

# food ethics

## Working for food

Suffering and success stories behind the dinner on our plates

**NEW** columns  
business pages  
eating out review

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– three years on  
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The Food Ethics Council challenges government, business and the public to tackle ethical issues in food and farming, providing research, analysis and tools to help. The views of contributors to this magazine are not necessarily those of the Food Ethics Council or its members.

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See page 5 for further information.

# From the editor

We rarely see the labour that puts dinner on our plates. When 23 Chinese cockle-pickers died in Morecambe Bay three years ago, many of us in the UK got a first glimpse of how deeply exploitative such work can be. The tragedy sparked a flurry of exposés and regulation but, as the articles in this magazine attest, our curtains twitched shut again all too soon.

Conditions remain dire for many people working in food and farming. They are worse paid than in other sectors and more likely to be killed at work. They have poor job security, with astounding rates of temporary employment and low union membership. Migrant workers, in particular, continue to suffer a torrent of mistreatment including poor housing, harassment, overpriced healthcare and underpayment. There are success stories too, of course, but human rights aren't fungible – good conditions at the best employers don't make up for abuses by the worst.

Why is this happening? Are harsh conditions just a fact of farming life? To a point, perhaps – some features of agriculture and food production certainly leave workers especially vulnerable. Seasonal production and fickle demand encourage temporary employment, while a dispersed workforce makes collective bargaining difficult. But these are reasons to put more effort into improving conditions in the sector, not excuses to turn a blind eye.

Is it 'gangmasters' who are to blame? Unscrupulous temporary labour providers played a pivotal part in the deaths in Morecambe Bay and, despite new legislation,

tales of serious exploitation still abound. Contributors to this issue report that the Gangmaster Licensing Authority has made a difference, but its enforcement team is thin on the ground.

Even where gangmasters are implicated, however, is that where the buck should stop? What about the companies who hire their workforce – could and should they be held to account too? How about the retailers selling their products? And what about us, the people who buy the food?

In this issue we hear how pressure from the 'big four' UK supermarkets fuels a race to the bottom on labour standards: the supermarkets squeeze their suppliers, the suppliers squeeze their workers. While research commissioned by Defra backs up this analysis, government has proved reluctant to rein in the big retailers. An ongoing investigation by the Competition Commission may finally see measures that weaken, if only slightly, the pressure from supermarkets. In the meantime, though, how else can working conditions be improved?

Company codes, such as those based on the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), can play a part, and consumer action on labour issues could increase their force. However, a recent review of the ETI shows such codes can only achieve so much. In the end, the articles here tell us, government action is essential.

The task facing government is tough but achievable. It is tough because simply adding to the

squeeze suppliers already face, pushing them out of business or off-shore, won't address the problem – workers' rights are global and it matters wherever someone is harmed making our food. Likewise, further restricting labour migration will add to the problems migrant workers face, not reduce them. Instead, government needs to ensure equal protection for all farm and food workers, permanent or temporary. Doing this in practice, as well as in law, will depend on building a closer, still critical but more supportive relationship with both unions and employers.

This issue's focus on workers' rights marks a new direction for the magazine – all future issues will have equally strong themes, with the next one exploring recent supermarket pledges to go green, healthy and fair. We have introduced new formats like 'the big question' on page 12, the business section on page 20 and a back-page eating out review, which this month samples school food in Rome. We have kept some of our old columns and added new ones.

Many of these changes came from you, our readers. Please keep telling us what you think!

Tom MacMillan  
tom@foodethicscouncil.org

If you want to respond to any of the articles in this issue or raise a different point, please write us a letter. We also publish full-length articles 'in response'. We can only publish a limited number of articles, so please get in touch before putting pen to paper. Our contact details are on the contents page.



## Are air miles fair miles?

Sir; the food miles article (Winter '06, p.13) claims that the fresh fruit and vegetable (FFV) export market is an effective development strategy for less developed countries. However, it ignores the high economic cost of airfreight and the barriers to accessing the market.

Currently, UK businesses only airfreight when it is unavoidable because it is so expensive. In some cases, airfreight of FFV from sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 50 percent of the total cost of production, packaging and distribution to Europe.

With peak oil rapidly approaching and proposed environmental regulations for the aviation industry, the cost of airfreight is set to rise even further. This brings into question the economic sustainability of businesses reliant on airfreight.

In addition, compliance with supermarket standards requires a substantial investment that can only be afforded by the largest producers. Expansion has therefore been through farm concentration and intensification by established, large-scale growers. Smallholders, which are often more productive in terms of yield, are generally excluded from the market.

Many NGOs believe sustainability is not an optional issue and that promoting small-scale farming for local markets is essential to long-term development. However, the FFV industry has compromised on both these issues in order to supply Europe with FFV out of season.

Ken Hayes, Soil Association  
[www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org)

## Consulting on co-existence

Sir; Tony Combes (Winter '06, Letters) claims that Defra's coexistence proposals are based on sound science, promote choice and that there have been no problems with coexistence in the last decade.

Coexistence is not only about choice. UK legislation will be introduced under Article 26(a) of the EU GMO deliberate release Directive (2001/18) – legislation that exists to protect human health and the environment from the impacts of GM crops. For Friends of the Earth and the Soil Association, Paul Lasok QC says the legislation "was not intended to be limited in scope to the economic aspects of coexistence" – one of seven major legal flaws identified in Defra's proposals.

The claim that coexistence proposals are underpinned by sound science also cannot be supported. The GM labelling threshold of 0.9 percent on which the coexistence proposals are based was not selected using scientific criteria. The figure was pragmatically plucked from the air when the European Parliament, Council and Commission were

trying to reach a consensus for labelling of GM content in food and feed in 2003.

Claims that GM and non-GM crops have been coexisting "without problems for the last decade" cannot be substantiated either. The website [www.gmcontaminationregister.org](http://www.gmcontaminationregister.org) details the growing number of GM contamination incidents around the world which demonstrate the failure of 'coexistence'.

The inability of GM crops to stay where they are put is one of many reasons why GM Freeze is not happy with the rapid introduction of GM crops. The combination of the wind, insects, human error and lack of care mean GM contamination will inevitably occur. Defra's proposals for very short separation distances between crops do not address this problem, and that would suit the biotech industry down to the ground.

Peter Riley, GM Freeze  
[www.gmfreeze.org](http://www.gmfreeze.org)

## The future of food distribution

A Downing Street petition with more than one million signatures has pushed road pricing onto the front pages for a third time since the Food Ethics Council began work on this issue last September.

Our discussion paper, published in December, examined the assumptions behind road pricing and its possible effects on food distribution. We organised a workshop, jointly with the Royal Society of Arts, to explore these issues further, concluding that most important effects on food distribution are likely to be indirect, via changes in where people live and how they shop, rather than from direct freight costs or lower congestion.

We now begin the second phase of this work, which starts with the question of how food can be distributed more sustainably. We shall compare a range of scenarios for food distribution 15 years hence, asking what part, if any, road pricing and transport policy might play in them coming about.  
[www.foodethicscouncil.org/ourwork/roadpricing](http://www.foodethicscouncil.org/ourwork/roadpricing)

## CAP reform

In December 2006, we published a discussion paper setting out the some of stickiest issues facing UK policy makers in the run up to further negotiations on the future of Europe's controversial Common Agricultural Policy. The paper highlighted challenges in the areas of climate change, animal welfare and biodiversity, international development, public health and governance. It asked whether the UK government's pursuit of out-and-out liberalisation for EU agriculture could make good on its promise to promote 'one planet farming', which respects environmental limits.

Our paper fed into a discussion workshop organised by the Sustainable Development Commission in January, which was attended by David Miliband, Defra's Secretary of State, and other key decision-makers from that department and HM Treasury.  
[www.foodethicscouncil.org/ourwork/capreform](http://www.foodethicscouncil.org/ourwork/capreform)

## news

## We must stop turning a blind eye to bonded labour Morecambe Bay – three years on

As I write this, it is three years to the day since 23 Chinese people died picking cockles by torch light on a freezing night in lethal Morecambe Bay, tragically highlighting the parlous working conditions in the UK's food industry. Soon afterwards I began working with film director Nick Broomfield on *Ghosts*, a film which follows a young woman, Ai Qin, as she travels from China to Britain seeking work which she hopes will allow her to send money home to care for her little boy. It was a real eye-opener to immerse ourselves in the lives of immigrant workers who live almost unseen amongst us. As well as Chinese we met Portuguese, Bulgarians, Poles, South Africans and others living in squalor and intimidation. Some of them were basically slaves, unable or afraid to leave the control of their gangmasters for fear of reprisals against themselves or their loved ones.

In February 2005, the TUC published a sixty-eight page report specifically about this problem, yet many continue to turn a blind eye. Last year, while trying to find statistics on the number of people working as bonded labourers in UK food production, I called Mark Boleat, chairman of the Association of Labour Providers. He also sits on the Home Office's Illegal Working Stakeholder Group, one of its stated aims being to "send out a strong message of determination to tackle illegal migrant working, exploitation and associated criminality". Mr Boleat tersely told me that in his two years in post he had "seen not one shred of evidence that a single person is bonded labour". It had taken us about two weeks to find and film plenty.

The truth is that as a society we depend on huge numbers of people working and living in appalling conditions to provide us with cheap food on demand. Most of our grocery shopping is done in supermarkets but, whenever abuses in their supply chains are exposed, the supermarkets distance themselves, stating that they do not directly employ the workers in question. Whilst technically true, this is specious because it is their buying practices that create the conditions in which such exploitation flourishes. Unrelenting pressure is applied to cut prices, and suppliers must be able

to respond to demand with changes in the weather, literally. Sunny weekend ahead? Sausages, burgers, lettuce and bread rolls for a quarter of a million barbecues must be delivered by midnight. The kind of labour force that can be turned on and off like a tap at rock bottom rates of pay is made up of only the most desperate people, and thus the most vulnerable.

## Some people were basically slaves, unable or afraid to leave the control of their gangmasters

The supermarkets' bully-boy tactics and dismal cant about "taking these issues seriously" goes largely unchallenged because those at the wrong end of it are afraid. A new report from the Competition Commission describes "a climate of fear" among suppliers of the big four, Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons. It means that suppliers are afraid of losing critical business if they voice complaints, but workers at the very bottom, we discovered, are afraid of actually being physically harmed if they object to their rank exploitation. It's not so much a case of good guys and bad guys, as good guys, bad guys and worse guys.

