



Looking Back, Looking Forward

Sustainability and
UK Food Policy 2000-2011



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Sustainable
Development Commission

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Foreword

This final Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) report on food matters, to the Governments of the UK, reviews the growth of UK policy during the 2000s to 2011. It covers the lifetime of the SDC and assesses the current state of thinking in relation to the challenges ahead.

We show that progress has been made, frustratingly slowly at times, but made nonetheless. Yet we do not have a sustainable food system, by any stretch of the imagination, and the evidence of the need to change the UK food system to face the immense challenges ahead is so strong that the policy development within Government still remains inadequate. To make matters more serious, just when a genuinely consensual perspective had finally taken root, and a policy process had begun, both with input from the SDC, it seemed to go into suspended animation after the 2010 election. Part of the intent of this report is to urge UK Governments to re-energise the process of national policy thinking and delivery.

For the SDC, sustainability means more than just carbon and climate change. Those are critical issues, of course, but the vulnerability and unsustainability of current intensive food production also includes biodiversity loss, water stress, international relations, inequalities in diet, and social affordability. And while these indicators show progress in the wrong direction, the imperative is to produce even more food for even more people while mitigating the negative sustainability impacts. 'Leave it to markets' or 'to consumers' are facile policy positions in the face of such a systems-challenge. As this report shows, that breadth of issues makes the task of delivering a sustainable food system complex and long-term, beyond the lifetime of any one Parliament. That is why continuity and clarity of long-term purpose is so important and this need is reflected in some of our recommendations.

The acceptance from industry, NGOs, commentators, farming and science that the food challenges cannot be air-brushed away by a political fixation on narrowing the national fiscal deficit is a good starting point for policy development, as long as Government stops thinking it is someone else's responsibility.

We live and publish this report in uncertain times, when fundamental questions about progress, security and the world are rightly pressing for attention. For politicians not to address food as a key element of the national interest in these circumstances would be a dereliction of duty.

Food inflation, for example, is a growing political challenge. Over decades prices have dropped, heralded as a great success of past policies. Yet low prices have externalised

costs onto the environment, far-off places, and cheap labour throughout food chains. And rising prices, whether deliberately or by inflation, hits low income people particularly hard. With analysts predicting oil hitting \$200 a barrel, weaning food systems off their dependency on oil must be part of the solution.

The challenges are international. The UK needs to take a lead in such debates by charting new options, new policy directions, new models of low carbon, health-enhancing food supply chains. This requires a more imaginative approach to European policy-making. For too long, the UK has opposed the Common Agricultural Policy. We recommend here a more positive approach, to argue that sustainable food is a priority for Europe and a new direction could be encapsulated as the transition to a Common Sustainable Food Policy.

This report sets out many more detailed recommendations, all designed to strengthen discussion, experimentation and policy leadership not just within Government – although that is our task and intent – but in wider society. A theme of the report is how Government only reluctantly began to engage with what, in companies and civil society eyes, seemed blindingly obvious in the 1990s and 2000s. That emerging consensus is to be treasured and built upon, not parked.

Changes ahead are likely to require us to 'produce more food from less land' and to eat differently, specifically to eat more plant-based foods, less meat and dairy, and to waste dramatically less. We cannot hide behind a false individualism to justify wasteful and damaging consumerism. Facing this cultural dimension need not frighten politicians. In the last half century, UK consumption has undergone dramatic changes; pizzas and curries have become favourite 'British' foods. So change is possible quickly. Many businesses are making sustainability commitments to shift food culture, including 'choice-editing' before consumers even see the food on shelves. We salute such efforts. But a core message of this final report is that UK society cannot rely on such actions alone to deliver systemic change. Government should not retreat from its responsibility in that process.

Finally, I want to thank all SDC Commissioners, staff and all those we've worked with inside and outside of Government for their work in helping promote moves towards a more sustainable UK food system.

Prof Tim Lang

SDC Commissioner (2005-11) and
Professor of Food Policy, City University London

Executive summary

Food is at the heart of the sustainability challenge. The transition from the post-war era of rationing to today's previously unimaginable range of choice is remarkable. More people have been fed, food has become progressively cheaper, making available an unprecedented range of foods, across the seasons. Yet by no stretch of the imagination could our complex web of food supply, consumption patterns and impact be currently described as sustainable.

Attempting to articulate what a sustainable food system is – one that addresses the multidimensional challenges of health, fairness, environment and economy – and what is required for its delivery, has been a persistent theme of policy deliberations and the work of the Sustainable Development Commission over the last decade.

This report reviews progress towards sustainable food policy in the UK from 2000 to 2011 – the period that reflects the lifetime of the Sustainable Development Commission. It identifies specific challenges for food and sustainability and highlights priorities for action going forward. Its purpose is to advise policy makers in the UK Government and the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland administrations, as well as those in business, academia and civil society, who continue to pursue this important goal. It draws on previous work by the SDC in this area and is also informed by the findings of a survey of 145 experts within Government, business, academia and civil society during November and December 2010.

The review identifies six major themes that shaped food policy during the 2000s:

- Governance
- Climate change
- Nutrition and health
- Children
- Food security
- Fairness and social justice

It reviews government policy and progress towards sustainable food systems in the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the roles of business, civil society and consumers during this period.

As we show in these pages, a consensual strategy came together towards the end of the decade culminating in

Defra's Food 2030 vision. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland too, were driving parallel but different and interesting policy developments in the 2000s.

Yet our verdict on these Governments' performance in promoting sustainability across the food system in the 2000s is that while there was progress in awareness and delivery in some respects, not enough has occurred to dispel our concern about failures to achieve systemic change. To make matters worse, just when a genuinely consensual perspective had finally taken root, and a policy process had begun, both with input from the SDC, it seemed to go into suspended animation in Whitehall after the 2010 election. Part of the intent of this report is to urge UK Governments to re-energise the process of integrated policy thinking and delivery in dialogue with the commercial, civil society and scientific worlds.

The strength of evidence to change direction in UK food grows rather than diminishes. Rising food inflation is again reminding Governments of the need to wean food production away from its dependency on oil. The need to waste less and feed growing populations while reversing biodiversity, climate change and environmental damage, requires not just the new language of 'sustainable intensification' of Foresight¹ but a real practical understanding of what producing more food, sustainably, means for the UK. This transition will need new approaches to make it easier for people to eat healthily and sustainably and to enable producers and the food chain to shift to sustainable models of production, distribution and retail.

This is not the time for Governments to step back and abdicate their responsibility. Effective Government leadership is essential. Markets alone cannot deliver. But real partnership between Government, business and civil society can. This is not just the voice of the SDC. Seventeen global companies behind the World Economic Forum's 2010 New Vision for Agriculture are explicit: 'Partnership among stakeholders, and effective Government leadership in particular, is critical to success.'²

This report's core message is the need for urgency to speed up the pace and scale of change, and to encourage present and future Governments to help transform UK food systems towards truly sustainable food.

We identify four priorities for action for which detailed discussion and recommendations are made:

Government leadership for sustainable food

We recommend the Coalition Government accepts full ownership of Food 2030 as the first expression of an integrated sustainable food policy, and support this with a new delivery plan to be created by September 2011. This should be led by Defra, working with key departments including Department of Health (DH), Food Standards Agency (FSA), Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS), Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC), Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT), Cabinet Office and Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG).

We recommend a Delivery Plan Implementation Group, led by a Delivery Champion inside government with a secretariat to co-ordinate and drive delivery cross-government and with external stakeholders. This should co-ordinate separate working groups for sectors of the food chain.

We recommend a new cross-government Cabinet Office sub-committee for England to meet twice yearly. To ensure co-ordination with the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland we also recommend a Ministerial level co-ordinating committee between the four UK administrations.

We recommend, as part of developing a Delivery Plan for Food 2030, that Government conducts a review of the full range of policy levers needed for each action to deliver the strategy, and that these be tied into short-term (2020), medium-term (2030) and longer-term (2050) goals, in the vein of carbon commitments.

We recommend that Government through Defra, CLG and DH encourages new local food partnerships to harness local bodies into the change process towards the goal of creating more sustainable UK food systems by 2030.

We recommend a new expert advisory body to advise Ministers and departmental policy teams on sustainable food, to narrow the gap between research evidence, policy and practice. Sustainable food needs to be a priority for the Government's Chief Scientist in his role to co-ordinate food and agricultural research across Government.

