**Submission by the Food Ethics Council to the Environmental Audit Committee inquiry into Environmental Change and Food Security**

Submitted21st December 2022

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**Respondent type:** Charity (registered charity and company limited by guarantee)

**Who we are**

1. The Food Ethics Council is a registered charity whose mission is to accelerate the shift to fair food systems that respect people, animals and the planet. Our vision is of a world where it is easy to eat well and global hunger is a distant memory; where farmers and food producers make a decent living, animals are treated humanely, and the environment is respected.
2. We were founded in 1998 and are considered by stakeholders to be experts on fairness and sustainability in food and farming, and the leader on ethical food issues. For 24 years, we have provided an independent voice and expertise from our Council and networks (across civil society, business and government) to bring ethics to the centre of food systems. We ask the hard questions and bring people and organisations together to find ‘in the round’ solutions to contentious issues relating to food and farming.
3. The Food Ethics Council is an expert body consisting of up to 20 Council members, leaders in their fields, bringing extensive networks and a range of expertise, from academic research and ethics through to practical knowledge of farming, business and policy.

**Overarching comments**

1. At the Food Ethics Council, we strongly support the development of an ambitious, overarching, long-term and integrated national food strategy, that has cross-party support and buy-in of all key government departments. This should link into international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Change and Biodiversity agreements. We also want measures taken that will promote adoption of the real living wage, will enable more people to get into good secure employment and will ensure the social security system functions properly to support people in need. The answers to food security – good food for everyone, forever - lie in empowering people and getting more people paid and treated better, not in artificially supressing the price of food and promoting cheap food (when others always end up paying the true cost of cheap food). The government should develop a comprehensive National Infant Feeding Strategy and implementation plan, including actions to promote, protect and support breastfeeding in all relevant policy areas, as previously advocated by First Steps Nutrition Trust.
2. How we produce, distribute and trade our food is vitally important – and we need a mix of measures to promote nature-friendly food production, to slash food loss and waste, and to rapidly move away from an obesogenic food environment. We should be striving for nutrition security – positive nutrition for all, rather than just providing enough food for everyone, regardless of its nutritional content. The consumerist mindset we are trapped in is the root of many of the problems facing our food system. We can only transition to fair food systems if we transform our mindsets from consumerism to food citizenship.

**Responses to individual questions**

**Climate change and food security: projected effect, risks, and mitigation**

1. Food systems are both major contributors to, and severely affected by, the climate and biodiversity crises. We are not responding to the specific questions in this section. We will leave others to respond directly.

**UK preparedness: Government and market**

1. We are not responding to all the specific questions here, but we provide short responses to some of the questions in this section below.

*Q: How effective would the market be at securing the UK’s food supply in a situation of major food insecurity world wide? To what extent could Government intervention be needed?*

1. There are several market failures in the food system, as outlined clearly in the diagnosis section of Henry Dimbleby’s independent National Food Strategy. We are already in a period of major food insecurity worldwide and it is unimaginable that we can get anywhere close to food security worldwide without strong action from all parties, including intervention from national governments. Government intervention can take many forms – from sustainable dietary guidelines to public procurement standards that reflect those guidelines; from restrictions on junk food advertising to properly rewarding farmers for delivering public goods (including food) and beyond.

*Q: Could the UK’s land be better used to secure our domestic food supply? What role could community or urban food growing play in increasing the UK’s resilience to food shortages caused by environmental change?*

1. There is a critical distinction between whether it is *possible* for the UK to be self-sufficient in producing healthy, fair, sustainable and humane food for all – and whether it is *desirable* for the UK to seek to be self-sufficient in such food. There is scope for the UK to significantly increase e.g. production of fruit, vegetables, pulses and nuts and in so doing to significantly increase levels of self-sufficiency. However, there will always be some food types that it will not make sense (economically or environmentally) to try to grow/ produce in the UK, that are better grown in other countries and that – done well – can deliver social, economic and environmental benefits to the countries from which they are sourced.
2. Supporting the development of community or urban food growing – and providing local routes to market – is vital. We applaud the work of Better Food Traders and others working in this area. We support the Community right to grow campaign led by Incredible Edible and believe that implementing the Community right to grow would be a very positive step forward in helping build community food resilience at a local level. This would support broader national food security goals and reduce environmental impacts from food distribution, but as – or even more – importantly, it would also help people value food (and food production) more, promote mental and physical health & wellbeing, and positively contribute to the levelling up agenda.