The supermarkets unquestionably have the wherewithal to clean up their supply processes right down the chain – simply reducing the time and cost pressures on their suppliers could achieve much – but I suspect that only one of two things will make them do it. The first would be government legislation requiring it – a mirror image of this would be the regulations on disposal of hazardous waste, under which a duty of care applies to the producer of waste even after it has been passed on to another party such as a waste contractor or recycler. A similar duty of care in the opposite direction could make supermarkets legally responsible for ensuring that employment practices along their supply chains are legitimate

and fair. The problem with this is that the supermarkets are such a powerful lobbying force that the government appears unwilling to tackle them.

The other way would be through consumer pressure – the withdrawal of our custom. During our research for *Ghosts* we met a former Sainsbury's buyer who told us that her training began with the Trading Director scoffing at the naivety of the new graduate recruits: one had suggested that their role was "to serve the customers", but he made it clear that they were there "first and foremost to make the shareholders money". We may well feel powerless as individual consumers making little more than gestures with our shopping choices, but my memory keeps prodding away at me with a news item I saw, stating that Sainsbury's bosses were rattled by a forecast fall in profits of what seemed to me a trivially small percentage. The point was not that people had stopped buying stuff, but that they were buying their stuff from competitors. So, although it would no doubt cost the supermarkets something to tackle the abuses in their supply chains, if we can persuade them that inaction will result in a greater hit to their bottom line, I predict that they will act swiftly. This may be bar stool economics, but we've seen similar effects both with the uptake of shelf space for organic goods, and the wholesale rejection of GM foods. And, whilst I find it pretty much impossible to avoid the supermarkets altogether, most of us could at least reduce our spend with them. As they say, every little helps!

Jez Lewis co-wrote the film *Ghosts*, directed by Nick Broomfield and funded by Channel 4, which will be broadcast on More4 in the spring. A trust fund has been set up to help the families of the Morecambe Bay victims.  
[www.ghosts.uk.com](http://www.ghosts.uk.com)



Opinion: Jez Lewis

# Migrant motives

## Why travel 56 hours to pick lettuce in the mud?

*Donna Simpson goes to Ukraine to find out*

The guidebooks don't say much about Ukraine. It was a blank canvas for me, blotted only by images of bleak soviet architecture and the recent Orange Revolution. Now I've visited the country, it is other impressions that endure: the vastness of a landscape yielding watermelons and sunflowers; the moonlit, snowy Transcarpathian Mountains; cities softened by autumnal colours. A 'soviet mentality' or expressions of Ukraine's recent independence were less evident than older traditions and beliefs – that if I sat at the corner of a table I wouldn't get married, or if I drank from someone else's glass I would have their dreams. These were my welcome to Ukraine, and my fondness for the place and its people only grew as young Ukrainians told me about their experiences working on farms in the UK.

Their opportunity to travel and work in the UK arose through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS). The scheme, facilitated by nine government approved operators, lets workers from Non-European Union countries enter the UK to work on farms for up to six months. Workers cannot switch farms or employer without approval from the operator and the farmer, who supplies accommodation.

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The former SAWS workers I spoke to were students attending the Kharkiv National Technical University of Agriculture. A key motivation for the university to be part of the SAWS is that many young people in rural parts of Ukraine have fewer resources than their urban counterparts. A senior faculty member at the University believes that opportunities to work on overseas farms enable students to broaden their horizons and earn money, from which they can create further opportunities for themselves back in Ukraine.

Sceptics, including myself not so long ago, question the value of a seasonal work experience which often begins and ends with a

non-stop 56-hour bus journey across Europe, and consists of an intensive schedule of work for six or sometimes seven days a week, occasionally broken up by a few days out in London. It was revealing, therefore, to get the students' own perspectives.

I was keen to find out what motivated these young Ukrainians to work over ten hours a day, six days a week. Svita's motivation was clear:<sup>1</sup> "I was afraid that I would never have such an opportunity in my life to earn such a sum of money". A student of power engineering, she told me how her experience at a salad farm benefited from "very good personnel and very good accommodation, very good attitudes to the students". She recalled how much she enjoyed shopping in Oxford Street, though she couldn't have spent too much of her wage there because she bought a two-room flat on her return to Ukraine.

It wasn't just money that students brought home to Ukraine. They felt they matured over their summer in the UK. This was especially true of those made team leaders, like Petro. "I was just growing up there," he reflected. "What would take about four to five years in the Ukraine there took about four to five months".

There were challenges, of course, particularly to do with the continuity of the work and the seasonality of crops. Bad weather, small orders from clients and poor harvest quality were all obstacles to achieving a satisfactory weekly wage. Some felt that having to work and live on a single farm left them at a disadvantage compared with workers from other countries who had a different immigration status. Maksym explained to me: "If there were ripe strawberries, Polish workers were the first and Ukrainians were the second. It was [like that] all the time". In his case, Ukrainians were asked to harvest soft fruit after Polish and Moldavian workers had already picked heavily from the same field.



© Gevorg Kikorian

Olena recognised that the absence of labour market mobility, which the SAWS immigration status confers on workers, can benefit the farmer. "As far as I know your British farmers like Ukrainian workers – do you know why? They like Ukrainian workers more than the Lithuanians because the Lithuanians are from the EU, and it means that if he or she doesn't want to work or decides to go home or decides to go on holiday, a farmer can't tell him anything, but Ukrainian students get to the field and we have to be there until the farmer doesn't need us anymore".

Without doubt, taking part in the SAWS is seriously hard work. "When I decided to go to the UK... I couldn't imagine

work could be so hard," Olena told me. "My parents are from the countryside and I always help them, and I know what agricultural work is, but I couldn't imagine how hard". Yet, as I spoke to more young veterans of the SAWS, I came to understand that it meant more than just hard work to many of them. It was a rite of passage, an opportunity to be away from home, both an adventure and challenge, often providing them with a significant bundle of cash (literally in some instances) to take home.

Despite the challenges the students I spoke to had faced, they all hoped to have another opportunity to work in the UK. But such hopes are unlikely to be fulfilled, since the decision by the Home Office

to limit the SAWS quota to EU member states. This is wrong. Limiting Romanian and Bulgarian workers to specific sectors such as agriculture goes right against the spirit of integration that is inherent to EU accession. The decision also reflects a failure by government to distinguish between low-skilled and seasonal workers: many of the students worked as tractor drivers, machines operators and team leaders, and so are hardly 'low-skilled'. Moreover, it fails to recognise the full benefits that the SAWS brings, both to farmers and workers, which last well beyond the growing season.

<sup>1</sup> Names have been changed.



## Ben Rogaly

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# Pressure on suppliers pushes worker exploitation

What's happening to the workers in Britain who produce fresh fruit, vegetables and ornamentals for the retail market? How far are gangmasters responsible for working conditions? How far do workers' conditions of employment depend on the relations that growers, packers and primary processors have with their main customers, the supermarkets?

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee commented on the lack of knowledge on these issues in 2003 and pushed Defra to commission new research.<sup>1</sup> The findings of that research, published quietly on the departmental website in August 2005, concurred with investigations by journalists revealing both a high degree of exploitation of workers and a connection between this and the supermarkets' stranglehold on their suppliers.<sup>2</sup> The Competition Commission report on supermarkets in 2000 showed how concentrated buyer power translated into tight pressure on the prices that could be charged by suppliers. Yet, the government did not put forward effective regulation of supermarket-supplier relations. Why would they, when they attributed relatively low annual increases in food prices, and their helpful anti-inflationary impact, to the 'efficiency' of supermarkets?

I was part of the team commissioned by Defra following the Select Committee report. We found a direct connection between the workings of the market-place for horticultural products, and the conditions of workers. Other research I was involved in, funded by the ESRC and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, concurred.<sup>3</sup> Growers we approached granted us interviews on the basis of complete confidentiality. Such was their fear of the commercial consequences, however, that in some cases the specific crop, or the region of production, had to be disguised in the reports that emerged.

The findings suggest a very widespread increase since the mid-1990s in the use of foreign nationals in fields, greenhouses and packing sheds. Foreign migrant workers were seen as more flexible than British workers,

willing to come to work without knowing what time the day would end, and to work weekends without question. They were also seen as being more reliable, a quality attributed by growers to the relatively low wages they were able to command at home. In our interviews, growers expressed the need for both these traits in workers *because* of the nature of the product market they faced.<sup>4</sup>

The Defra-commissioned research also revealed a change in the kind of gangmaster used to source workers. With the new regulation of gangmasters in the form of the Gangmaster (Licensing) Act of 2004, and the emergence of the Gangmaster Licensing Authority, small-scale gangmasters, with a core of perhaps a dozen workers, found that the loopholes they had once used were increasingly closed. Meanwhile, larger businesses grew, making money through the accommodation they were able to provide for migrant workers.

Government regulation of wages also affected employment conditions in another way. While hourly rates were subject to a special agricultural minimum wage, firms were able to use piecework to reduce wage costs. The only stipulation for piecework was that the final payment at the end of the day had to be at least as much as the worker would have earned at the minimum hourly rate. There is evidence that piece rates have fallen in real terms, and that companies have recruited foreign nationals willing and able to work at the new levels of intensity required.

There is another side to this story, however. While UK horticulture as a whole has continued to decline, and many small producers have been forced out of business, some growers have been able to take advantage of the volume of sales demanded from supermarket customers to expand their operations. Workers from the eight countries whose nationals gained access to the UK labour market for the first time in May 2004, following EU enlargement, have benefited from having their status regularised. And some migrant workers have sought piecework

(and long hours) to maximise their earnings. It is important to avoid portraying migrant workers in horticulture as victims – there is a range of employment conditions across the country and some people *choose* to work hard at low wages for a period as a temporary measure, and do not want that choice to be denied.<sup>5</sup>

There remains a need for more detailed research which distinguishes between different crops and regions, and which shows up not only the employment conditions and experiences that lie behind horticultural production in the UK, but also the connection of these to the dual class position of growers: subordinate to the companies they supply; yet the dominant party in employment relationships. Research relies on cooperation from suppliers and growers who cannot, however, be blamed for keeping quiet in recent investigations by the Office of Fair Trading and the Competition Commission – going to the regulators is a big commercial risk.<sup>6</sup>

Alongside this work, it is important to investigate the changing nature of relations between long-term residents, new migrants, and seasonal workers in the countryside. These too have their own share of myths. Many rural workers are urban residents, for example, who commute to work daily. Moreover, there are organisations that seek to exaggerate the number of migrant workers and to raise fears about their influence on society. Careful, grounded research can shed light on these issues too.