We recommend the Government maintain and expand the Joint Research Council's Food Security Programme and link it more tightly to the UK, not just international, needs and priorities.

Sustainable food supply chains

We recommend Defra and the administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland be charged with a policy imperative to produce more food, by sustainable means, in the UK. Priority should be given to horticulture, particularly fruit production and to lowering the GHG impact of meat and dairy production.

We recommend that growers need to be encouraged to build ecosystems support into production, rather than seeing it as a separate income stream. We recommend an expert but multi-stakeholder inquiry be completed to determine how this can best be achieved.

We recommend an inquiry into how to rebuild and support the small farm sector and the rise of part-time farming. This needs to include examination of capital availability, access to land, skills/education, agricultural labour and biodiversity.

We recommend an inquiry into how to revitalise food growing skills and extension services. This should consider the role of Agricultural Colleges and the potential for a new combined Sustainable Agricultural and Food Advisory Service to support the transformation needed in UK production.

We recommend national strategy be given particular local and regional emphasis, since the UK has considerable variety of terrain, traditions and projected impact of climate change.

We recommend that the Government works with other Member States to lay the evidence and policy grounds to help evolve the EU's Common Agricultural Policy into a new Common Sustainable Food Policy, centred on the EU becoming a low impact, healthy and just food market.

We recommend that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) consider how to build skills, research capabilities and infrastructure to support thriving small business food sectors. This should include development of local food hubs and opportunities at a regional and local level for learning and sharing of expertise.

We recommend mandatory health and sustainability standards for all publicly procured food. In doing so, we recommend Government draw on pioneering work such as the Food for Life scheme to create a common public set of standards. We recommend the creation of a sustainable procurement delivery team and 'Tsar' to drive progress.

Sustainable consumption

We recommend the need for UK bodies to define sustainable diets, taking note of local and regional variations, and to consider how policy can enable people to consume accordingly. This should be a new action led by Defra and the Department of Health, taking advice from specialist bodies such as the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, the Food and Environment Research Agency, the Food Standards Agency and the Environment Agency.

We recommend that Defra's forthcoming waste strategy prioritises actions to reduce food waste, including goals towards zero food waste to landfill by 2015.

We recommend that Defra, CLG and DH create a joint working party with invited academics, consumer groups and industry specialists to advise on how best to help shift consumer behaviour more rapidly. This should take note of international experience.

We recommend that Defra coordinate work to consider how the full range of levers of Governments and others can be applied towards enabling sustainable diets.

We recommend schools be supported to put further emphasis on practical food experience, including cooking skills and food growing, and to help educate future food citizenship skills including understanding of how marketing affects food choices.

We recommend further consideration of how standards and information can be used by consumers, taking note of new technology developments.

We recommend Governments draw on the experiences from civil society initiatives and establish opportunities to share learning and influence policy.

Fairness

We recommend the Groceries Code Adjudicator and the Competition Commission should operationalise sustainability as a key theme in redefining how markets work and what is meant by efficiency and market power. We recommend that the Groceries Code Adjudicator's and Competition Commission's terms of reference should include sustainability criteria.

We recommend that Defra, BIS and HM Treasury consider how to move the concept and delivery of fair-trade beyond a niche in the food market, and harness the experience of large companies in particular foods in this respect.

We recommend Governments of the UK need to be explicit about how they are addressing food and health inequalities through their policies. New fiscal policies are required to improve affordability of healthy and sustainable food choices. The cost of ensuring a nutritious and sustainable diet should be reflected in setting minimum wage and benefit levels.

We recommend that Defra and the Office for National Statistics regularly publish a breakdown of where in the food chain consumers' 'Food Pound' goes, both generally and for specific staple foods.

We recommend that Defra, the Chief Veterinary Officer and animal welfare organisations convene a forward look at future foods and animal welfare.

We recommend Defra create a Commission of Inquiry to explore current barriers to access to land for sustainable food production, taking particular note of the needs of young people wishing to come into food growing.

Introduction

This report reviews UK food policy from 2000 to 2011 – the period that reflects the lifetime of the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC). Our review focuses on the specific challenges of food and sustainability, charts the growth of policy development and highlights priorities for action going forward.

Our review draws on previous work by the SDC in this important area and is also informed by the findings of a survey of 145 experts within Government, business, academia and civil society conducted by the SDC during November and December 2010. The purpose of this report is to advise policy makers in the UK Government and the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Governments, as well as those in business, academia and civil society who continue to pursue this important goal.

The SDC was established in 2000 to be the independent advisor to the UK Government, and the newly established Devolved Administrations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In its lifetime from 2000 to March 2011, when its government funding was withdrawn, the SDC helped put sustainable development at the heart of government policy through advice, scrutiny and capability building.

Championing sustainability in the food system has been an important element of the SDC's work right from the start. A full list of publications relevant to sustainable food is given in Appendix 1. Before the present final report, specific work in this area has included:

Sustainable development: The key to tackling health inequalities (February 2010)

Setting the Table – Advice to Government on priority elements of a sustainable diet (December 2009)

Food Security and Sustainability: the perfect fit. SDC Position Paper (July 2009)

Green, healthy and fair: A review of the government's role in supporting sustainable supermarket food (February 2008)

\$100 a barrel of oil: impacts on the sustainability of food supply in the UK (November 2007)

Double Dividend? Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals (December 2005)

The Role of Food Retail: A Sustainable Consumption Roundtable response to the draft Food Industry Sustainability Strategy (July 2005)

Sustainable Implications of the Little Red Tractor scheme (January 2005)

Sustainability of sugar supply chains (April 2003)

Sustainability appraisal of policies for farming and food (December 2001)

A vision for sustainable agriculture (October 2001).

In addition, food procurement has featured heavily in our work on Government operations in Whitehall and in our collaborative programmes with DH/NHS (Good Corporate Citizenship) and DCSF/DE (Sustainable Schools). Our event Breakthroughs for the 21st Century, in 2009, featured some pioneering projects on local food.

The SDC's work on food was informed by its expertise in land use, farming, natural resources, health, consumption, energy, transport, housing, community development, public procurement and economics.

Commissioners with lead responsibility for the food and farming policy area in the SDC's lifespan were Helen Browning, Richard Wakeford, Sir Graham Wynne, Dame Deirdre Hutton, Hugh Raven, Dr John Gilliland and Prof Tim Lang. The Commission also acknowledges the contribution of many outside experts and interests who offered their thoughts, evidence and feedback throughout the period of its work.

The case for concern: UK food and sustainability

Measured against the vision articulated in the post World War 2 period, the story of UK food has been one of some considerable success. These goals were widely recognised as:^{3,4}

- raising production;
- lowering the price of food; and
- reducing deficiency-related ill-health.

More people have been fed. Food has become generally progressively cheaper, enabling people and households, even on low incomes, to have access to an unprecedented range of foods, across the seasons. From the disastrous level in 1939, when only a third of UK food was home-grown, the proportion rose to over four fifths by the early 1980s. The transition from the era of rationing (which

ended in 1954) to today's previously unimaginable range of choice is remarkable.

Our modern food system is a complex web of food supply and consumption which relies, and impacts, on the physical and material world through the use of resources for fertilisers, buildings, equipment; the biological world by using plants and animals; the social world by requiring labour and social organisations to create, process, distribute, cook and deliver food; and the cultural world by shaping demands, meanings and aspirations for what and how food is consumed.

