers & Peasants' Rights in all countries?

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT?

Do existing institutions' practices and policies provide an environment that enables all to access consensually agreed basic goods? How can central and local government create a 'fair play' environment, where people are empowered to solve their own food-related problems?



FREE TO MAKE ONE'S OWN DECISIONS ABOUT FOOD?

How can we ensure people have the capacity to live their own lives? How can we ensure that they are able to participate meaningfully in the food system so that they can take informed action when accessing food? What does informed consent look like in the context of taking decisions related to food?

A VOICE IN PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING?

Who (or what) does not have a voice in public decision-making, including shaping policy relating to food? How can we amplify the voices of those too often excluded or marginalised or represent the voices of those who cannot present their voices (such as future generations and animals)? What does collaborative design in decision-making look like?



The fairness framework in action

How can we use the fairness framework to identify and address food injustices?

Here are five - of many - examples of food injustice in 2020 and how the framework can help us think through. These also highlight some of the emerging, diverse individuals, campaigns and organisations working to eliminate food injustices and build just food systems in a innovative and powerful ways.

We encourage you to learn more about these pioneers so as to get a deeper understanding of the many tenets of food justice and to see how we can be part of supporting food justice movements.





Racial injustice and household food insecurity

Food injustice

Injustices affect different groups in different ways. The 'for whom?' section of the fairness framework prompts us to consider how specific sectors of society are not able to participate in or benefit from the dominant food system as is. Who does not have access to healthy, culturally acceptable food? Who lacks access to the resources needed to produce food (water, land, capital)? Who does not have a voice in political decision-making about food to ensure policy serves their community? These questions are pertinent on the scale of the individual, but crucially relate to an individual's affiliation to different groups such as their gender, faith, class, race, immigration status, (dis)ability, age and geographical location.

For example, the fairness framework helps us unpack the diverse historical and current racial injustices manifest in our food systems. One example of these racial injustices is the disproportionate number of BAME people who experience household food insecurity. In December 2019, some 40% of Black Londoners - over 400,000 people - were experiencing food insecurity. Writing during COVID-19, we anticipate these figures have increased dramatically. Structural racism affects socioeconomic rights such that racially marginalised people are at greater risk of poverty, hunger, poor access to public services and housing. These issues intersect. Generally, low-income areas have a high percentage of fast food outlets and other shops that sell cheap, highly processed foods. Often there are limited public transport opportunities here to other shops and markets.

Opportunity to address this injustice

The Black Lives Matter movement has pushed racial injustice into public consciousness. Increasingly the U.K. is examining its own colonial history and the multiple, complex ways racism manifests in contemporary life, including in the food and farming system. An emerging food justice movement, particularly in urban contexts, draws attention to this and the steps required to eliminate household food insecurity for all.

Who is doing pioneering work to address this injustice?

The African Caribbean Food Heritage Network

Food Power

Sustain's Right to Food campaign

FIAN

Nutrition Watch of the Global Network on the Right to Food and Nutrition

Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)

Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR)

Food Foundation





Young people's voices excluded from decisions about the future of food

Food injustice

There are many voices who do not get a fair say in shaping future policy relating to food. Sometimes this is because we cannot hear their voices directly, such as future generations and farmed animals and fish. This means that there is rarely adequate representation of their interests by organisations advocating for policy change, despite the fact that the issues in hand may affect them directly.

One group whose voices are not heard enough is young people, who should have *at least* an equal voice to older generations. There is an argument that they should have more of a voice in shaping future policies related to food and farming, given that they will have to live with the consequences of past injustices driven by many policy decisions made today (e.g. greenhouse gas emissions from current and past food systems).

Opportunity to address this injustice

Young people should, and can, be given much more of a voice - in decisions about the future of our communities, country, planet, animal welfare and how workers in the food system are treated. This is at last beginning to be recognised.

Who is doing pioneering work to address this injustice?