<sup>1</sup> [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmenvfru/691/691.pdf](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmenvfru/691/691.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.defra.gov.uk/farm/working/gangmasters/pdf/research-study1.pdf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/working/gangmasters/pdf/research-study1.pdf) and F. Lawrence (2004) *Not on the Label*. Penguin.

<sup>3</sup> B. Anderson, M. Ruhs, B. Rogaly and S. Spencer, 2006, *Fair enough? Central and East European migrants in low-wage employment in the UK*. COMPAS.

<sup>4</sup> B. Rogaly (2006) *Sussex Migration Working Paper 36*

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, Ruhs, Rogaly and Spencer, *op cit*.

<sup>6</sup> [www.offt.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/5C58328C-8A2F-4C45-AD02-0AA4567DF3F2/0/oft807.pdf](http://www.offt.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/5C58328C-8A2F-4C45-AD02-0AA4567DF3F2/0/oft807.pdf) and [www.competition-commission.org.uk/inquiries/ref2006/grocery/pdf/emerging\\_thinking.pdf](http://www.competition-commission.org.uk/inquiries/ref2006/grocery/pdf/emerging_thinking.pdf)

## Temporary workers need proper protection

# Treat equally, curb abuse

Halina came here from Poland, keen to improve her English and happy to work hard. She has a lot to offer the UK. She found work in the hospitality industry and then in food processing, as is common for many migrants to the UK from the A8 EU accession countries. Sadly, the treatment she received while here wasn't unusual either: sexual harassment, excessive hours, discrimination and abuse, forced to work handling food while ill – and, as a temporary worker, there was very little she could do about this treatment.

"I was out of work for four days because all the workers got the water to drink in fuel containers," Halina told us. "Many people had diarrhoea, so had I. Next three days I worked as a translator in the surgery for those workers who did not know English. I was not paid for that and did not earn on those days but I didn't complain – the most important thing was to help a man in need".

"I was ill again for two weeks also because of the employer. In the caravan I shared there was no heating. But she [my employer] did nothing. And I caught a cold. Being ill, with a high temperature, I worked in the field in the pouring rain. When I could not stand it any more I went to the doctor and got medical leave. I did not come to England to have sick pay but to work and earn".

Temporary and agency workers like Halina are not entitled to the same protection as directly employed workers, meaning they lose out on pay, sick pay, holidays and overtime. This absence of rights breeds a culture of widespread mistreatment. Nastier employers can undercut permanent workers by exploiting temporary workers – and it is all perfectly legal.

The Transport and General Workers Union (T&G), having led the formidable coalition forcing gangmasters to register for a licence under the Gangmasters Licencing Act, now wants to see protection spread to agency workers, often migrant workers, sometimes illegal. As one unusually frank Midlands employer said "foreign workers come cheap and illegal workers come cheaper still". The

T&G believe that if you're a worker you need protection whatever your status.

With over one million temporary and agency workers in the UK, the need for action against the routine abuse of arguably the most vulnerable group of workers in our economy, many of whom are migrants like Halina, is pressing.

We call these workers the 'missing million'. Set apart from labour protection, they are a growing casualised workforce. It is about time government removed the barriers to their equal treatment that contribute so much of the abuse they endure.

Meanwhile, we have to deal with the manifold problems experienced by our members. When the EU expanded to embrace the A8 nations, the T&G took an active decision to organise these new workers, to help them defend themselves against exploitation. We now have over 20,000 Polish members, a dozen or so Polish organisers and six Polish shop stewards, in large part reflective of how Poles, with over 170,000 now working in the UK, comprise the largest group of migrant workers. But we are also working with and organising workers from across the Spanish, Portuguese and French speaking worlds, as well as Russians, Latvians, Ukrainians and Bulgarians, in whatever sectors they work, be it aviation, cleaning, construction or food processing.

In food processing, a sector characterised by poor wages and few opportunities, the union has encountered some serious problems for the workforce. Often union representation is the only thing standing between the workers and unchecked abuse by their employers.

Take the meat sector, for instance, where agency working is now a way of life. Our research found up to 50 percent agency staff on some sites. There is a two-tier pay system across the sector, seeing large reductions in gross pay for permanent workers, with overtime cut, and temporary working extended beyond standard hours but without extra pay.

This is creating division in the workplace – but it also weakens social cohesion within our communities. In one factory, the police were called in recently to break up a fight between the permanent and agency workers, the former angry at the hundreds of pounds a month lost from their wages as the employers switched to temporary workers. Migrant workers are isolated and exploited.

In fruit picking, the instances of abuse are just as pronounced. Again, workers, mostly migrant, are underpaid, overworked, isolated and confused about why their wage packets do not tally with the riches they were promised by recruiters in their homeland. At one site we visited, we found open drains, crowded caravans, charges for basic medical attention and pay packets that amounted to only £70 for the working week instead of the £150 they had been led to expect.

The supermarkets are playing an intriguing role in all this. As the main driver to hammer down food and farm producers' prices, the big retailers create the conditions in which rogue gangmasters and unscrupulous employers flourish. But, hating the bad publicity that such exploitation of their workers creates, they are keen to be seen auditing conditions at companies failing to maintain decent standards.

Of course, the best protection for these workers is union membership. Across the food sector, we are striving to bring workers together. Yet without the legal requirement to treat all workers equally, every worker suffers. Removing this legislative discrimination is a job only government can do. Until it acts on this and cracks down on abusers, cases like Halina's will be the tip of the iceberg and the UK food sector will become a by-word for bad practice.

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## Stephanie Barrientos

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# Are supermarket codes benefiting workers?

Supermarkets have for many years been operating codes of labour practice in their supply chains. The codes came about as a result of civil society pressure on supermarkets and retailers due to poor working conditions. They are aimed at ensuring that working conditions amongst their suppliers meet acceptable standards. Are codes a corporate veneer or can they help to improve the lives of workers?

Most UK supermarkets have codes of labour practice. Many are also members of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). This is an alliance of retailers and brands, non-government organisations and trade unions. It has a Base Code that all members agree to incorporate in their own company code. The ETI has been in existence since 1998. Three years ago the ETI commissioned an impact assessment to assess whether workers are really benefiting from codes of labour practice implemented by member companies. The study was carried out by the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex. The findings are published in a series of reports.<sup>1</sup>

The impact assessment was based on comparative case studies in food and manufacture carried out in five countries, plus a scoping study in China. In total, the case studies included an analysis of the implementation of codes of labour practice across 11 ETI company members, with in-depth studies on 25 supplier sites. Interviews were held with senior and HR managers, over 400 workers as well as trade union and civil society representatives in each country. The studies which focused on food were carried out in South African fruit, UK horticulture and Costa Rican bananas.

The study found that company codes are leading to some improvements, particularly in relation to more 'visible' issues such as health and safety. But

significant challenges remain, particularly in relation to less 'visible' issues such as trade union rights and discrimination. Permanent and regular workers were more likely to have seen benefits from codes, but casual, migrant and contract workers received least benefits. The results do not constitute a representative sample of all sites implementing codes of labour practice in these sectors or countries. However, they provide the most in-depth study of codes of labour practice to date.

Supermarkets source through different types of supply chain. Some fresh produce is purchased directly from large suppliers, who have a small number of large buyers. Here, supermarkets have more leverage to improve employment standards. But much fresh produce is sourced through more complex supply chains, involving large numbers of supermarkets, agents and intermediary tiers of supply. In such cases, it is difficult to isolate the impact of a particular supermarket's code on any one supplier and individual supermarkets have less leverage. But when a number of supermarkets all operate codes of labour practice, suppliers are likely to respond because of their critical mass. Much depends, though, on the attitude and commitment of individual suppliers and agents within the chain, and this was found to vary considerably.

The most positive changes from company codes have been in relation to health and safety. This included better information, procedures and protection for workers handling produce, chemicals and machinery. In Costa Rica, banana workers said that they used to take overalls home which had been used with chemicals, bringing them into contact with their children. Due to codes, this no longer happens. Better awareness of hygiene had also affected how workers maintained their houses. There was evidence that permanent and regular workers now have better access

to formal contracts and employment benefits, such as social insurance, as a result of codes of labour practice. However, casual workers and those employed by third party labour providers were less likely to receive their full legal entitlements.

The study found little evidence of the use of child labour, except during school holidays on one farm. Suppliers in this study were aware of the market risk of exposure on child labour, and largely conformed to national regulation. On some farms in Costa Rica the study found a reverse problem of reluctance to employ young workers, even though legal, for risk of auditors believing they were underage. This contributed to problems of youth unemployment in banana growing areas.

Codes were found to be having little impact on enhancing access to trade unions. Some sites in the study already had union representation, including two packhouses in South Africa and a horticulture farm and packhouses in the UK. They had procedures in place for negotiating labour issues with management. However, no site had enhanced union access directly as a result of codes of labour practice. Many workers were either unaware of their union rights, or feared joining a union could affect their ability to get work. Farms in South Africa had workers' committees, but most did not include casual or contract workers.

Discrimination came up as an issue on many sites. Regular women workers now receiving employment benefits were able to access maternity and health cover. Yet, in all countries we found embedded discrimination in hiring, with women more likely to be in casual employment and have less access to training or promotion. Conditions of employment were better for women in packhouses, but even here they complained of lack of opportunity for promotion. Migrant workers complained of discrimination by other workers,



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supervisors and management in South Africa and Costa Rica.

All the sites in the study had undergone a buyer self-assessment or independent audit. Yet we found many problems remained. Auditing has been able to address visible issues such as health and safety. But it is failing to address more embedded issues such as freedom of association and discrimination. In many cases it is permanent and regular workers who are benefiting from codes of labour practice. Their employment conditions are more likely to be documented and they are more likely to be interviewed during social audits. Codes are often failing to reach casual and migrant workers. They are often overlooked by auditors, and are less likely to have seen positive change.

Third party labour contractors operated in all the case study countries. In South

falling prices and commercial pressures constrained their ability to improve employment conditions. Anecdotal information suggested that these pressures are compounding the use of labour contractors as a means of coping with volatile orders. Yet the risks of labour abuse are more likely to be found amongst this group of workers. Addressing purchasing practices could play an important role in enhancing employment conditions for all workers.