Yet by no stretch of the imagination could our food supply, consumption patterns and impact be currently described as sustainable. See Table 1:

Table 1 Sustainability impacts of food system

Environmental limits

- The direct GHG emissions of UK food are 20% of total emissions but this rises to 30% of total UK footprint when additional land use affected by food is included in calculations.⁵
- All stages of the UK food chain contribute emissions: production and initial processing (34%); manufacturing, distribution, retail and cooking (26%) and agriculturally-induced land use change (40%).⁶
- Livestock farming alone accounts for 57% of agriculture's emissions and is also responsible for three quarters of land use change emissions.⁷
- Meat and dairy account for 24% of the environmental impact of Europeans' consumption patterns.⁸ A diet which met health guidelines, cut out meat and was organic would reduce the average UK diet's footprint by 44%.⁹
- The food system is a major source of land, forestry and fisheries and water degradation. 15 out of 24 of the world's ecosystem services are being degraded or used unsustainably according to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.¹⁰
- 50-78% of the main fish stocks monitored have recorded either declines in stocks or evidence of being fished unsustainably.¹¹
- Global agriculture consumes 70% of all freshwater extracted for human use. UK agriculture uses 742 million m³ of water per year.¹²
- Livestock accounts for about 40% of the average UK citizen's agriculture water footprint. It takes 200 litres of water to produce a 200ml glass of milk, and 2400 litres of water to produce a 150g hamburger.¹³
- UK households waste around a third of all food they buy, leading to an estimated 5.3 million tonnes of avoidable food waste every year, with the cost to households estimated at £12 billion per year or £480 for an average household.¹⁴

Strong, healthy and just society

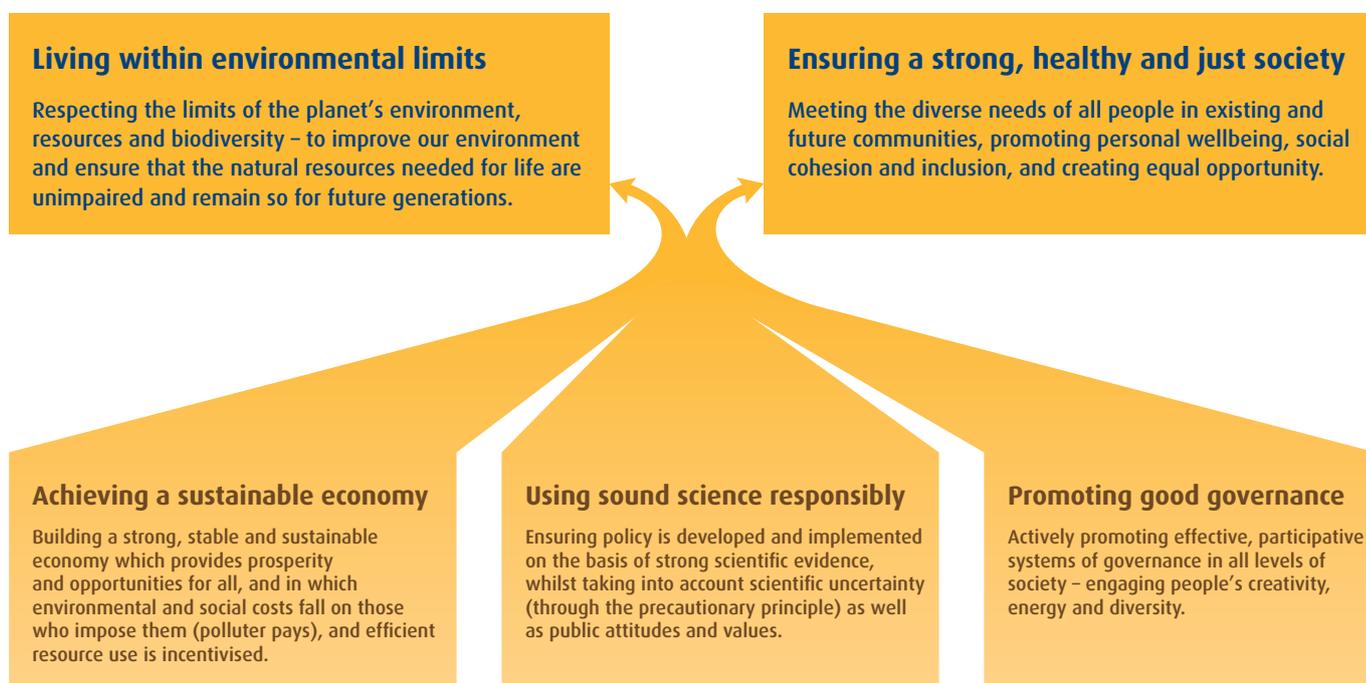
- In England in 2008 25% of people aged 16 or over and 16% of children were obese. The total annual cost of obesity and overweight for England is estimated to have been about £8 billion in 2008.¹⁵ In Scotland in 2008, almost two-thirds of men (66.4%) and more than half of women (59.6%) were overweight (including obese), up by a fifth since 1995.¹⁶
- The FSA's Low Income Diet & Nutrition Survey in 2007 found that the UK population as a whole was not eating enough fruit and vegetables, nor enough oily fish and was consuming too much saturated fat and sugar.¹⁷
- For every £1 spent on cashew nuts in British supermarkets, 77 pence goes to importers and retailers, 22 pence to traders and processors, and just one penny to farmers.¹⁸
- 1 million people in rural Africa are supported by the fresh fruit and vegetable trade with the UK, injecting an estimated £200 million into rural economies in Africa.
- The UK imports an estimated 189 million m³ of African 'virtual water' as a result of the import of green beans; this would be enough to provide 10 million Kenyans with drinking water.¹⁹

Sustainable economy

- The UK food economy currently supplies a market of 61 million consumers, spending £173 billion on food, drink and catering services.²⁰
- Food manufacturing is the single largest manufacturing sector in the UK and employs 440,000 people, representing 14% of the UK's manufacturing workforce.²¹
- The UK imports about 40% of its food - a decline in self sufficiency since the early 1980s. For food which can be grown and produced in the UK we are 72% self sufficient.²²
- Much UK farming much is reliant on subsidies. Across the EU, 40% of all livestock and 25-30% of dairy income is subsidy dependent.²³
- Over 40% of UK farms growing field crops were estimated to have entered 'financial distress' or were already in 'negative income' when decoupling of EU payments occurred. Most UK mixed farms became financially unviable. UK horticulture was less hit, mainly because it received next to no subsidies in the first place, and had shrunk for decades already.²⁴
- 30-70% of all energy in world agriculture is oil-derived.²⁵ Fertiliser costs are rising, tending to follow oil costs, with the International Energy Agency declaring 2006 as have been the 'all-time peak' for conventional crude oil and describing the future as 'undulating plateau',²⁶ and the FAO describing rising fertiliser input pressures as threatening the 30 year drop in food prices.²⁷
- Food prices are unstable. In January 2011, global commodity prices exceeded the 'spike' of 2008.^{28,29} Within the UK, annualised inflation in the year to February 2011 was 15.3% higher for transport costs, 6.3% for food 6.3% and 4.6% for cafes and restaurants.³⁰
- In 2008 a quarter of all wagons on UK roads were food, of which half were empty.³¹ Around 9% of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK food chain are attributed to commercial transportation of food for UK consumption.³² The external cost of food transport has been estimated at between £1.9 billion and £4 billion.³³

Such facts and figures are a snapshot of the UK's food system. It is neither a closed system, being highly integrated internationally, nor sustainable. Attempting to articulate exactly what a sustainable food system is, and what might be required for its delivery, has been a persistent theme of the last decade's deliberations and a strong focus for SDC's work. Part of this task has been to contribute to the process of clarifying the criteria by which sustainability might be judged, and how to improve performance.

The mainstream perspective on sustainability identifies the key issue as the interdependency of environment, economy and society. The UK Government translated this broad thinking into its White Paper *Securing the Future* in 2005,³⁴ a process to which the SDC contributed considerably. It set out cross-government commitments for: ensuring a strong, just and healthy society; living with environmental limits; supported by a sustainable economy, good governance and sound science. It acknowledged the important role of food to achieve sustainable consumption and production, address climate change, protect natural resources and to create a fairer world.



Source: *Securing the Future*, HMG, 2005.

These overarching principles are useful criteria against which to judge Government action and policies, and they informed much of the SDC's approach and work.

From this perspective, the sustainability of food systems invokes a complex framework of understanding including the needs to:

- address **environmental** impacts such as greenhouse gases and climate change, biodiversity, water use, land use and other infrastructure on which food depends,
- **contribute to human health** not just by preventing food-borne diseases associated with poor safety but also non-communicable diseases due to under, as well as over, consumption,

- **deliver good quality food**, fit to meet consumer and cultural aspirations,
- **embody appropriate social values** such as fairness and animal welfare,
- **provide decently rewarded employment** across the supply chain, with skills and training,
- **improve the above through good governance.**

This broad range of aspirations is summarised in Table 2. The 21st century challenge is how to deliver these in synergy rather than trading off gains in some for losses in others. A sustainable food system will aim to develop a continual cycle of improvement for sustainability.

