



## ***Government sets out 21st century challenges for food in the UK***

**7 July 2008**

The Cabinet Office today publishes the results of a ten-month Strategy Unit project looking at food policy across Government – and concludes that rising demand, climate change, and trade and productivity restrictions must all be addressed.

Commissioned by the Prime Minister, the report focuses on food issues in the UK and puts them in a global context. It draws together evidence about long-term trends in food production and consumption, and how food safety and nutrition impact on the health of the UK.

Some **key recommendations** are:

- Building on the Stern Review and drawing on the UK's world class science base, the UK should take a leadership role in looking at how the world can meet the twin challenges of climate change and global food security. The Government's Chief Scientific Adviser is commissioning a major new project on this, which is announced today. It will explore how the food system and its associated policies will need to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- The Government should launch a public engagement about a more joined-up approach to UK food policy that pursues fair prices, safer food, healthier diets and better environmental performance; Defra will work in partnership with DH and FSA, to develop and engage the public and food businesses in a new shared vision to guide future food strategy. This work will be completed by autumn 2009.
- The UK must continue to focus on fair prices, access to food and food security through competitive markets; Defra will shortly be issuing a discussion paper that takes forward this important debate.
- We must work with other European countries to promote the role of agriculture in mitigating and adapting to climate change; Defra will take this forward with other major partners, such as Germany and France, to build consensus on priorities and secure effective action.
- A new scheme should be launched to get the public sector in England providing healthier, more environmentally sustainable food. The Department of Health will take forward the development and launch of a new Healthier Food Mark for public food.
- We need to help consumers to access healthier choices when eating out, and need to provide information that considers both the health and environmental aspects of food.



**Key findings** include:

- World food output must rise to feed a growing, wealthier population. The World Bank estimates that cereal production needs to increase by 50% and meat production 80% between 2000 and 2030 to meet demand. But this will need to be achieved in a changing climate and in a world where natural resources – especially water – are becoming more scarce;
- For the world and for households, cutting waste would help – in the developing world up to 40% of food harvested can be lost due to problems with storage and distribution, and in the UK consumers waste £10 billion worth of food each year
- In farmgate value terms, half of the food eaten in the UK is home-grown, nearly 70% of the rest comes from elsewhere in the EU. Everything else, from tea to pineapples to prawns is sourced from across the world;
- The food chain creates 18% of UK greenhouse gas emissions. Farming and fishing contribute around half of this total. Changes to farming practices, such as more efficient use of fertiliser and providing animals with diets that specifically match their nutrient requirements could reduce emissions from agriculture;
- A third of the food bought for home consumption is wasted – 6.7 million tonnes. Most of this could have been eaten. Wasting food costs the average UK family £420 a year. Eliminating the unnecessary greenhouse gas emissions that this wasted food produces would be equivalent to taking one in five cars off UK roads. By using 60% of food thrown away by households, enough energy could be generated to provide power for all the homes in Glasgow and Edinburgh.
- If UK diets met nutritional guidelines, 70,000 premature deaths could be prevented each year. On average, adults and children eat more salt, fat and added sugar than is good for their health, and too few fruit and vegetables despite high awareness of the '5 a day' target. A new push on the 5 A DAY campaign is needed.

The Prime Minister Gordon Brown said:

“The rise of popular interest in food policy issues, and growing public awareness of the impact of what we choose to eat on everything from animal welfare, to our health and the protection of the environment has seen a massive transformation in Britain's food culture over the past ten years. This cultural change, along with more recent events in global food markets, has brought new and urgent policy challenges to the fore, which governments must act to meet.

“Recent food price increases are a powerful reminder that access to ever more affordable food cannot be taken for granted, and it is the family finances of the poorest in our society that are hit hardest when food prices rise. But the principal food security challenge for the UK is a global one. We cannot deal with higher food prices in the UK in isolation from



higher prices around the world. Attempting to pursue national food security in isolation from the global context is unlikely to be practicable, sustainable or financially rational.

“So to tackle higher prices both here in Britain and in developing countries, where food often accounts for more than half a family's spending, we will continue to play a leading role in combating instability in commodity markets and building a more resilient global food chain, as well as maintaining a supportive environment for competitive UK food producers. If food production in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world reached its potential, global food output would be much higher, far fewer people would go hungry and the threat of food-related political and social instability around the world would recede.”

As a first step, the Department for the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (Defra) will shortly be publishing a paper entitled ‘**Ensuring the UK's Food Security in a Globalised World**’. This report will set out the key factors which affect food supply and pricing, and encourages discussion with stakeholders including producers and retailers about ensuring long-term food security

The Strategy Unit report also calls for a clearer view of how the food system should adapt to feeding a growing global population at the same time as the planet is experiencing the effects of climate change.

So today Hilary Benn has announced that Professor John Beddington, the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, will commission a new Foresight project on future global food production and farming and the implications for the UK

Hilary Benn said:

“Recent events in world food markets have shown that continued access to affordable food is not something that can be taken for granted. The long term challenges in this area are significant but can be overcome.

“The lessons of the ‘Green Revolution’ of the last century need to be learnt as we work to achieve food security in this century. In the future our planet will be adjusting to the effects of climate change with economies that need to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is in this context that we must base our efforts.

“By 2050 we will need food for a world population that is wealthier and several billion larger. We will need to do this at the same time as adapting to a warming and less predictable climate. And, in addition, we will need to cut the greenhouse gas emissions associated with food production.”



The report also recommends that the Food Standards Agency takes forward work to make it easier for consumers to access integrated government information and advice on a healthy, environmentally sustainable diet and confirms that the Agency should work with food businesses to improve information and healthier choice options when eating out. The report also endorsed further work on food safety through developing a 'whole food chain approach' to food safety risks.

Source :

[http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work\\_areas/food\\_policy/analytical\\_report.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/food_policy/analytical_report.aspx)