A number of other factors were found to contribute to more sustained improvement in employment conditions. Stable supply relationships and capacity building by buyers is important. This is more easily achieved in integrated supply chains with stronger supplier attachment. In complex supply chains with multiple agents and supermarkets, collaboration between buyers is important for improving employment conditions. Greater harmonisation of company codes in line with the principles of the International Labour Organisation would help to clarify their objectives. Suppliers take more notice when a critical mass of retailers carry the same message.

In all countries, the study found that company codes have raised awareness amongst suppliers about labour legislation. However, workers were generally unaware of codes, and many had limited understanding of their own rights. Codes of labour practice can have some positive impacts where the enforcement of legislation is weak, and workers do not have access to independent trade unions. But they are insufficient to address embedded labour issues. The study recognised that, ultimately, employment conditions can only be improved through more effective government regulation.

Africa, the worst conditions of employment were found amongst contract workers, who had received little benefit from codes. In the UK, publicity following the death of 23 cockle pickers in Morecombe Bay had highlighted the risks of abuse by unscrupulous labour contractors. The ETI had coordinated a Temporary Labour Working Group that helped to promote the introduction of regulation covering 'gangmasters'. The farm and packhouses in our UK study had switched from the use of gangmasters to direct recruitment from East Europe and through the seasonal agricultural workers scheme. To be more effective, the study recommended that the reach of codes be extended to all workers on a site, irrespective of their employment status or employer.

Many suppliers complained bitterly about the adverse effects of supermarket purchasing practices. They indicated

<sup>1</sup> www.ids.ac.uk or www.ethicaltrade.org/dl/impactreport

# Is farm work good work?

What are working conditions like in agriculture?  
What value do we place on farm labour?  
We asked nine people for their views...

The big question

## Felicity Lawrence

**No...** but it could be. Agricultural labour, either as tied labour or waged labour, has always been hard, dangerous and dirty. Today in the UK it mostly remains so. The migrant workers who drive the crop sprayers, harvest the flowers and fruit, pack and sort the vegetables, and man the abattoir slaughter and cutting lines for agribusiness, do shifts that are long and unsocial for very low wages, precisely because indigenous workers do not want employment that is so insecure and exploitative. As British society has become more affluent, local labour in agricultural areas has migrated to service jobs that are less punishing. Anyone who thinks life in the rural past was automatically better should read accounts of the conditions of waged farm labour in the 1930s. Chinese landworkers who migrate to the cities for factory jobs, whose conditions seem impossibly harsh to Westerners, do so because even these conditions offer better prospects than staying on the land.

But farm work isn't bad work by definition. Half the world's population of six billion still depends on agriculture for some part of its livelihood. Where people work on the land within a family structure, the farm work is tough but not inhuman. Where waged agricultural labour is given workers' rights, including the right to organise, so that health and safety, pay, hours and conditions are fair, it can provide much needed employment in areas that would otherwise have little. Scale is important too. It is the tyranny of globalised, just-in-time ordering systems that drives much of the abusive agricultural employment. Where farm workers are connected to their employers and the land more directly, the

abuses are less frequent. On the whole, farmers who know their workers individually are less likely to treat them like units of production. This is not true by definition, just an observation and, I suspect, a fact of human nature.

Felicity Lawrence is author of the best-selling exposé of the food business *Not on the label* and an investigative journalist for the *Guardian*.

## Jeff Rooker

**Yes...** work on a British farm offers the opportunity for an enriching and satisfying career. The traditional image of agricultural work as unskilled labour is now redundant in the face of the demands of today's modern farming practices and techniques. Many of today's agricultural workers require a wide range of skills to perform their jobs. In agriculture, Defra provides funding to and works closely with Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for the environmental and land-based sectors, to increase skill levels and to promote the recognition of skills and the business benefits of training. Today, farmers are both producing food and managing 80 percent of British land on behalf of us all.

This is a key challenge for Defra and increasingly important in the light of the Leitch Review of Skills. Defra has commissioned Lantra to develop a competence framework for the land-based sectors. This will provide a clear understanding of the skills an individual needs to undertake particular jobs in the industry. It will also map out a clear career path and provide links to training opportunities.

'Good' also has an ethical meaning. In this context, the Government is determined to stamp

out the exploitation of workers and other forms of illegal activity by agricultural labour providers. We have worked closely with the Ethical Trading Initiative since 2002 to develop a Code of Practice for labour providers and supported the passage of the Gangmasters Licensing Act 2004. That Act established the Gangmasters Licensing Authority to implement and operate a licensing scheme for labour providers active in agriculture, food processing and the shellfish gathering sector. To date around 1,000 licences have been issued. Exploitative labour providers have no place in the agricultural industry and we are determined to root out those who operate illegally.

Lord Rooker is Minister of State for Sustainable Farming and Food.

## Peter Ainsworth

**Yes...** farming is good work because it provides one thing without which none of us could live: food. British farmers give us fresh, locally produced food with some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world. Farmers also make a great contribution to community life whilst they do so, whether from producing and selling regional food through to being a major source of employment in rural areas.

Finally, farming has shaped the look and feel of the UK, giving us both a strong tourism industry and a retreat from city life. In other words, farming also gives us something no one can put a price on: our beautiful British countryside.

Peter Ainsworth is MP for East Surrey and Shadow Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary.

## Neil Ward

**No...** we shouldn't worry too much about the number of jobs in farming. Farming has been shedding labour for centuries. I'd call it progress. For more than 200 years, Britain's competitive advantage has been in things other than agricultural produce – first manufactured goods and more recently services. The £2 billion of Common Agricultural Policy subsidies injected into British farming each year mean that more people work in farming than would otherwise do so. As these subsidies are reduced, so farming will involve fewer people. I am relaxed about this trend. Between 1998 and 2002, the number of jobs in agriculture and fishing in England dropped by 26,000, but 275,000 net new jobs – that's more than 10-times as many – were created in England's rural areas in other sectors.

Some remoter rural areas are particularly dependent upon agricultural employment, which can make up 10-15% of the workforce in some areas. In these areas, dependence on farming is a weakness to be overcome, and is not a reason to justify for subsidies to keep people in farming. Instead, these areas need economic development support to help create and grow new businesses and overcome the barriers that geographical remoteness and population sparsity pose.

I welcome the recent increase in interest in where food comes from, how it is produced, and the wider implications, including for the environment, of different sorts of food supply chains. A new food ethics will bring new commercial opportunities for farm businesses, not just in Britain but also in the wider world. However, we should not let romantic ideas about 'the farming community' cloud our judgement. It's great to buy local and support local producers, but it can also sometimes make environmental as well as economic sense to import some foods from further away.

Neil Ward is Professor of Rural and Regional Development and Director of the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University.

## Michael Green

**Yes...** farmers and farm workers have the skills and knowledge we need to produce good quality food and to care for the countryside. Over half a century of agricultural intensification, farming methods have inflicted a terrible toll on the wildlife of Britain. During the same period, our countryside has lost 79 percent of its farm workers. This deskilling of the countryside – or 'shedding' labour – has been encouraged by policymakers as part of the managed decline of British farming. Skilled labour has been replaced with agrochemicals and larger machinery as farms have become larger.

But why does this matter? Farm labour is more than just a 'fixed cost' that should be reduced as much as possible. Farms make a significant contribution to the national and regional economy, community cohesion, social stability and our cultural identity. In addition, as oil reserves begin to dwindle, a skilled agricultural workforce will also be needed to make the inevitable transition away from the current fossil fuel-dependent farming towards more sustainable, low-input farming.

Michael Green is policy officer at the Soil Association and co-wrote their recent *Organic works* report about employment on organic farms.

## Zad Padda

**Yes...** my experience coming from a family that both farms and supplies labour is that farm work can be good work. The industry is cleaning up its act and new rules govern the supply of agricultural labour strictly. However, more progress is needed and suppliers, retailers and consumers must all play their parts.

The biggest challenge is to tackle the falling farm-gate prices that make it hard for farmers to improve labour standards while staying in business. I'm encouraged by what some retailers are doing in this area, but 'everyday low price'-type strategies have huge impact on working conditions. Retailers need to admit this and allow their suppliers to speak up about problems without fear of reprisal.

But it isn't all up to the supermarkets – I also think we can learn a lesson from Fair Trade. We need a similar system in the UK, where prices for certified products include a social premium that consumers know will go towards improving welfare standards for workers. Quite aside from the money, this has the benefit of making people aware about labour issues here in the UK, building pressure for higher standards across the board.

The difficulties we face in the UK are different from those farmers and workers face in South Africa or the Windward Islands, for example. But there are important similarities, not least big price pressure from retailers and the use of temporary workers. We don't want to undercut Fair Trade for these other countries – we need to win better conditions for workers wherever they are and wherever they've come from.

Zad Padda founded Ethical First, which assists businesses affected by the Gangmaster Licensing Act. His family are farm assured strawberry producers.

# Vital statistics

Agriculture accounts for **68 percent** of land use in the UK but employs less than **one percent** of the workforce. Between **235,000** and **345,000** documented migrants are employed in the industry each year, after deductions often earning only **£70 a week**. Farm workers face the worst fatal injury rate of any major employment sector with **45 deaths** recorded last year and **400,000** working days lost to illness and injury. Worldwide, agriculture accounts for around **half of the 335,000** fatal workplace accidents each year. Farmers also have one of the highest occupational suicide rates in the world – in India, **150,000** committed suicide in the last decade and at present **six do so every day**.

Frances Pollitzer

References at [www.foodethicscouncil.org](http://www.foodethicscouncil.org)

Image © Tartan Films

**Yes...** it can be, though it can also be bad! 'Farm work' covers a diversity of tasks in a great range of environments and, of course, a variety of employers. Some aspects of agriculture may combine to exacerbate the impact of good and bad employers.

At G's Marketing, during our UK harvesting season, we employ and provide accommodation for up to 1,100 people, on 18 sites. Work varies from tractor and forklift driving, management, supervisory and quality control functions, through to the hard graft of cutting and packing crop in the field or packhouse. Minimum rates of pay per hour are guaranteed, maximum rates of earnings are defined by piecework schemes, and hours are generally limited by the legislation. Last summer, across all our seasonal staff, average earnings were £6.35 per hour, or £305 per week for the average week of 48 hours. Accommodation costs £37 per week, which compares favourably with most areas of the UK. Peak hourly pay rates achieved by some teams and individuals during their time with us were in the £8 to £9 bracket. We visit and recruit from the same universities across central Europe every year, and we depend on a significant presence of returnees (circa 50 percent) to recycle knowledge each fresh season. We cannot afford to lose staff during a season, and have to support our work offer with a suitable management style and

facilities. Purpose-built sporting and social facilities combine with a wide range of recreational trips to maximise the opportunity for people to enjoy their time with us. We need to be recommended as a good place to work in order to sustain what we do!