Table 2 Multiple values for a sustainable food system

| Quality | Social values |
|--|---|
| Taste Seasonality Cosmetic Fresh (where appropriate) Authenticity/provenance | Pleasure Identity Animal welfare Equality and justice Trust Choice Skills (for food citizenship) |
| Environment | Health |
| Climate change Water Land use Soil Biodiversity Waste reduction | Safety Nutrition Equal access Availability Social status/affordability Information and education |
| Economy | Governance |
| Food security and resilience Affordability (price) Efficiency True competition and fair returns Jobs, skills and decent working conditions Fully internalised costs | Science and technology evidence base Transparency Democratic accountability Ethical values (fairness) International aid and development |

Looking Back

In this section we identify some of the major sustainability drivers and policy initiatives during the 2000s that engaged policy makers in Governments, businesses and civil society organisations throughout the UK. We do not see this as a comprehensive assessment of the decade, which is beyond the scope of this report, rather as a review that provides indicators of key sustainability trends, activity and pointers for the future.

This review draws on evidence from SDC's previous work, additional desk research and the findings of SDC's survey of experts within Government, business, academia and civil society during November and December 2010. We are particularly grateful to the input of colleagues and others in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland who have assisted our review of activity in the Devolved Administrations.

The review identifies the following major themes:

- Governance
- Climate change
- Nutrition and health
- Children
- Food security
- Fairness and social justice

It also reviews government policy and progress towards sustainable food systems in the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and key activities of business and civil society during this period.

2.1 Governance

Good governance is one of the five principles of sustainable development. New governance arrangements were a key response to the major challenges that food policy in the UK and elsewhere faced at the turn of the 21st century.

Concerns about the impact of food on the environment, public health and safety, ethical issues and the structure and operations of the food sector, had emerged throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Issues such as BSE, genetically modified food and E coli food poisoning had ensured that food issues were often front page news, but the BSE crisis of 1996 marked a turning point in UK and European food safety policy-making. Public confidence in the ability of Governments and public institutions to protect public health had been seriously undermined and the public reputation of scientific expertise had been damaged. BSE contributed to the downfall of the then Conservative government.

A new Labour government came to power in May 1997 acutely aware of the importance of food for consumer and industry confidence in safety and public health. It knew its first priority was to help rebuild trust in UK food and that this required fundamental changes to governance structures.

The Government almost immediately began the process of creating a Food Standards Agency (FSA)³⁵ following the recommendations from Professor Philip James.³⁶ The

passing of the Food Standards Act in 1999 led to the FSA becoming operational in April 2000 with a remit that included protecting food safety and broader consumer interests in relation to food e.g. labelling, standards and, more controversially, nutrition. The latter remained a source of tension between the Agency and Department of Health throughout the 2000s. The Agency's offices in Aberdeen, Cardiff and Belfast provided this role in the newly devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The FSA's mission to 'put consumers first' recognised the conflict of interest, between promoting the economic interests of farmers and the food industry and the protection of public health from food-borne diseases that had existed within the old Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF). The FSA's commitment to openness, independence and to science and evidence-based policy making sought to address key government failings identified by the 16 volume BSE Inquiry report chaired by Lord Phillips.³⁷ This led to new approaches to risk assessment, management and communication. 'Sound science' would become one of the underpinning principles of the Government's approach to sustainable development.

But these changes did not end the Government's troubles. In 2001 a bad outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease resulted in costs to the public purse of over £3 billion and to the private sector of more than £5 billion.³⁸

Table 3 Food policy 1998 – 2010: Significant events, legislation, policy initiatives

| | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|---|--|--|---|
| Governance | Devolution of powers to Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland. | | Food Standards Agency and Sustainable Development Commission launched. | | Defra created. | | |
| Policy | | Minimum Wage Act. | BSE Inquiry Report (Phillips Report). | | Policy Commission on Future of Farming & Food (Curry Commission) reports. <i>Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food: Facing the Future in England</i> published. Wanless report for HM Treasury identifies diet as key preventable factor to lower NHS costs. | | Gangmasters Licensing Act passed. |
| Events | | | | Foot and Mouth outbreak (eventual cost £8bn). | | Chief Medical Officer warns of "obesity time bomb". | |
| Scotland | | | | | | | |
| Wales | | | | Farming for the Future strategy published. | | Food and Well Being (Nutrition Strategy) published. | |
| NI | | | | | | Fit for Market strategy published. | Food Strategy Implementation Partnership established. |
| EU and International | | WTO trade negotiations ends in chaos following anti-globalisation protests. | EC Food Safety White Paper. CAP reform. Millennium Development Goals launched. | | European Food Safety Authority created. | CAP reform agreement 'de-couples' subsidies from production. | |

| 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| School Food Trust set up. | | | Council of Food Policy Advisors established. DECC established. Committee on Climate Change established. | | Election leads to Coalition Government. FSA remit cut, loss of CFPA and cross-government co-ordination. |
| Food Standards Agency's <i>Hastings Review</i> concludes advertising does affect children's diet. | School food nutrition standards introduced. Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative created. | Chief Scientist publishes <i>Foresight Tackling Obesities</i> report. Stern Review <i>of Economics of Climate Change</i> published. Low income Diet and Nutrition Survey published. | Cabinet Office publishes <i>Food Matters</i> report. <i>Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives</i> White Paper. | | <i>Food 2030</i> published (Jan) <i>UK Food Security Assessment</i> published (Jan) Marmot review <i>Fair Society, Healthy Lives</i> published Defra publishes <i>Food Business Plan 2011-15</i> (November) |
| Jamie Oliver launches school dinners campaign. | | 2007-8 food price spike. | | | |
| Review of Scottish Diet Action Plan. | | | | | <i>Recipe for Success</i> – Scotland's National Food and Drink policy published. |
| | | | | | <i>Buying Safe Food for the Public Plate – A New Approach to Food Procurement for Wales</i> published. <i>Food for Wales, Food from Wales 2010:2020 – A Food Strategy for Wales</i> published. |
| EC issues a Directive on the protection of animals during transport. | UN FAO publishes <i>Livestock's Long Shadow</i> report. EIPRO report identifies 20-30% of environmental impacts of total consumption come from food and drink. | | UN FAO High-Level Conference on Food Security. | International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD). | European Commission launches public debate on CAP reform and Communication on <i>The CAP towards 2020</i> . |

A Commission of Inquiry into the state of farming and food was set up, chaired by Sir Don Curry. In further changes to the machinery of government, the environment portfolio which had sat within the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (created in 1997) was merged with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to create the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in June 2001. This had the intention of better integrating the Government's 'environment' brief with one of the major environmental influences – that of food production and land use. The lack of 'agriculture' in the department's name may have caused rumblings within the farming community, however its remit was generally welcomed as a move towards greater 'joining up' of Government on key sustainability issues. Further changes to Defra sponsored bodies led to the creation of Natural England in 2006, amalgamating the Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Rural Development Service to become Government's advisor on protecting and improving the natural environment, including environmental stewardship of farmland in England. Natural England made one of its early priorities the connection between health and the environment.

But it was not just new disease outbreaks that were driving new governance arrangements. New biotechnology developments were also causing controversy and illustrating the need for new approaches to risk assessment and management. A review of the regulatory and advisory framework for biotechnology by the UK Government in May 1999,³⁹ called for greater transparency, more streamlined governance arrangements and more capacity to deal with rapid developments. This led to the establishment of two new bodies to complement the FSA's regulatory role on GM and other novel foods. The Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC), until it was wound up in 2005, provided strategic advice to Government on biotechnology issues that had an impact on agriculture and the environment. The Human Genetics Commission continues this role in the field of human genetics.