Food Foundation's Children's Right to Food campaign and Young Food Ambassadors

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act in Wales

Rural Youth Project in Scotland





3 Corporate control of seed

Food injustice

Power in global food and farming systems is concentrated in the hands of a select few, large, international corporations. This manifests in lots of different ways, including through how large agri-food corporations shape the food system for their (shareholders') benefit rather than for the benefit of society (i.e. sustainable and fair). The fairness framework helps us think through the multiple dimensions of injustice that relate to corporate concentration of power.

One such manifestation is corporate control of the global proprietary seed trade. Back in 2009, the four largest seed companies (also major agrochemical producers) controlled over 50% of the global seed market. By 2020, after a series of 'mega-mergers' into three seed corporations, these controlled more than 70% of the proprietary seed market. Proprietary seeds are often 'hybrid,' which cannot be saved and re-used on-farm and are frequently genetically modified. Combined with intellectual property rights and unjust seed laws, which prohibit the saving and exchanging of seeds, farmers are tied into chains of dependency, purchasing proprietary seed from fewer and fewer large companies year-on-year. In this way, corporate dominance of the market erodes the autonomy of smaller actors to be able to make their own decisions and participate in the market. Additionally, the increasing consolidation of the market erodes local crop biodiversity, undermines agroecology, promotes vast, uniform monocultures and effectively means a select few corporations dominate the global food system.

Opportunity to address this injustice

We need to ensure that the voice of small-scale, biodiversity-enhancing, agroecological farmers influence decision-making on food and farming. Furthermore, the ability of a few corporations to steadily increase in power and dominance needs to be regulated by national and international bodies. Equally, legislation on the distribution and breeding of seed should favour small-scale, agroecological farmers so that they can save, sow, share and sell their biodiverse seeds.

Who is doing pioneering work to address this injustice?

IPES-Food

EcoNexus

Via Campesina

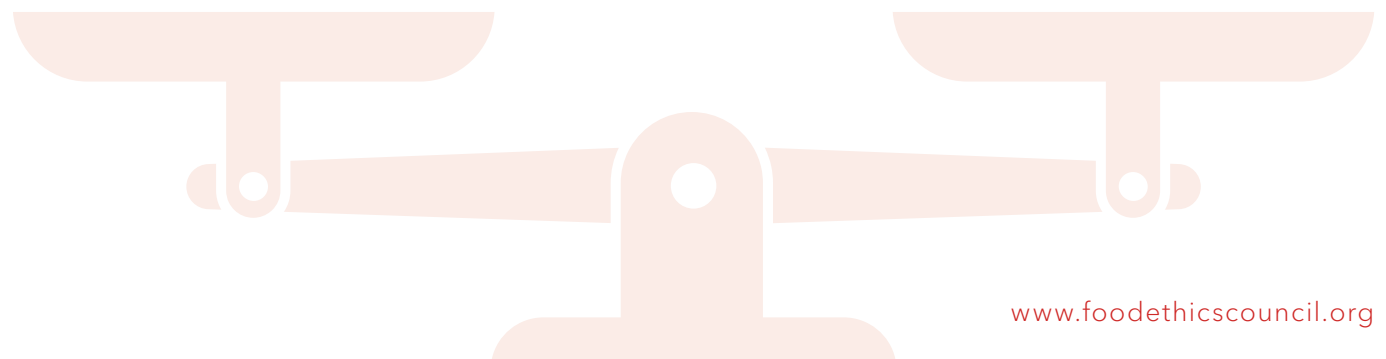
GRAIN

UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants

Seed Sovereignty Programme in UK and Ireland

Farmers' Rights in the International Seed Treaty (IT-PGRFA)

International Food Sovereignty Movement





Small-scale farmers in the Global South are amongst the hardest hit by the climate and biodiversity crises

Food injustice

The impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss are not distributed equally and, because of historical injustices, will affect the most marginalised in the world first and most severely, despite the fact that they are least responsible for causing these crises. Climate breakdown will manifest differently in different parts of the world but will result in phenomena like desertification, depleted or contaminated soil and water reserves or increased extreme weather events such as extended droughts or flooding, all of which make reliable food production difficult.