**Julius Joel is supply chain director at fresh produce company G's Marketing, representing 28 co-operative farming members spread across the UK and Spain.**

**Graeme Walker**

**Yes...** but only if the health and safety of workers is properly managed. Much of the work in the industry is seasonal, short-term and low-skilled. Changes in UK agriculture and the food supply chain mean relying on a flexible workforce - characterised by casual, temporary and migrant working, which pose new management challenges - to remain competitive.

Media coverage suggests the demand for such labour in the industry is serviced by a workforce sourced from overseas, supplied by ruthless and exploitative gangmasters. In fact the workforce is a mix of indigenous UK (44 percent in 2004/05) and migrant workers, and many labour providers and users take their responsibilities

seriously - though clearly some don't.

Nevertheless, all workers are entitled to the protection of health and safety legislation. The challenge for employers is to provide their workers - be they UK citizens or migrants - with a safe and healthy working environment and the information, training, instruction and supervision they need to work safely without putting themselves or others at risk. In the case of migrant workers this may mean putting effort into making sure written and verbal communications can be understood by people with little or no English.

Crucially, all parties need to understand who is responsible for the employer's duties under health and safety legislation - and those duties need to be discharged. Whilst in practice it depends on the facts in each case, where a labour user controls and directs the activity, as is generally the case in planting, harvesting and packhouse operations, they are likely to be deemed to be the employer at law.

Health and safety is fundamental to sustainable farming and farm business management. Casual and temporary working is only one of the challenges that need to be managed.

**Graeme Walker is Head of Agriculture Strategy and Project Management Unit at the Health and Safety Executive.**

**David de Verny**

**No...** not for migrant workers in Lincolnshire, where more than a quarter of fruit and veg sold in the UK is produced and packaged. The single biggest contributory factor to their misery, abuse and exploitation are gangmasters of every nationality. Every crook, gangster, mobster and big man got in on the act of earning easy money - vast amounts of it. There is no end to the criminal imagination. Migrant workers are stripped of life savings and borrowed money before they even reach the UK. Labour providers in the country of origin ask for £800 to £1,800 per worker to arrange travel, job and housing in the UK, while the average monthly wage for a worker in Eastern Europe is £80-90! Then government gets in on the act and takes a further £75 for the Workers Registration Scheme. And finally the gangmasters, who in 60 percent of cases are also the landlords, charge anything between £60-£250 per week for a bed or mattress in a House in Multiple Occupation. Together with illegal deductions for administration, transport, hard hats, gloves and the like, this leaves a large number of foreign workers with only £30 cash per week to live on.

The Gangmaster Licensing Authority has two inspectors working in Lincolnshire - the fourth largest county in the UK with an estimated 1,000 gangmasters operating here - and admits that 60 to 70 percent of gangmasters have so far not bothered to obtain an operating licence. Yet calls to abolish this modern day slavery fall on deaf ears and are ridiculed. Why the Job Centres cannot take on the role of labour provider for farms and packaging firms is beyond me. Migrant workers need to be encouraged to work in co-operatives and as social enterprises without the fear of reprisals and threats.

The whole system of food production, including packing and transport, is full of abuse, criminality and intimidation. It is one of capitalism's most silent crimes because the migrant workers at the very bottom of this money-spinning pyramid rarely complain. They are far too frightened.

**David de Verny is a Chaplain with New Arrival Communities in South East Lincolnshire.**

**Julian Oram**

**No...** not until agricultural workers get a better deal from global supply chains. For many of the world's 450 million waged agricultural labourers, poverty and hardship are inescapable facts of life. Low wages and the seasonal nature of farm work mean incomes are insufficient for agricultural labourers to invest in land or other assets that could provide improved livelihoods. In addition, farm workers in developing countries are frequently denied basic labour rights and often deal with hazardous chemicals and machinery. Of roughly 335,000 fatal workplace accidents worldwide each year, about half occur in agriculture.

Over recent decades, complex international supply chain relationships have emerged linking farm workers in poor countries with consumers in advanced economies on an unprecedented scale. The value of these supply chains is enormous, with food imports from developing countries into Britain alone worth over £12m per day.

Such sums suggest that global supply chains can provide a vital route out of poverty for agricultural workers. However farm labourers capture only a tiny fraction of the value of the products that enter international supply chains. Corporate concentration in the agrifood sector has enabled a handful of powerful commodity buyers and food retailers to dictate crop prices to their suppliers. Under pressure to reduce prices and increase quality, suppliers cut costs in the only area they can - their workforce. The result has been a drastic reduction in the number of permanently employed agricultural workers worldwide, leading to lower wages and a reduction in employment protection and benefits, particularly for migrant labourers and women workers.

Farm labourers have a right to good working conditions and a living wage, but this right will only be realised when governments tackle excessive corporate buyer power by re-regulating companies and markets. Only then will a more equitable share of commodity value chains stays in the hands of those who grow, pick and package the food we eat.

**Julian Oram is Deputy Head of the Trade and Corporates team at ActionAid UK, where he specialises in corporate accountability and the global food system.**

**Palwinder Kaur**

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Analysis: migrant workers

# What challenges face migrant workers in rural England?

Economic advantage is one of the key stimulants for migration, both for the migrant worker and for the hosting country that is seeking to fill labour shortages and skills gaps.

In May 2004, the European Union opened its doors to eight new member states including Poland, Slovakia and the Baltic States. In January this year, Romania and Bulgaria also acceded to the Union, increasing the overall membership to twenty-seven countries and boosting its population to half a billion people. With the undoubted opportunities that membership provides, it is not surprising that many citizens of the newly acceded countries are choosing to seek work in the more established EU countries such as the United Kingdom.

The Commission for Rural Communities analysed information collected via the Workers' Registration Scheme (WRS). According to the available information from the WRS, around 120,000 migrant workers registered in the rural areas of England between May 2004 and September 2006. This represents 23 percent of the total number of WRS registrations across England over this period, roughly in line with the rural-urban split of the whole population.

The WRS data can also identify the key economic sectors within which the rural migrant workers from the A8 accession countries were employed between May 2004 and September 2006. In terms of absolute numbers, there are three key sectors:

- Manufacturing (33 percent of all rural registrations)
- Agriculture and fishing (25 percent of all rural registrations)
- Distribution, hotel and retail (20 percent of all rural registrations)

These three sectors account for over three-quarters of registrations in rural areas. By comparison, the same three sectors account for 36 percent of overall rural employment. Clearly, migrant workers are more concentrated in specific industries than is the case for rural employees as a whole.

**120,000 migrant workers registered between May 2004 and September 2006**

Compared with the overall local workforce in rural areas, migrant workers are highly 'over-represented' in both manufacturing (which includes businesses such as food processing and packhouses) and in agriculture/fishing.

When we consider the geographical distribution of registrations for work in the manufacturing sector, we see two clear areas of high concentration - Yorkshire and areas around the Wash. Looking at registrations for the agricultural sector, it is clear that there is a more dispersed pattern with registrations seen in most rural areas. Registrations for work in the distribution, hotel and retail sectors are more clustered.

Hardworking migrants are making a tremendous contribution to rural economies. It is crucial to ensure that their willingness to work is not unfairly exploited. There have been media reports of unscrupulous landlords and employers 'shoe-horning' migrants into accommodation to gain maximum rents.

Rural residents in areas with clusters of migrant workers are concerned they will strain public services. Local authorities and their partners in these areas may not be as well-equipped to cope as larger, wealthier urban authorities. For example, rural

schools may sometimes for the first time be faced with children for whom English is not a first language. Similarly, a change in funding next academic year will make it especially hard for rural authorities to provide courses of English for Speakers of Other Languages. Despite these obstacles, there are commendable examples where public service providers have responded well to the needs of rural migrant workers and the challenges they pose for other residents.

**Higher costs would hit hard if the influx of migrant workers reversed**

Some businesses have also done well to help their migrant workforce. Overall, though, employers need to do more, sometimes jointly with public service providers. This should be a core business concern because labour shortages and higher costs would hit certain rural economies hard if the influx of migrant workers from the A8 countries suddenly reversed. The risk - and the need to address it - is particularly pronounced in manufacturing, distribution and agriculture.

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# Subsidies with sense

## How can we spend our single payment sustainably?

### ON THE FARM



**John Turner**

John Turner is a farmer near Stamford in Lincolnshire, where he runs a 100 hectare mixed farm together with his brother and parents. He was a founding member of FARM. [john.turner@fam.org.uk](mailto:john.turner@fam.org.uk)

January is conference season. Farmers with the necessary spare time and cash can treat themselves to slick showcases of all that is best in agriculture, and contrasting visions of what the future holds.

At one end of the spectrum sits the Oxford Farming Conference, with its bold agribusiness overtones. At the other is the Soil Association's, which this year focused on environmental limits. Each year the stakes rise a notch, as organisers compete for themes that will yield the most bountiful harvest of government ministers and media celebs. And, every year, practical farming gets left further behind in the scramble for column inches.

This year was no exception, with David Miliband's vacuous dismissal of organic food (and thereby organic farming) as a 'lifestyle choice' commanding endless coverage. In stark contrast, hardly a word was written about Jonathan Porritt's succinct summary of the huge implications of Mr Miliband's 'one planet' vision for the way that we farm.

January is also when I try to make sense of the piles of paper in my office. I need to plan for spring-sown crops, to work out how many livestock we can comfortably support, and to reflect on last year's successes and failures. Finances feature heavily in all this with the deadline for tax returns imminent and the rent demands approaching in April. We also know that with a bit of luck we should receive our Single Farm Payment (SFP) subsidy cheque – invested wisely, this could steer us down at least one of the routes towards sustainable farming envisaged in those lofty conferences.

There's ample advice about what not to spend our SFP cheque on. It shouldn't, we are told, subsidise loss-making enterprises on the farm, although many farmers have no other choice. By implication, it also shouldn't be used to renew tired pieces of farm machinery associated with such enterprises. For the more conscientious, there is a case that it shouldn't be used to invest in property or shares – no other industry could expect the luxury of such support. So, how should we invest in our farming future? How can we do so while allowing markets to operate freely and fairly? What counts as a good use of taxpayers' money?