The establishment of all three bodies recognised the increasingly scientific novelty, complexity and uncertainty of issues such as biotechnology. The need to better incorporate uncertainty into risk assessments was advocated within the scientific community alongside the need for new approaches that engage with the public and other stakeholders and address broader social and ethical issues outside narrow regulatory safety assessment procedures.⁴⁰

The AEBC's calls for greater public engagement led Defra (under then Secretary of State, Margaret Beckett) to establish the 'GM Nation' public debate. This open public debate, convened by an independent Steering Group, with involvement of the AEBC, went far beyond typical government 'consultations' and remains unprecedented in UK food policy. It concluded in 2003 that there was little public appetite for further commercialisation on genetically modified (GM) crops in the UK at that time.⁴¹ The public debate took place alongside an 'economic' assessment of the costs and benefits of GM crops by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU)⁴² and an independent review of the science of GM chaired by the Government's Chief Scientific Advisor.⁴³ This began to acknowledge many of the sustainability concerns that independent researchers and campaigners were raising, beyond narrow 'safety' assessments of individual GM crops. While less high profile than earlier in the decade, GM continues to be a cause of debate.

At the UK level, the Westminster Parliament is still where most legislation emerges but by the 2000s, Scotland and Wales had clear processes defining land use, and were expressing strong policy commitments for rural life, health, land use and education. Both Scotland and Wales had forged their own food and rural policies with strongly integrationist and sustainability themes. In Northern Ireland the focus was on developing a competitive agri-food sector with close collaboration between Government and the food industry through the Food Strategy Implementation Partnership.

Europe and global governance

As globalisation of supply chains and operations continued to be a key trend throughout the 2000s, a multi-level system of food governance emerged at national, regional and global levels. The capacity of Government to help the UK food system become sustainable depended on and operated within this framework and went beyond the Common Agricultural Policy. BSE, for instance, had exposed

weaknesses in risk assessment and management processes within the European Union. A new body, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)⁴⁴ was set up in January 2002 to provide independent scientific risk assessment and advice to support the European Commission, European Parliament and EU member states in taking effective and timely risk management decisions.

European policy shapes much UK food policy. It is often said that 80% of food legislation emerges at the European level; this is simply because in a common market, decisions about food require multinational deliberation. To some extent, this approach was enshrined around agriculture from the EU's early beginnings in the 1950s. In the 2000s, that cross border negotiation continued, with incremental change in the Common Agricultural Policy. Notable was the agreement to shift subsidy payments away from direct subsidy for food production (so-called Pillar 1 funds) to payment for environmental goods (Pillar 2 funds). In 2000, the long CAP commitment was reformed by designating rural development as the second pillar of CAP.⁴⁵ In 2003 EU farming ministers adopted a fundamental reform of the CAP by 'decoupling' subsidies from particular crops. New 'single farm payments' are subject to 'cross-compliance' conditions relating to environmental, food safety and animal welfare standards. And in 2010 the European Commission launched a public debate on the CAP towards 2020.⁴⁶

This incremental policy change has ironies. Just when public attention on food security and the case for ensuring policy supports the growing of food more sustainably within the EU, that commitment has been de-coupled from its main policy instrument, subsidies. In its 2009 position paper on UK food security, the SDC argued a different position, recognising the need to rebuild UK plant-based food production within sustainable methods, and calling for the CAP to evolve into a Common Sustainable Food Policy.⁴⁷ Subsidies need not be the prime or sole instrument in such a policy.

Whereas the CAP was created with the founding of what is now the EU, under the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) was not created until 1983. It has aimed to protect the ecological balance of our oceans as a sustainable source of wealth and well-being for future generations.⁴⁸ However, it has been criticised for failing to achieve those aims. Stocks are under threat, boats and capacity are in over-supply, waste is considerable (not least from the practice of discarding non-approved fish), and the costs are huge. In 2002, new environmental and social commitments were set for the CFP, though many have not been met. In 2009, the European Commission launched a consultation on the reform of the CFP to seek to address the failings of the policy and stimulate a renewed prosperity for the fisheries sector.⁴⁹ In the run up to the reform, new fishing quotas for 2010 were announced and fisheries Ministers from the UK, Denmark, Norway and Scotland Fisheries agreed a joint declaration calling for action to reduce and eliminate discards.⁵⁰ A legislative proposal was planned for 2011 and for the new CFP to come into force in 2013. In March 2011, four Ministers from the UK, Denmark, German and France agreed to back a gradual ban on discards and to work together for CFP long-term reform.

European legislation has also been behind the raised animal welfare standards, influenced by UK campaigning and government support, including the phasing out of battery cages and sow stalls in 1998,⁵¹ and better conditions for the transport of animals in 2005.⁵² The European Commission worked to a first Action Plan (2006-10)⁵³ and is now preparing a second EU strategy for the protection and welfare of animals (2011-2015), which is expected to be adopted in December 2011.⁵⁴

At an international level, another strand of advice on environment, health and farming flows through the UN system such as the World Health Organisation and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The UK Department of Health, for instance, championed the creation and work of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health,⁵⁵ and then a subsequent process for England, both chaired by Professor Sir Michael Marmot.⁵⁶

Perhaps more significant, however, has been the economic framework agreed through international negotiation at the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which set the broad conditions for trade, credit and consumer spending. The UN's Codex Alimentarius Commission, created in 1963 by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and World Health Organisation (WHO) provides the platform for developing food standards, guidelines and codes of practice for the operation of global food and agriculture trade, though its remit marginalises broader social and ethical issues.

During the 2000s little progress was made on furthering the liberalisation of global trade ambitions of the WTO. In 1999 WTO trade negotiations in Seattle ended in chaos following anti-globalisation protests. A second attempt to start a new round of trade talks, the Doha Round, was launched in 2001 to enhance equitable participation of poorer countries, but little progress has been made due to continuing disagreement between rich and poor countries, not helped by the banking crisis later in the decade.

Thus attempts to embed a coherent food policy, linking economics, social gain and environmental protection – the core vision of sustainable development – remains elusive. As the UK Government's Foresight Project on Global Food and Farming Futures concludes, international bodies are far from able to deal with sustainability challenges: "[t]he global institutions that have evolved to govern the global food system have not yet adapted sufficiently to face today's challenges of sustainability and equity. Work on productivity, sustainability, equity, trade and hunger continues in institutional silos which are unprepared to face the multifaceted nature of future challenges".⁵⁷

2.2 Climate Change

Throughout the 2000s, attention grew on the policy hot spots of energy and climate change with increasing recognition of the significant contribution of the food system. It was the Treasury which initiated a report into the economics of climate change led by Lord Stern, former World Bank chief economist, published in 2006.⁵⁸ The report has been hugely influential in the UK and internationally. It showed the large global impact of greenhouse gas emissions stemming from agriculture, 14% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in 2000. The costs associated with not tackling climate change now, Stern argued, would add to inevitable greater costs later.

Much work has taken place in the 2000s to understand the GHG footprint of the UK food chain. Agriculture is the single largest contributor from ruminant animals (dairy cows, beef cattle and sheep) together with emissions of nitrous oxide from fertiliser use. In 2006 the UN FAO published *Livestock's Long Shadow*, a report which assesses the full impact of the livestock sector on environmental problems, identifying livestock as being responsible for 18% of GHG emissions.⁵⁹ Food waste is also a significant contributor.

One response to this and other evidence was the establishment of the UK's Committee on Climate Change and the introduction of the Climate Change Act (2008) – the world's first long-term legally binding framework to tackle the dangers of climate change by reducing GHG emission by at least 34% by 2020 and at least 80% by 2050. However attempts to reach international agreements stalled in Copenhagen in 2009.

In further changes within UK Government, a new Department of Energy and Climate Change was established in 2008 integrating climate change from Defra and energy from the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), now largely what sits as the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS).

Despite food and agriculture's significant contribution towards GHG emissions, policies to reduce the GHG impacts of the food chain have largely been voluntary. In 2009 the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan⁶⁰ encouraged farmers to take action themselves to reduce emissions, to at least 6% lower than predicted for 2020, through more efficient use of fertiliser and better management of livestock and manure, reducing waste sent to landfill and supporting anaerobic digestion. It remains to be seen whether such a voluntary approach will be successful. Policies to address the impact of meat and dairy production and consumption are contentious and remain a key challenge.

