



## Press release

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### **Food Ethics Council celebrates 20 years as the authoritative voice on food ethics**

*Ethical decision-making must be at the heart of future food policy, say leading global experts on food*

The Food Ethics Council celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary today, Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2018, by convening a group of leading experts, including Olivier De Schutter, former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food and co-chair of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food), to discuss 'The Future of Food, all things considered'.

The event brings together over 100 opinion formers, food and farming business leaders and other changemakers to explore the big, difficult and pressing questions facing our food system, and to call for much needed action.

Jon Alexander, Chair of the Food Ethics Council said: *"Despite the progress we've seen in the last 20 years, the challenges facing our food system are at the moment getting worse not better. This is not about a single issue but the outcomes of the whole system: from the treatment of farm animals to care for the environment, from human health to the welfare of those working in the food system. Food ethics cuts across all of these concerns. We have seen a Blue Planet moment turn our society's approach to plastics upside down almost overnight; we need a Blue Planet moment for food."*

Keynote speaker Olivier De Schutter said: *"There is an urgent need to move towards a fairer food system and escape the current path dependency, in which food systems reform is little more than crisis management. This requires food democracy: we must hold institutions to account and give people a voice in shaping a food system fit for the future."*

With a reputation for putting fairness and sustainability at the centre of policy decisions about UK food and farming, the Food Ethics Council has been the leading voice on food ethics for twenty years. During this time, ethical concerns have risen up the food and farming agenda. There have been some steps towards fairer, healthier food systems in the UK, from the creation of the Food Standards Agency, to the establishment of the Groceries Code Adjudicator and the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act. We have seen a gradual acceptance that diets do more than impact individual health, but this has not yet translated into meaningful action at a societal scale.

Dr Modi Mwatsama, Director of Policy at the UK Health Forum, also speaking at the event, said: *"Poor diets are damaging our wallets, our health and the health of the planet. We have an urgent duty to tackle the problem of unhealthy and unsustainable diets for the sake of current and future generations."*

In the last 20 years, there has also been a series of food scares and scandals, from foot-and-mouth to horsemeat, and responses from businesses and government have been piecemeal at best. In the last twelve months alone meat has reportedly been found in vegan products, raising serious issues about trust and transparency in food supply chains; supermarkets have been accused of misleading shoppers by introducing self-certified 'fairly traded' labels; and mergers have been proposed in an already concentrated food sector, raising questions about power in the food system.

Since 1998 the Food Ethics Council has played a pivotal role in shifting debates and taking concrete steps towards a fairer food system by putting ethical concerns relating to food and farming firmly on the map. Over the last two decades, the Food Ethics Council has been instrumental in:

- breaking the stalemate between producers and civil society groups on the meat and livestock issue, via its [Livestock Dialogues](#) series with WWF-UK. This helped catalyse the launch of Eating Better, a civil society alliance of over 50 organisations. The Food Ethics Council has been at the forefront of promoting 'less and better' meat consumption in the UK, almost a decade before 'flexitarianism' began to really take off in the UK;
- redefining what fairness in the food system means, with its landmark 2010 [Food Justice](#) report, highlighting the need for a 'fair share', 'fair say' and 'fair play'; and
- pushing household food insecurity in the UK onto the political agenda, with its 2012 work for Defra being raised at Prime Minister's Questions and helping trigger the launch of the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty.

Helen Browning OBE, Chief Executive of the Soil Association, member and former Chair of the Food Ethics Council said: *"For the last 20 years, a time of much change and turmoil, the Food Ethics Council has offered objective analysis and a safe space to debate the ethical issues around food without fear or favour. Now is a moment where change is possible and we can put values at the heart of our food system. The Food Ethics Council's experience and authority will be invaluable in helping this happen."*

In the next decade, the Food Ethics Council will continue to open up the political space, so that politicians, businesses, civil society and citizens are ready to embrace opportunities to shape the future of food and farming for the better. Our food system urgently needs a 'Blue Planet moment' to set it onto a fair and sustainable footing.

#### Notes to editors

The Food Ethics Council has created a timeline of selected food milestones from the past 20 years. The timeline can be viewed [here](#). The Food Ethics Council was founded in 1998 by [Ben Mephum](#), "as a result of widespread public concern over recent developments in agricultural and food industries, some of which offended commonly accepted ethical principles". The landscape at the time was a mix of food scares – including salmonella, E. coli and BSE – and silver bullet solutions. This had led people to question the direction of travel and how our food was produced.

The Food Ethics Council ([foodethicscouncil.org](http://foodethicscouncil.org)) is a UK-based charity that provides independent advice on the ethics of food and farming. Our aim is to create a food system that is fair and healthy for people, animals and the environment. Twitter [@FoodEthicsNews](#). Facebook [@FoodEthicsCouncil](#)

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