The guidance from on high is to invest the money in sustainable, profitable enterprises and to diversify where necessary into non-farming interests. There also seems to be an attempt to justify the SFP as providing environmental benefits that the market doesn't support, but targeted measures such as the stewardship schemes are actually much better at this.

I could just as easily 'invest' in a Range Rover or a Caribbean holiday

What will we do with the money when, or if, it appears? We'll play our part in growing 'a diet for a small planet'. While there's a good case for using animals to graze and convert grass, it is unsustainable to fatten beef with wheat, potatoes and beans: we will change our crop rotation to reduce cattle numbers and concentrate on food production for direct human consumption. There is also little justification for using mains water for those cattle we do keep, so I will be looking to install a borehole to provide an alternative source for them. We have already gone a long way to reducing energy consumption but there are still some areas where we can go further.

Over recent years, the SFP subsidy cheque has already helped us reduce our farm's dependence on fertilizers and chemicals derived from fuel. It has reversed a decline in soil organic matter and helped make significant improvements in both the diversity and number of wildlife on the farm.

However, the SFP isn't ring-fenced. I could just as easily 'invest' in a Range Rover or a Caribbean holiday (now that's a lifestyle choice). This is too important to be left to chance – we face huge environmental and social challenges, and this public money could and should play a bigger part in meeting them. The farming conferences demonstrate the diversity of views on where a sustainable future lies and, in the midst of this, farmers need clear, practical guidance to help them invest their SFP subsidy money wisely.

# Food is a right

## Brazil is pioneering ways to make that right reality

### WORLDVIEW



**Flavio Valente**

Flavio Valente is Secretary General of Fian International. Until recently he was Brazil's National Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Food, Water and Rural Land, and Technical Coordinator of Brazilian Action for Nutrition and Human Rights (ABRANDH).

After 20 years of strong civil society mobilization, and with the support of the present federal government, the Brazilian National Congress has recently approved a National Food and Nutritional Security Framework Law instituting a National Food and Nutritional Security System to promote the human right to adequate food in the country.<sup>1</sup> The law reaffirms the international obligations of the Brazilian State – as party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>2</sup> – to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the realisation of the human right to adequate food of all inhabitants of the Brazilian territory. It also establishes the state's obligation to monitor the realisation of this right and to institute the necessary public mechanisms for people to be able to claim their right to food.

The proposed system is inter-ministerial in nature, bringing together an impressive cross-section of government sectors involved in the different dimensions of food and nutrition issues, such as: land tenure; agricultural production; food production systems; technical and credit support for small farmers; agrarian reform; food supply policies; food quality control; food marketing; health and nutrition; basic sanitation systems, food and nutritional surveillance, food and nutrition education; school feeding programmes; income transfer programs; human rights institutions; food and nutritional security of indigenous and Maroon populations; and emergency food assistance. According to the new law, the system will be coordinated by a cabinet-level inter-ministerial chamber that will be in charge of integrating the sectoral policies into a National Food and Nutritional Security Policy and Plan.

The challenge now is to put all this into practice in a country that is still split between the priorities of promoting the aggressive expansion of the production of commodities for export (soy, sugar, timber, biofuels etc.) to guarantee the inflow of foreign exchange, and guaranteeing land, technical and credit support to millions of small family farmers, millions of landless families, thousands of communities of African slave descendants and indigenous peoples, which are among the hardest hit by food insecurity and malnutrition in the country. The newly proposed system is not just about guaranteeing food assistance or income to the poorest, but also

questions the hegemonic development model of monoculture for export. So, embedded within it is also a choice between an agroecological, diversified, low-chemical input approach to food production and the genetically modified, chemical-intensive production model, with all its implications for food quality and displacement of rural people.

The system is not just about guaranteeing food assistance or income to the poorest, but also questions the model of monoculture for export

In parallel to this, the government has taken the initiative, in consultation with civil society, to set out a strong regulation on the marketing of fat, energy and salt rich foods to children under 12. This regulation is now undergoing a public consultation that will close at the end of March. In doing this, the government refused to accept arguments from the food and advertising industries that they could tackle the matter through voluntary measures.

The regulation would prohibit: TV publicity for these foods between 6am and 9pm; the participation of athletes and artists in commercials; publicity which implies that good parents are those who buy such foods for their children; and, finally, the distribution of free samples and gifts with such foods. These stringent proposals are strongly supported by the public and heavily opposed by the food industry, which has threatened to go to court if the new rules get the go ahead.

So, current developments in Brazil are worth following closely. These initiatives may have important spin offs elsewhere in Latin America and the global south. How will multinational food companies and their governmental partners in the rich countries of the north respond? Will these initiatives in the south spark similar efforts by civil society in the north and maybe even in the UN? Time will tell.

<sup>1</sup> [www.planalto.gov.br/consea/exec/index.cfm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/consea/exec/index.cfm)  
<sup>2</sup> [www.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm](http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm)

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# Alcohol advertising

## We need to learn from Ofcom's food ad consultation

### HEALTH CONSCIOUS



Jane Landon

As I write, UK broadcast regulator Ofcom is due to announce its final decision on new rules to restrict food and drink advertising to children. We can expect a ban on advertising for high fat, sugar or salt foods (HFSS) during children's programming and during programmes of special interest to children under 16, and prohibitions on certain advertising techniques (such as associations with licensed characters or the offer of collectible toys) in HFSS adverts 'targeting' pre-school or primary aged children.

In a global context of generally feeble – or absent – regulations, these measures would represent just about the most rigorous restrictions on TV food advertising to children anywhere in the world.

Yet, as anyone following this extraordinary process will know, the consensus among a broad coalition of health charities, MPs, medical professional bodies, consumer groups and the general public is that the proposals are inadequate and that the most effective way to reduce children's exposure to HFSS advertising is a total restriction up to the 9pm watershed. Ofcom's own impact assessment shows the 9pm option offers twice the reduction in advertising impacts and twice the estimated health and social benefits compared to the proposed package.

The whole episode has given food for thought to anyone concerned about alcohol advertising, which also affects health. In December, I was invited by Alcohol Concern to speak at a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Alcohol Misuse about the National Heart Forum's campaign for the 9pm watershed and our threatened legal action against Ofcom, which successfully overturned the regulator's pre-determination to rule out a 9pm option from the public consultation.

At this meeting, recent research by the Institute for Alcohol Studies was reported to demonstrate a very clear relationship between increasing UK advertising expenditure on alcohol between 1992 and 2000 and rising levels of alcohol consumption amongst 11- to 15-year-olds during the same period.

Scheduling restrictions on TV advertisements are almost all based on the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board audience index. Alcohol and bingo share an index of 100, which means that a

programme attracts restrictions if it is watched by a greater proportion of children than you would find in the population at large. For HFSS food, Ofcom sets the bar at 120, meaning the child audience ratio would have to be at least 20 percent greater.

Problems arise when children watch programmes that also attract a large adult audience (such as *Emmerdale*, *Coronation Street* or *X Factor*). These have a low ratio of child to adult viewers despite a high number of children watching. As a result, programmes which attract the largest numbers of children escape the advertising ban.

According to Srabani Sen, chief executive of Alcohol Concern, this weakness is compounded by inadequate content rules governing alcoholic drinks which do not prevent adverts appealing to underage drinkers. She gave as examples the recent Bacardi campaign promoting its low calorie drink, which could easily appeal to diet-conscious teenagers, and Carling's *Belong* campaign that seemed in direct contravention to the rules prohibiting adverts which link alcohol and social success.

If the principle underpinning Ofcom's rules is that the regulator recognises the harmful link between alcohol ads and drinking among under-18s, it hardly seems justifiable to use a regulatory mechanism that only protects children when they are a majority audience. Either Ofcom should extend protection to all children or reject the link entirely. The Ofcom person at the meeting said she didn't see any problem with current rules on alcohol advertising.

I'd happily wager that calculating the costs and benefits of a watershed restriction on alcohol advertising would confirm this option to be far more effective than current rules and lead Ofcom to struggle with its self-determined duty to make maintaining television standards its top priority, just as it has over HFSS food advertising.

Surely the lesson from the food ad consultation is that Ofcom is ill-equipped to make judgements on public policy decisions, rather than purely regulatory matters. Wherever advertising is a major public concern, be it for food, alcohol or gambling, it should be the job of the government, not the economic regulator, to take the final decision.

# Let the race begin!

## As retailers go green we need to look ahead

### CAPITAL CONCERNS



Nick Robins

Timing is everything. Seven years ago, an inspired attempt was made to use market forces to drive up standards of social and environmental performance in the supermarket sector. Led by the International Institute for Environment and Development, this 'race to the top' had all the hallmarks of a successful project. Ultimately it failed, however, when Tesco and Asda did not submit themselves to third-party scrutiny. Roll forward to 2007 and how the world has changed. Over the past year, Tesco and Wal-Mart (Asda's parent), as well as other retailers, have announced ambitious initiatives to 'green' their operations, with Tesco's Terry Leahy, for example, committing the company to provide carbon footprints for all of its products.

Looking back, three things seem to have transformed the situation over the past seven years. The first is that the environmental constraints on current patterns of consumption have become unequivocal, whether the issue is fish or climate change. Alongside this is a second trend – the victory of the enlightened self-interest model of corporate social responsibility, which has shown how incumbent players can gain both reputational and economic benefits from taking a proactive approach to employee engagement, supplier relations, customer satisfaction and environmental management. The third change is the heightened level of community protest against the economic impact of 'big box' retailers on independent traders and suppliers. While supermarket efforts to tackle climate change clearly do little or nothing to stem the precipitous decline of specialist grocery outlets, it at least shows how a dominant market position can be used positively.

To some extent, this welcome engagement from the industry giants with the sustainability agenda has caught civil society and socially responsible investors off-guard. After years of often seemingly fruitless advocacy and activism, one-time sector laggards have apparently leapfrogged into leadership positions. Yet dig beneath the headlines and it becomes almost impossible to compare and contrast real company performance. For, what is striking about the current crop of 'green' plans, is how they are designed on their own terms by the companies concerned, with pitifully few areas where real benchmarking is possible on the back of published commitments.

This is why, more than ever, we need commonly accepted expectations on both conduct and disclosure. An essential starting point for such an exercise would be to map out the macro-level challenges facing the sector. 2004 saw a similar exercise for pharmaceuticals, which then faced reputational threats of "biblical proportions" from protests against corporate policies on access to medicines in the developing world. This Pharma Futures initiative was backed by some of the world's leading pension funds, who wanted to align shareholder and stakeholder interests over the long-term. The project generated three scenarios – driven in turn by producers, consumers and governments – in all of which the traditional pharma sector would struggle to perform.