In the latter part of the decade, the development of an agreed publicly available specification for measuring GHG impacts within food supply chains – PAS2050⁶¹ – was an important step towards enabling companies to identify and manage product life cycle 'hot spots'. The enthusiasm for a consumer-facing 'carbon' label waned as it became clear that it was more useful for addressing impacts within the food chain, rather than a label to influence consumer choice. Another route is illustrated by the work of the SDC in helping the NHS in England to address its carbon impacts by prioritising key action areas through a Carbon Reduction Strategy, and by providing an evidence base for future carbon management.⁶²

In seeking to understand carbon and broader supply chain impacts, the issue of 'food miles' – the distance that food travels from its production to consumption – became a focus for research and campaigning. In 2005 Defra commissioned research from AEA Technology to review the validity of 'food miles' as an indicator for sustainability.⁶³ This research demonstrated the limitations of the concept as a means of finding the true environmental impact. Despite this, the 'local food movement' has grown, reflecting the increasing interest in communities to develop and support distinctive local sustainable food systems that more closely link producers and consumers as an alternative to globalised food systems.

2.3 Nutrition and Health

A further catalyst to the growth of policy and engagement in the 2000s was alarm at the growth of evidence of national obesity and overweight. Like climate change – to which it was sometimes compared as an indication of systems failure – obesity heralded a combination of social,

health and economic costs including large externalised costs to people's health and wellbeing and to the environment. It began to expose the post-war pursuit of cheapness and ubiquity, as a flawed policy.

Sir Derek Wanless, former head of the NatWest Bank, was asked to chair first one (2002) and then another health inquiry (2004) for HM Treasury. These concluded that the costs of non-communicable diseases, in which diet is a key factor, were preventable and unnecessary burdens.^{64, 65} Daming reports from the National Audit Office in 2001,⁶⁶ then the Chief Medical Officer for England in 2003 warning of an ‘obesity time-bomb’,⁶⁷ then the Commons Health Committee in 2004⁶⁸ led to the creation of yet another review led by the Chief Scientific Advisor’s Foresight Programme. This took a systemic approach, linking environment, food supply and socio-cultural aspects. The two year review reported in 2007, and was widely admired for its comprehensive nature and impact.⁶⁹ It concluded that on present trends, obesity and overweight would cost the NHS £50 billion in 2050. Even for a rich economy like the UK, this would be folly.

Despite this wealth of evidence it was not until after the 2007 election, that the re-elected Labour Government introduced a three Ministry led White Paper *Healthy Weight Healthy Lives* with £0.3 billion attached for projects in the form of social marketing such as *Change4Life*, pilot *Healthy Towns* initiatives and other auditing and encouragement.⁷⁰ Health professionals felt this was a start but still a too cautious approach relative to the challenge. Nevertheless, it appeared to signal that Government was beginning to realise the systemic nature of obesity’s causation and thus possible prevention. It had taken two decades since epidemiologists first issued serious warnings about rising obesity and overweight, not least associated with ubiquitous high calorific foods, for hesitant but welcome public policy action to be embraced.

Meanwhile the Food Standards Agency had been going it alone leading other diet-related health initiatives. It launched its Salt Awareness Campaign in 2004 to bring down the average UK salt intake. This followed scientific evidence that eating too much salt is a significant risk factor in developing high blood pressure, tripling the risk of heart disease and stroke and causing or contributing to more than 170,000 deaths a year in England.⁷¹

In a radical departure from earlier government sponsored health awareness campaigns, the FSA’s campaign included setting salt reduction targets for over 80 food products, monitoring and reporting on food industry progress, as well as running high profile public awareness campaigns. In 2009 the FSA reported a reduction in the daily average population salt intake of 0.9g, yielding annual cost saving benefits of £1.5 billion.⁷² In 2008 the FSA extended its nutrition awareness campaign to include saturated fat and energy intake.

The FSA’s was less successful in its promotion of front of pack ‘interpretative’ nutrition labelling, known as ‘traffic light’ labelling to enable shoppers make healthier choices more easily. Despite evidence that such a system of labelling was more helpful to consumers than a system based on Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs) strong opposition from some, but not all major retailers and food companies, influenced European decision in 2010 to back GDA rather than traffic-light labelling.⁷³

Social inequalities continue to highlight disparities in health in the UK. An inquiry chaired by, the then, Chief Medical Officer Sir Donald Acheson was set up shortly after the 1997 election. It reported in 1998⁷⁴ and resumed public health concerns first articulated by the suppressed 1987 Black Report⁷⁵, not least by identifying improving food and school meals as crucial approaches for tackling these issues. In 2006 the Department for Health rolled out *Healthy Start* to encourage breast feeding and healthy eating for pregnant women and children on very low incomes across the UK, following reform of the Welfare Foods Scheme. It offers vouchers towards the cost of milk, fruit and vegetables.

In 2007, the FSA’s Low Income Diet & Nutrition Survey showed again that general nutrition levels are poor, with people on low incomes even worse. The 2010 Marmot Review, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*,⁷⁶ to which SDC contributed, illustrated the continuing divide.

2.4 Children

A key theme which emerged in the 2000s was children’s health and wellbeing. An early report in 1997 commissioned by, the then, Minister of Health Tessa Jowell MP from Professor Philip James recommended the creation of a new national strategy to prevent future ill-health by early years educational and health promotion.⁷⁷ It was dismissed by the

Government as ‘nanny statist’ in 1998 and buried, only for the issue to return with a vengeance when the lamentable state of public provision in school meals and children’s food was exposed by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver with his *School Dinners* (2005)⁷⁸ and then by the *Ministry of Food* (2008) TV series.⁷⁹ The first series embarrassed the Government into

releasing £0.3 billion to create the School Food Trust and in 2006, twenty-five years after their predecessor standards were abolished, the Government introduced tougher school food standards for England.

Meanwhile, Scotland had already taken a lead by appointing a 'food tsarina', Gillian Kynoch, and by introducing good standards for schools (in the *Hungry for Success* programme and the School Meals (Scotland) Act) and extended official support for breast feeding.⁸⁰ Both Scottish interventions proved how government can make a difference early in the life-course, and underlined the mistake made when Tessa Jowell dismissed Prof James' report.

Jamie Oliver's second TV series exposed the low level of citizen food skills such as cooking. Again this was in England but the message had UK-wide resonance. On both issues – school food and food skills – Jamie Oliver catalysed arguments and evidence established by academic researchers and campaigners suggesting the case for better connection between the social and personal elements of UK food culture with social inequalities and health outcomes.

Food advertising to children was a further focus on which some progress was made in the 2000s. Proponents of public health and consumer rights had long identified the strong influence of advertising and marketing on food choice.⁸¹ In the early 2000s, the Food Standards Agency requested a review of the academic evidence.⁸² Publication of the Hastings Review in 2005 led to a furious reaction from some sections of the food industry and hostility from the advertising and media world. To its credit, the FSA stuck to the evidence that advertising does influence children's food choices and began a process with Department of Health and Ofcom, the media regulator, which ended with a new system whereby unhealthy foods could not be advertised before a time watershed. Health campaigners argued that the controls did not go far enough, however, and the FSA's capacity to initiate such policy development has been curtailed, since the May 2010 election, by removing key functions from the Agency and splitting them across Defra (labelling) and the Department of Health (nutrition).

2.5 Food security

In the 2000s, the issue of food security moved from being a marginal concern (associated with localism and trade protectionism) to become a central governmental and industry concern by the decade end. In 2000, the Labour Government had an early brush with such potential realities with a lorry strike during fuel shortages, which exposed that much-vaunted efficiencies in the UK supermarket system were vulnerable.⁸³ Ministers learned that empty shelves could be a matter of a few days away,⁸⁴ as just-in-time logistics mean that food warehousing is minimal.

Until the latter part of the decade, the dominant perspective in UK Government was to view food security as a problem only for developing countries. Insofar as it was seen as a UK concern, it was a resilience issue to be resolved through market rigour.⁸⁵ Defra and HM Treasury strongly argued that CAP was the main 'local' food security issue, being a barrier to developing country exports. They articulated the dominant UK policy position that trade liberalisation and markets could resolve food security problems.⁸⁶ With regard to the UK's own supplies, the dominant assumption was (and to some extent remains) that as a rich economy the UK did not need to worry unduly about its food security, being able always to buy on world markets.⁸⁷

Such assumptions were questioned as world food prices spiked in 2007-08 heavily influenced by a combination of rocketing oil prices,⁸⁸ low global food stocks, export restrictions, speculation and US and EU biofuel commitments.⁸⁹ In 2008 the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) High-Level Conference on Food Security raised \$1.2 billion extra funding for the World Food Programme to address rising need caused by the commodity price rises.