As these crises worsen, it will be increasingly challenging for marginalised farmers to continue producing sufficient food. Using the fairness framework, we can shed light on how our food systems in the UK lead to the unequal opportunities faced by farmers in the Global South, since they have progressively worse access to 'good outcomes' such as fertile soil or reliable water (rain or irrigation).

Opportunity to address this injustice

First and foremost addressing this injustice requires consolidated, ambitious global action to address the climate and biodiversity crises. This action needs to be performed primarily by those most responsible for causing the crises (the Global North), whilst ensuring that those most affected (generally the Global South) are centred in decision-making and supported in their biodiverse, agroecological production systems, which are less harmful to the biosphere on which we all rely.

Who is doing pioneering work to address this injustice?

[International Forum for Agroecology](#)

[Via Campesina](#)

[Fairtrade Foundation](#)





Unfair living conditions for intensively-farmed animals

Food injustice

There are multiple aspects of injustice that relate to farmed animals - including how they are reared, transported and slaughtered. [One billion terrestrial animals and many millions of fish are farmed for food in the UK every year](#). The fairness framework highlights not only questions about rights and 'voice', but also about 'fair shares' for animals.

Many farmed animals - particularly those that are intensively reared - do *not* have fair access to good/humane living conditions, where there is, for example, sufficient space and freedom to express natural behaviours. Farmed animals - whether on land or in water, in the UK or overseas - must all have (at least) minimum reasonable access to good outcomes.

Opportunity to address this injustice

There has been an increase in the number of animals reared in systems with higher welfare potential in the UK in recent decades partly as a result of growing public concern for farm animal welfare. With animal welfare being a key discussion point in trade negotiations post-Brexit and with a desire to protect and further strengthen standards and practice in the UK, now is the time for measures to ensure fair treatment of all farmed animals.

Who is doing pioneering work to address this injustice?

[Compassion in World Farming](#)

[RSPCA Assured](#)

[Soil Association](#)

[British Veterinary Association](#)



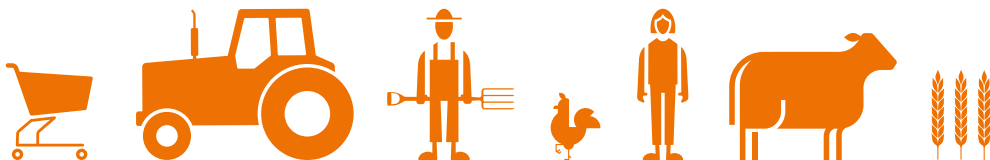
Conclusion: In pursuit of food justice for all

Awareness of the need for fairness in our food system has grown in the past decade – as the areas of unfairness have become starker. COVID-19 has exacerbated these injustices. It has also propelled a response to address them at the national, regional and local level, by authorities, by businesses and by citizens. The pandemic and subsequent recession have caused an ongoing crisis in the food system. However, there are hopeful signs, with many organisations paving the way towards a more just food system.

We all have the power to affect positive change in the food system, particularly if we shift away from a consumer mindset and instead treat each other as food citizens. But if we resolve to building just food systems for people, planet, and animals, then ‘food justice’ cannot exist only as separate projects, organisations, or movements.

The fairness framework helps us **acknowledge** the intersecting injustices across food systems. It helps us **identify** how our direct line of work influences and shapes those injustices, empowering us to change, through policies and practices. Finally, it allows us to **integrate** justice across our existing work. This is true whether we are working on the climate crisis, emergency food provision or public health policy.

We want a world where all can participate in shaping our food systems for the better and all are treated fairly. By challenging injustice, taking on tough ethical questions and supporting those working to promote food justice, we will move further and faster on the road to food justice. Now, more than ever, we must come together, to foster the cooperative momentum of the pandemic response and to rebuild our food systems such that all are able not just to meet basic needs, but to flourish.



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