The task ahead is to construct a framework for sustainability analysis and disclosure that isn't hostage to corporate opt-outs and that enables consumers, employees, suppliers, retailers (and investors!) to gain an informed view on actual progress. Everyone will have their favourite issues, and our team has shortlisted ten. For me, three stand out: economic diversity, value added and carbon reduction. On the first, it seems difficult to reconcile the dominant position of the 'big four' supermarkets with a common sense model of market economics that promotes new entrants and innovation – one performance indicator would be to measure progress towards a more balanced distribution of market share, with ten percent as a notional target. How value is shared along the supply chain and within companies is a global issue, but it is particularly pronounced in the retail sector, which has a high proportion of low-income, mostly female workers – here some benchmarks exist, such as Whole Food Markets in the US, which caps salaries at 14 times the group average. On carbon reduction, it is crucial to cast the net beyond a company's own operations and its suppliers, to question also their underlying model of consumer access which is dependent on transport emissions.

The supermarket sector is at last engaging creatively with the sustainability agenda. To succeed, ambition must be high – and a Retail Futures scenarios project might be a good place to start.

Nick Robins is Head of Sustainable and Responsible Investment Funds at Henderson Global Investors.  
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#### Next issue

#### Choice, scale and power

Big retail wants to go green, healthy and fair. Can it?

See page 22 for details

# The Business Pages

## Safety is a skill worth building

Charlie Clutterbuck

Should we worry more about the health and safety of farm workers, farmers and others who provide and process food, or can we leave it to the authorities to ensure their welfare? Health and safety is a specialist bore to some, but to many others it is a matter of life or death. People should be able to go to work presuming that they will not be severely injured or killed, nor that they will contract a disease that prevents them working or enjoying a normal life.

Farm and food workers are notoriously poorly paid and often work in poor conditions. Government 'extension services' that support food and agriculture are declining throughout the world, making protection even more precarious.

The International Labour Office (ILO) estimates at least 170,000 agricultural workers are killed each year. Workers in agriculture run at least twice the risk of dying on the job compared with workers in other sectors. Their mortality rates have remained consistently high in the last decade while other sectors have decreased. Millions are seriously injured in workplace accidents. Furthermore, due to the widespread under-reporting of deaths, injuries and occupational diseases in agriculture, the real picture of the occupational health and safety of farm workers is likely to be worse than these official statistics.

In common, UK farm workers face a greater threat of death while at work than any other group of workers, resulting in about 50 people dying per year. A recent report from the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) also found that one in four migrants had either themselves experienced an accident at work or had witnessed accidents involving migrant co-workers.<sup>1</sup>

The Labour government set up a *Revitalising Health & Safety* initiative which identified agriculture as a main target of concern. The government also included safety at work in their *Strategy for Sustainable Farming & Food*, highlighting that 100,000 working days were being lost each year to agricultural accidents.<sup>2</sup>

And the response of the HSE? In the last two years, they have halved the agriculture budget. They closed their Health in

Agriculture committee, where all sides of the industry met to sort out long term health issues, such as musculo-skeletal disorders that afflict 80 percent of permanent workers.

To deal with the diverse difficulties that they face, UK farm workers are developing a fresh approach that may have lessons for others. Instead of relying on rarely seen inspectors, or occasional roving safety reps, they are also developing national work-based qualifications for people on farms.<sup>3</sup> People on farms and in packing houses at all levels can learn about how to develop the necessary skills to promote better safety practices and procedures. Retailers are already expecting these sorts of higher standards.

We cannot presume that health and safety laws in most countries protect food and farm workers. We need a more transparent system where there is a greater capacity of people doing the jobs to be more skilled in what to look out for and what controls should be in place.

For help anywhere in the world contact the ILO: [www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/index.htm)

<sup>1</sup> [www.hazards.org.uk/commissionimpossible](http://www.hazards.org.uk/commissionimpossible)

<sup>2</sup> [www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/pdf/sffs.pdf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/pdf/sffs.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [www.epaw.co.uk/farm.html](http://www.epaw.co.uk/farm.html)

Charlie Clutterbuck is an agricultural scientist who works a lot with trade unions and runs Environmental Practice @ Work Ltd.

He is a member of the Food Ethics Council. [www.epaw.co.uk](http://www.epaw.co.uk) | [www.sustainablefood.com](http://www.sustainablefood.com)

## Faith groups are a growing force

Michael Heasman

The influence of faith-based groups is often overlooked by business leaders, yet they are increasingly active on public policy relating to food. While faith-driven activism in food and farming goes back at least as far as the industrialization of our food supply in the 19th century,<sup>1</sup> a new dynamic in the public activism of faith-based groups seems to be opening up – this is faith-based responses to the environment, especially issues around global warming.

US Christian groups illustrate this trend, which is evident across other faiths and in other countries. A key example, perhaps one of the more unexpected moments in Christian intervention in environmental matters, was in early 2006 when a group of 85 influential US evangelical leaders released a statement expressing a biblically driven commitment to curb global warming and calling on the government to enact national legislation to reduce carbon dioxide emissions that are contributing to global climate change.

The statement, issued by the Evangelical Climate Initiative, was signed by the US leaders of many of the United States evangelical Christian denominations, mega-church pastors, Christian college presidents, and CEOs of major evangelical world relief organizations.<sup>2</sup> Citing higher sea levels, more frequent heat waves and droughts, increased tropical diseases, and drops in agricultural

output as likely results of “even small rises in global temperature,” the statement declares: “This is God’s world, and any damage that we do to God’s world is an offense against God himself”. It is too early to gauge the impact this type of faith-driven environmental intervention will have on the food industry and agri-business, but it is truly significant that the Christian ‘right’ is turning to ‘green’ matters.

In other areas, faith groups are already central to public awareness and campaigning on food business-related issues. One prominent area, with a long history, is food aid, food security and hunger, where there are countless examples of faith-based groups from all types of religious tradition making a difference. Again, though, the key trend here is ever more direct engagement in public policy debates, which is putting these groups in a strong position to critique food business strategies on ethics and social responsibility. For example, Bread for the World, a US group started in October 1972 by a small coalition of Catholics and Protestants, today brings together a membership of 500,000 to influence US farm policy in support of struggling farmers, rural communities and those at risk of hunger.

A second area where faith groups have a long history but growing influence is socially responsible investment. For example, the New York-based Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility has filed 150 shareholder-sponsored resolutions for the 2007 filing/proxy voting season. Resolutions have been filed with more than 70 companies addressing more than 40 key issues. While not all of these are food-related, some are: they include resolutions on the labelling of genetically modified products, sustainability reporting and vendor standards.

A third, less reported, area is the involvement of church groups in working to improve labour standards in the food supply chain. This area of faith-based activism is especially important since it often falls between the cracks of other

environmental or food-related advocacy. A prominent example is the way different US church groups have been key players in an on-going campaign to introduce fair labour practices and end child slavery in the cocoa industry. They have directly lobbied leading US candy and chocolate confectionery makers such as Hershey and M&M/Mars.

In particular the campaign has urged these chocolate giants to purchase a percentage of Fair Trade Certified cocoa, and to ensure their suppliers comply with International Labour Organisation standards on forced and child labour. One tactic is writing open letters to the corporations concerned, such as in June 2002, when church groups joined unions, student and consumer groups, and environmental and economic justice organizations, to write to the President of M&M/Mars Inc. in the US calling on the company to source at least five percent of its cocoa as Fair Trade. As they point out in this letter to Mars: “Surely, most of your customers would be outraged to learn that the sweetness of their favorite chocolate is tainted with the bitterness of slavery and worker exploitation”.

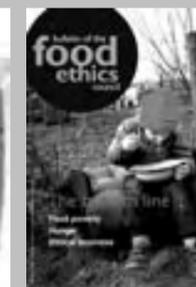
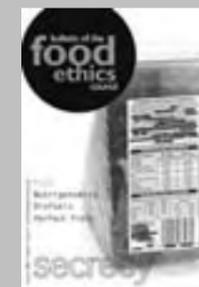
As the food industry grapples with environmental challenges and ethical issues, and tries to expand in non-Western countries, faith-based groups and people of faith will emerge as stronger public advocates for food justice and ethics. through their engagement with issues related to the food business, particularly as the food industry itself grapples with the challenges posed by environmental crisis, business sustainability and ethics, and trying to grow their market shares through marketing activities in non-Western countries.

<sup>1</sup> Cathy Campbell (2003) *Stations of the banquet: faith foundations of justice*. Liturgical Press.

<sup>2</sup> [www.christiansandclimate.org](http://www.christiansandclimate.org)

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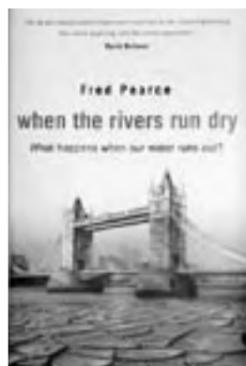
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# reviews reading



## When the rivers run dry: what happens when our water runs out?

Fred Pearce | 2006 | Eden Project Books

In the problem stakes, water scarcity is up there with climate change – it is a fact, not just a possibility, that will shape many of our lives profoundly. What Fred Pearce's globe-hopping analysis of the issue underlines is that it will be through food and other products that we may feel the biggest effects, and not necessarily from our taps drying up.

The book is full of human stories. Pearce visits people drilling their communities dry in Gujarat, India, and finds out why they are

doing so. He talks to the director of Cubbie Station, Australia's largest private irrigation project, in the ever dryer Murray Basin. Yet it is numbers

which launch the first chapter that tell the most memorable tale: that it takes up to 5,000 litres of water to grow a bag of rice – more water than many households use in a week; 1,000 for a kilo of wheat; and 5,000 litres for a small steak. Compared with the cubic metre of water Pearce drinks in a year, he estimates using 50 to 100 cubic metres around the home and up to 2,000 times as much – that's more than half an Olympic-size swimming pool – to feed and clothe himself.