The notion that oil prices might rise to \$100 a barrel seemed remote in 2005 when SDC commissioned research (*\$100 a Barrel of Oil: Impacts on the sustainability of food supply in the UK, 2007*) on the effect this would have on UK food prices. But by 2007, when we reported that food prices would rise by 5-10%, it seemed prescient as oil prices hit this new high.

The 2007 price spike catalysed the UK government's interest, and engagement with initiatives already underway such as the 2005-08 Chatham House project,⁹⁰ and positions from bodies such as commercial farming lobbies.⁹¹ When Gordon Brown became Prime Minister in June 2007, he initiated a Cabinet Office review, published as *Food Matters* in 2008. In 2009 the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs select committee conducted an inquiry,⁹²

eliciting a Government response.⁹³ Defra, meanwhile, began to work on a new set of food security indicators, publishing a UK Food Security Assessment in 2010, based on assessments of UK resilience globally and domestically.⁹⁴

Debate about the indicators was a reminder that the catch-all term ‘food security’ meant different things to

different interest groups. The SDC itself has argued, in a 2009 position paper *Food Security and Sustainability*, that food security policy needs to be based on delivering sustainability.⁹⁵ SDC also highlighted the opportunity within CAP reform for an ambitious new Common Sustainable Food Policy to replace CAP with a clear vision for European food systems to become low impact, healthy and just.

2.6 Fairness and social justice

Issues of fairness and social justice throughout the food chain were strong themes throughout the 2000s, both nationally and internationally. They were manifest in diverse forms: fairness in markets, society and moral issues such as animal welfare.

In the 2000s, there was increasing concern over the growing market dominance of a decreasing number of large supermarkets. By the end of the decade the ‘big four’ chains, Tesco, Asda (taken over by the world’s largest food retailer US Wal-Mart), Sainsbury’s and Morrisons (which had taken over Safeway’s) took over three-quarters of shoppers food spend,⁹⁶ compared with less than half during the 1990s.⁹⁷ Many local campaigns sought to end the spread of multiple retailers⁹⁸ in what became dubbed ‘clone town Britain’.⁹⁹

Unfair relationships between supermarkets and farmers have been a public concern over the last decade. This included high profile campaigns for ‘fair milk prices’ with backing from the National Federation of Women’s Institutes.¹⁰⁰ Inquiries by the Competition Commission into the grocery market in 2000¹⁰¹ and 2007¹⁰² resulted in the Grocery Supply Code of Practice¹⁰³ which came into force in 2010 to govern the relationship between supermarkets and their suppliers. While critics saw this as weak, the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) is now taking forward the establishment of a body, the Groceries Code Adjudicator or ‘Supermarkets Ombudsman’ as it was previously known, to monitor and enforce compliance of the code.¹⁰⁴

The Minimum Wage Act came into force in 1999. This set the bar for pay below which no worker should fall and has considerable impact in food sectors. The Gangmaster Licensing Act (2004) set up a new Authority to regulate gang labour in agriculture, horticulture, food processing and packing, fish processing and shellfish industries. The need for the Gangmasters Licensing Authority was highlighted by the deaths of twenty-one cockle-pickers in Morecambe Bay in 2004.

The decade saw a growth in ‘ethical consumption’. Long championed by the UK’s strong animal welfare movement, the notion of ethics being a driver for the food system was deepened by the rapid growth of the fair trade market.¹⁰⁵ By the end of the decade, fair trade had moved beyond a niche market into the mainstream, with Cadbury and Nestlé both launching fair trade chocolate products, and companies such as the Co-op and Sainsbury attempting to more fully integrate fair trade into their business model.

Nevertheless, an inquiry by the Food Ethics Council at the end of the decade looked at the extent of social injustice in the food system within the UK and at global level, and how this unfairness impedes progress towards sustainable food and farming.¹⁰⁶ It concluded that ‘fairness’ has largely been peripheral to food policy debate although a socially just food system is essential to address the challenges of providing secure, sustainable and health providing food systems.

Globally, the decade began with the UN Millennium Development Goals, which includes commitments to eradicate extreme poverty and to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.¹⁰⁷ In 2002 the UN FAO World Food Summit reiterated the position that under-nourishment is the key social challenge for food policy. Debate is now centred on how to feed a growing world population estimated to reach 9 billion by 2050. In 2009 the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report called for radical changes in world farming to avert increasing regional food shortages, escalating prices and growing environmental problems.¹⁰⁸ ‘Land grabs’ has entered the lexicon as some countries sought to acquire land, particularly in Africa, as a buffer against rising food prices.¹⁰⁹

Global inequalities were highlighted by the UK Government’s Foresight report at the end of the decade, which concluded the benefits of globalisation have been unequal and unfair.¹¹⁰ It reported that high income countries

have been privileged by subsidy and trade regimes which have attempted to shield local producers from growing global competition. This has skewed access to vital global markets for food producers in low- and middle-income

countries. Foresight called for further reform, including of the Common Agricultural Policy, to make subsidies more targeted towards the provision of (environmental) public goods.

2.7 Policy for Sustainable Food Systems

A sustainability approach to policy requires a comprehensive system approach, that 'joins up' economic, environmental and social elements and government departments and key actors. In the 2000s signs of such

policy making began to emerge. This section reviews policy development by the UK Government and Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland administrations.

UK government

Shifting Government thinking about food from its primary focus on agriculture has been a long process. In the post World War 2 reconstruction, it was farming that dominated attention, symbolised by the Agriculture Act 1947. That strand of commitment was re-asserted in the 1975 Food from our own Resources White Paper,¹¹¹ and although the UK's accession to the Common Agricultural Policy of the Common Market (now EU) in 1973, confirmed by the 1975 referendum, changed the mode of farm support, UK policy still centred on ensuring production did not drop to 1939 levels, when about a third of UK food was home-produced. But farming policy is not food policy. The latter goes wider. And in the 1980s and 90s when the food system first began to come under sustained critical review – mostly due to food safety and environmental hazards – UK Governments found themselves almost in uncharted territory. It was a long time since the UK had articulated anything like a comprehensive food policy – arguably since the Ministry of Food was wound down in 1954, leaving production-oriented thinking in the ascendancy at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, with food added last in its title.

The 2001 Food and Mouth outbreak can be taken as the first major prompt for Government to re-engage with food policy. The Government set up a Policy Commission to inquiry into the state of farming and food in England, chaired by Sir Don Curry. The Curry Commission reported in 2002 that a re-orientation of food and farming was needed, with more emphasis on environmental protection and greater engagement with the needs of the consumer as mediated by powerful food retailers.¹¹² It recommended tighter integration between farming and food supply chains, with a strong environmental focus. Health took a regrettably low priority in the Curry review.¹¹³

The SDC welcomed the Curry Commission's findings¹¹⁴ for taking sustainable development as its guiding principle, making 'reconnection' its over-arching idea and recommending public money for 'public good' i.e. social and environmental benefits rather than production subsidies. However, the SDC also highlighted that the findings did not cover all aspects of sustainability including global resource use, rural communities, and resilience and that health took a low priority.¹¹⁵

The Government response to Curry was the *Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food: Facing the Future in England*, launched on 12 December 2002.¹¹⁶ An independent strategy implementation group, chaired by Sir Don Curry, was then set up to act as a driver for change within Government and across the industry until 2006. It became recognised as a successful and innovative model of driving delivery, demonstrating to Government the value of new ways of working, with greater openness and accountability.