*Q: What role should the Government take in ensuring that land is available to secure the UK’s food supply in the context of a changing climate?*

1. Co-developing a land use framework will be an important first step. We urge the UK government to build on the important work of organisations such as the Food and Farming Countryside Commission in this regard. It is vital that “ensuring that land is available” does not mean land grabs, i.e. buying up or seizing land in other countries as was done in colonial times. The government should invest in the next generation of producers and growers, including in addressing questions of racial injustice e.g. difficulty in access to land for minoritised groups.
2. More consideration should also be given to the possibilities of sustainable food supply from our seas and waters. Any fish and seafood eaten must be produced from sustainable stocks. Water-based food supplies are too often neglected in discussions about food security and the land.

**Securing a sustainable food supply**

*Q: Does the Government’s Food Strategy put the UK on a path to a secure and sustainable food supply?*

1. In short, no. The Government’s Food Strategy is woefully inadequate, including in addressing climate, inequality, health and biodiversity crises - and in putting the UK on a path to genuine food security. This is not just the view of the UK Climate Change Committee, but also of many others working in the sector, including us at the Food Ethics Council. The Government’s Food Strategy fails to set a long-term vision or long-term goals around food security (or nutrition security) – and crucially fails to provide a framework for joined-up policymaking, which is so urgently needed.

*Q: What are the most environmentally friendly ways of producing a secure supply of nutritious food?*

1. There are lots of ways of producing a secure supply of nutritious food, from nature-friendly farming to encouraging people to eat fruit and vegetables no matter whether they are ‘wonky’ or not, from investing in UK horticulture to ensuring higher government buying standards which will give greater certainty to UK producers (as happened in Denmark for example).

*Q: What role could a reduction in meat and dairy consumption play in improving food security and what measures could the Government take to capitalise on the trend to plant-based diets?*

1. What we in the UK eat – as well as what we produce and throw away – has a huge impact on how food secure the UK is as a nation. We support healthy, sustainable diets, which includes less ultra-processed food; more and better nuts, wholegrains, vegetable, fruit and pulses; and less and better meat and dairy. We believe there can be a role for livestock in sustainable food systems, but there needs to be a shift away from intensively produced food towards agroecological methods. Designing a food system that considers our need to change consumption habits and access to affordable healthy food is key. In our view, meat and dairy can be part of that system (pasture-fed meat in Less Favoured Areas) but appropriate land use should be considered. e.g. rough grazing areas are often more suited to sheep than vegetable production. But should we be using fertile land that is appropriate for horticulture production to produce silage for beef for example?
2. We urge the government to support a transition to ‘only the best’ livestock, meat and dairy – and to seriously invest in UK horticulture. Diversity in the food we produce (types and varieties) will also contribute to food security and should be encouraged, amongst producers and in food citizen behaviours.

*Q: What role do food technologies have in mitigating the risks that environmental changes pose to UK food security?*

1. There is huge potential for applications of certain food technologies, as long as ethical considerations are taken into account. However, many of the solutions to food security are low or no tech – and are already out there, just not evenly distributed. We urge the UK Government to do more to support good low and no tech solutions – and to critically explore with others the potential for other technology-based solutions.

*Q: Is there research and development the Government could be funding to provide food security solutions?*

1. We urge the UK government to restructure publicly-funded research priorities (including UKRI and Defra) and funding towards agroecological-based farming systems that promote nutritious, biodiverse food production. We urge the Government to ensure research setting processes are inclusive, there is a transparent research agenda and that research is focused on enabling a paradigm shift to fair, healthy, humane and sustainable food systems.
2. It would also be hugely beneficial to recreate an independent, free-to-use advisory service to translate research outcomes to best agroecological practice and to support progressive policy objectives.

**Submitted by: Dan Crossley, Executive Director, Food Ethics Council on behalf of the Food Ethics Council**

**December 2022**