Pearce ends with a chapter called 'water ethics'. Here, he points out this problem can be solved – after all we're not really running out of water, just managing it wastefully. Yet he also touches on an important dilemma. Rich countries are buffered against the worst impacts of water scarcity and have a responsibility to help poorer countries cope as well. Yet, so many of the disasters he documents are products of ill-considered development projects, often backed by heavy investment. Can we share the wherewithal to address water scarcity without compromising people's autonomy to find their own solutions to this problem? TM

## Ethics, law and society (Volume 2)

Jennifer Gunning & Søren Holm (eds.) | 2006 | Ashgate

Over 30 essays on topics ranging from the toy industry to the trial of Saddam Hussein. The collection includes several contributions on food and public health, some from FEC members and staff. TM

## Fuelling a food crisis: the impact of peak oil on food security

Caroline Lucas, Andy Jones & Colin Hines | 2006 | The Greens & European Free Alliance

A report arguing that oil shortages will drive up food prices. It calls for policies that promote greater national and regional self-reliance in agriculture. TM

## Organic, Inc.: natural foods and how they grew

Samuel Fromartz | 2006 | Harcourt

Deserving shelf space with other books monitoring alternative food networks, by Melanie DuPuis, Julie Guthman and Michael Pollan, this book describes how what began as specialist production from small organic plots turned into a competitive farm niche, where incomers with MBAs used big business tactics of mergers and cost-cutting to beat their competitors. BS

## The received wisdom: opening up expert advice

Jack Stilgoe, Alan Irwin & Kevin Jones | 2006 | Demos

One of the latest booklets from the think tank's prolific science policy team. The authors wrote this report after Defra commissioned them to look at the way it took advice from experts. It provides one of the most readable accounts yet of the challenges associated with building expert advice into public decision-making, and includes especially useful reflections on the difficult roles 'lay members' play on government advisory committees. TM

## UK food supply in the 21st century: the new dynamic

Susan Ambler-Edwards et al. | 2007 | Chatham House

A briefing paper from the Royal Institute of International Affairs. This provides a concise analysis of some of the main uncertainties overshadowing UK and global food supplies in decades to come. It predicts significant structural change in areas ranging from land and water use and to livestock and technology. TM

## World development report 2008: agriculture for development

2008 | World Bank

The report itself is a long way off but an outline is already available through the World Bank website. Starting with the fact that 70 percent of the world's poor live in rural areas, mostly depending on agriculture, the report looks set to explore how agricultural investment can have a positive social, economic and environmental impact. The Bretton Woods Project ([www.brettonwoodsproject.org](http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org)) is co-ordinating critical feedback. TM



# reviews eating



## By Kevin Morgan

Kevin Morgan is Professor of European Regional Development in the School of City and Regional Planning at Cardiff University, where he researches creative public procurement. He is a member of the Food Ethics Council. [morgankj@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:morgankj@cardiff.ac.uk)

## School food heaven

One of the unexpected fringe benefits of studying the reform of school food in Europe was an invitation from the Mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni, to sample a Roman-style school meal. Along with my colleague, Roberta Sonnino, we gladly accepted what turned out to be the most memorable day of our school food research project.

The Mayor had organised a press conference on Capitol Hill in the morning, where he had arranged for us to be interrogated by the Roman media, all curious to know why we had travelled so far for the sake of a school meal. Having earned our crust, we departed for Rio de Janeiro – a primary school in the Monteverde district of the city.

As a matter of courtesy we were introduced to the school dinner ladies, all dressed in hygienic white uniforms. They told us that, two hours before lunch, all children in Rome are given a Fair Trade chocolate bar as a mid-morning snack (the proceeds from which were used in the Dominican Republic to build a school).

Entering the dining room we were struck by some very unusual sights – nicely laid tablecloths; children trusted with silverware; and, most shocking of all, teachers sitting and eating with the children. The teachers were surprised to learn that this didn't happen in the UK because, as one of them said, "eating is a pedagogic moment".

The food itself was the high point of the occasion. The first course consisted of pasta with a freshly-made tomato sauce, simple but delicious. The second course was freshly-made meatballs with a mixed salad, followed by seasonal fruit as a third course. The biggest shock for Brits was the absence of choice – a term that did not resonate at all in Rome, making healthy eating much easier to organise. After finishing their meal, children were invited to dispose of their leftovers, some of which were destined for the city's animal shelters.

The Soil Association in the UK would be green with envy to learn that 70 percent of the meal was organic. Where the ingredients were not organic, they were certified – the meatballs were made from PGI-certified Welsh lamb for example. The bread was freshly made because regulations specify that it must not be more than six hours old. The parmesan cheese (Parmigiano Reggiano) was required to be freshly grated each day too.



© Roberta Sonnino

The hallmarks of the Roman system are quality ingredients, freshness, lack of choice and a social environment which fosters the idea that food is pleasure not fuel. Walter Veltroni, the mayor, is immensely proud of the city's school meals system – a system of social justice in action.

Rome's school meals system is not perfect. The reforms to date have focused on *quality* provision, not necessarily local provision. Re-localising the food chain to ensure that local food is good food is the next big challenge. If Rome is not yet school food heaven, it's damn close.

## Choice, scale and power Preview

### Big retail wants to go green, healthy and fair. Can it?

The Summer '07 issue of *Food Ethics* looks ahead to the next wave of challenges supermarkets will face, asking:

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## Rio de Janeiro Primary School Rome, Italy

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# upcoming events



1st - 2nd Mar '07	<b>USDA Outlook - Agriculture at the Crossroads: Energy, Farm and Rural Policy</b> USDA   <a href="http://www.usda.gov/oce/forum/">www.usda.gov/oce/forum/</a>   Arlington VA, USA
5th - 7th Mar '07	<b>Energy Farmers: From Energy Hunter Gatherers to a Sustainable Future</b> James Martin Institute   <a href="http://www.martinstitute.ox.ac.uk">www.martinstitute.ox.ac.uk</a>   Oxford, UK
7th Mar '07	<b>Winning Products Seminar 2007</b> Food and Drink Innovation Network   <a href="mailto:jeffrey.hyman@fdin.go-plus.net">jeffrey.hyman@fdin.go-plus.net</a>   Daventry, UK
7th - 8th Mar '07	<b>How to Communicate Climate Change to Consumers</b> Ethical Corporation Conferences   <a href="http://www.ethicalcorp.com">www.ethicalcorp.com</a>   London, UK
9th Mar '07	<b>Cooking Numbers and Eating Words: Using Data to Investigate Food, Lifestyle and Health</b> Economic and Social Data Service   <a href="http://www.esds.ac.uk/news/eventdetail.asp?id=1665">www.esds.ac.uk/news/eventdetail.asp?id=1665</a>   Leeds, UK
19th - 20th Mar '07	<b>3rd National Conference on Obesity and Health</b> Index Communications   <a href="http://www.obesityandhealth.co.uk">www.obesityandhealth.co.uk</a>   Manchester, UK
19th - 22nd Mar '07	<b>Secure and Sustainable Living: Social and Economic Benefits of Weather, Climate and Water Services</b> World Meteorological Organization   <a href="http://www.wmo.int/Madrid07/">www.wmo.int/Madrid07/</a>   Madrid, Spain
20th - 21st Mar '07	<b>Working Towards Sustainability in the Food Supply Chain</b> Cold Storage & Distribution Federation   <a href="http://www.csdf.org.uk">www.csdf.org.uk</a>   Leeds, UK
26th - 28th Mar '07	<b>Genomics and Society: Retrospects and Prospects</b> CESAgen   <a href="http://www.cesagen.lancs.ac.uk">www.cesagen.lancs.ac.uk</a>   London, UK
27th - 28th Mar '07	<b>EU Outlook - Towards 2013: The Prospects for CAP Reform</b> AgraEurope   <a href="http://www.agra-net.com">www.agra-net.com</a>   London, UK
2nd - 4th Apr '07	<b>BSAS Annual Conference</b> British Society of Animal Science   <a href="http://www.bsas.org.uk">www.bsas.org.uk</a>   Southport, UK
17th Apr '07	<b>Horticultural Marketing Symposium</b> Organic South West / Soil Association   <a href="http://www.soilassociation.org">www.soilassociation.org</a>   St. Austell, UK
17th - 19th Apr '07	<b>High Value Grassland</b> British Grassland Society, British Ecological Society, British Society of Animal Science   <a href="http://www.britishgrassland.com">www.britishgrassland.com</a>   Staffordshire, UK
3rd May '07	<b>Landwards 2007 - Achieving Traceability across the Food Chain</b> IAgrE   <a href="http://www.iagre.org/landwards2007">www.iagre.org/landwards2007</a>   Peterborough, UK
3rd - 4th May '07	<b>Assuring Animal Welfare: From Societal Concerns to Implementation</b> Welfare Quality   <a href="http://www.welfarequality.net">www.welfarequality.net</a>   Berlin, Germany
9th - 11th May '07	<b>Functional Foods in Europe - International Developments in Science and Health Claims</b> ILSI   <a href="http://europe.ilsa.org/events/upcoming/functionalfoods.htm">europe.ilsa.org/events/upcoming/functionalfoods.htm</a>   Malta
15th - 19th May '07	<b>World Environmental and Water Resources Congress</b> Environmental and Water Resources Institute (EWRI) of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)   <a href="http://content.asce.org/conferences/ewri2007/">content.asce.org/conferences/ewri2007/</a>   Florida, USA
12th - 13th Jun '07	<b>3rd Annual Obesity Europe Conference</b> Epsilon Events   <a href="http://www.epsilonevents.com">www.epsilonevents.com</a>   Brussels, Belgium
27th - 29th Jul '07	<b>Badger Trust Annual Conference</b> Badger Trust   <a href="http://www.badgertrust.org.uk">www.badgertrust.org.uk</a>   Derbyshire, UK
31st Aug '07	<b>Organic Food Awards</b> Soil Association   <a href="http://www.soilassociation.org/foodawards">www.soilassociation.org/foodawards</a>   Bristol, UK
1st - 2nd Sep '07	<b>Soil Association Organic Food Festival</b> Soil Association   <a href="http://www.soilassociation.org/festival">www.soilassociation.org/festival</a>   Bristol, UK
13th - 15th Sep '07	<b>Bioethics in the Real World</b> European Association of Centres of Medical Ethics   <a href="http://www.ethik.unizh.ch/biomed/eacme/index.html">www.ethik.unizh.ch/biomed/eacme/index.html</a>   Zurich, Switzerland
13th - 15th Sep '07	<b>Sustainable Food Production and Ethics</b> EurSafe   <a href="http://www.eursafe.org">www.eursafe.org</a>   Vienna, Austria
17th - 19th Sep '07	<b>Pathways to Legitimacy? The Future of Global and Regional Governance</b> Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, University of Warwick   <a href="http://www.csgr.org">www.csgr.org</a>   Warwick, UK