The strategy included a commitment to work with key sectors of the food industry beyond the farm gate to develop a Food Industry Sustainability Strategy (FISS) to provide strategic direction and set priorities. It also initiated the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative (PSFPI) to ensure that sustainability is an important factor in food procurement for public provision. Neither initiative fully lived up to its promise. FISS was 'a difficult and time-consuming process'.¹¹⁷ The review of the PSFPI by Deloitte for Defra concluded that it had begun to be effective in shifting the £2 billion public procurement sector towards more sustainable delivery (with useful contribution from the SDC) but that it had much further to go.¹¹⁸ The good

news was that the PSFPI had succeeded in raising the proportion of UK derived foods in 2003-09.¹¹⁹ What the report did not say, however, was that this £2 billion is only 1.5% of the national food supply. Although government was beginning to get its act together, it wasn't helping shift the national picture. The Curry Commission also recommended setting up a 'Food Chain Centre' which IGD ran for five years.¹²⁰

The inclusion of health within the strategy and the setting up a Food and Health Action Plan (FAHAP) group was a major step towards integrating health within sustainability, but the implementation group found delivering a strategy that crosses Departmental boundaries particularly challenging.¹²¹ Cross-government mechanisms were established through a ministerial steering group, an officials group and the FAHAP group, leading to improved working relationships between the Department of Health, Defra, the Food Standards Agency and the Department for Education and Skills. In 2004, the Department of Health published its White Paper, *Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier* which set out Government's commitment to provide more of the opportunities, support and information people wanted to enable them to choose healthier lifestyles, and in 2005, *Choosing a better diet: a food and health action plan*¹²² was taken forward under a cross-governmental governance structure.

Dame Yve Buckland, who championed health within the Implementation Group reflected concerns about the process in 2006:¹²³

"Food and Health policies must continue to be a key part of the ongoing strategy. We have a number of concerns about this area. It is worrying that the broad approach we would like to see to improving nutrition in the whole population is not reflected in the narrow PSA targets for reducing childhood obesity. There also appears to be a risk of loss of momentum for delivering the *Choosing Health* White Paper and the obesity strategy as a result of cuts in DH funding and reprioritisation of funding and delivery targets. Unless the improvement in relationships between parts of government and the food manufacturers and retailers is maintained, there could be a stalemate around some of the more sensitive issues, such as advertising food to children and food labelling. It is also vital that health issues continue to be integrated into the food chain delivery and public procurement work taking place under the Strategy, and into regional delivery, where the involvement of the Regional Directors of Public Health will be crucial."

While this was written in 2006, it could easily apply today.

When David Miliband became Defra's Secretary of State in 2006 he set out his vision for 'One Planet Farming' taking a more explicit sustainability focus.¹²⁴ For the first time climate change became a priority theme – an issue which he championed during his brief time at Defra and subsequently from 2007 at the Foreign Office. That theme was further strengthened later with the Climate Change Act with its commitments for the UK to lower greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050.¹²⁵

Gordon Brown becoming Prime Minister in 2007 was a crucial turning point in leadership for sustainable food policy. He asked the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU) within the Cabinet Office to conduct a major review of food policy, recognising the need to integrate policy cross Government. The SDC's own research found nineteen Whitehall departments covering almost one hundred relevant policy areas and responsibilities.¹²⁶ Our 2008 report *Green, Healthy and Fair* called for government leadership in delivering an ambitious, comprehensive and integrated vision for a sustainable food system.¹²⁷

The Cabinet Office published the Strategy Unit's data analysis in January 2008¹²⁸ and the final policy report, *Food Matters* in July.¹²⁹ *Food Matters* was the first comprehensive review for decades. It called for better integration of food policy across Government and highlighted two main challenges: climate change and obesity. It supported the SDC's recommendations, proposing a national 'low carbon and healthy' food strategy.

Food Matters accelerated important cross Government action including:

- The creation of a Cabinet sub-committee on food, the Domestic Affairs (Food) Sub-Committee (DA(F)), chaired by the Secretary of State at Defra, with a parallel meeting of officials across Government,
- Improved co-ordination between Whitehall and the devolved administrations on food, long overdue given the lead given by Scottish and Welsh Governments,
- Creation of a Council of Food Policy Advisors to advise the Secretary of State at Defra (not devolved administrations), drawn from industry, professions, civil society and academia,¹³⁰
- A more comprehensive national vision and strategy for food, culminating in Defra's *Food 2030* strategy,¹³¹

- A range of policy initiatives including:
 - The Integrated Advice to Consumers project to make it easier for consumers to access information on a healthy, low-environmental impact diet (FSA lead),
 - ‘Healthier Food Mark’ to promote more nutritious, environmentally sustainable food standards for public sector food procurement standards (DH led),
 - Foresight project to examine future global sustainable food systems (Chief Scientific Advisor led with Ministerial involvement),
 - Initiatives to reduce food waste (WRAP led).

Following a period of engagement and consultation, *Food2030* published at the beginning of 2010 set out the Government’s vision for a sustainable and secure food system for 2030.¹³² This was the first attempt since the 1950s to bring together cross-government policy on food into one overarching food policy framework. It envisaged a food system by 2030 in which:

- Consumers are informed, can choose and afford healthy, sustainable food. This demand is met by profitable, competitive, highly skilled and resilient farming, fishing and food businesses, supported by first class research and development,
- Food is produced, processed, and distributed, to feed a growing global population in ways which:
 - use global natural resources sustainably,
 - enable the continuing provision of the benefits and services a healthy natural environment provides,
 - promote high standards of animal health and welfare,
 - protect food safety,
 - make a significant contribution to rural communities, and
 - allow us to show global leadership on food sustainability,

- Food security is ensured through strong UK agriculture and food sectors, and international trade links with EU and global partners which support developing economies,
- The UK has a low carbon food system which is efficient with resources with any waste being reused, recycled or used for energy generation.

Its six priorities were to:

- Enable and encourage people to eat a healthy, sustainable diet,
- Ensure a resilient, profitable and competitive food system,
- Increase food production sustainably,
- Reduce the food system’s greenhouse gas emissions,
- Reduce, reuse and reprocess waste,
- Increase the impact of skills, knowledge, research and technology.

Government identified its role as to:

- Encourage change through voluntary, regulatory or economic approaches,
- Lead by example,
- Enable change,
- Build evidence,
- Provide policy leadership.

Scotland

As was noted earlier, Scotland began the 2000s with important cultural and health-oriented policy initiatives, particularly the long-developed rural policy and low income projects as well as the newer Hungry for Success school meals initiative. But with *Choosing our Future: Scotland's sustainable development strategy*¹³³ in 2005, Scotland produced its first broad-based Sustainable Development Strategy. This set out the vision for sustainable development and action across a broad range of policy areas. It acknowledged the role of the 1999 Scottish Food and Drink Strategy¹³⁴ in achieving "a sustainable and profitable food and drink industry in Scotland that is consumer-focused, market-led and internationally competitive". It recognised the important contribution of the food and drink industry to communities (from primary producers through to retailers and the food service sector) by creating wealth and providing employment and access to a healthy, affordable diet. And it encouraged the food industry and consumers to increase the take-up of locally produced food and respond to the growing consumer interest in healthy balanced diets by providing choices that help inform buying decisions.

Against these aspirations, much debate about policy in Scotland was tempered by awareness of ever increasing diet-related ill health, inequalities and obesity. The latter is a symptom rather than a cause of unsustainable food policy, but its costs were particularly troubling for health services. The review of the decade old *Scottish Diet Action Plan*,¹³⁵ begun in 2005, had found that there had been progress in facing the legacy of poor diet in Scottish culture, but showed that inequalities remained and that the links between sustainable development, food and health were still weak.

In 2009, *Recipe for Success*,¹³⁶ Scotland's first food and drink policy, was published. The SDC supported the aim of the policy 'to promote Scotland's sustainable economic growth by ensuring that the Scottish Government's focus in relation to food and drink, and in particular our work with Scotland's food and drink industry, addresses quality, health and wellbeing, and environmental sustainability, recognising the need for access and affordability for all.'¹³⁷ Much of the analysis within the report recognised that previous approaches to food had not delivered healthy, affordable and sustainable food and that a new version of the 'Scottish diet' was needed. Support for community empowerment and a change from an ethos of 'food consumers' to 'food citizens' as a means of encouraging healthy eating was a worthy aspiration.

However, many of the indicators are still not currently positive: obesity levels are high, employment in farming continues to fall and farming practices still contribute significantly to water pollution and greenhouse emissions.

In Scotland, as in the rest of the UK, there is currently a lack of understanding on how best to measure the environmental sustainability of food and drink and there is not yet an effective way of measuring environmental sustainability comprehensively. Work on the sustainability of diets, championed by the SDC's *Setting the Table* report, has been left to academic work with civil society, in the form of the Rowett Institute's work with WWF to translate the FSA's *Eatwell* plate into a 'Livewell' plate.¹³⁸ Through supply chains, more work is required on Life Cycle Analysis, looking at the carbon costs of food supply chains and on the wider environmental footprints of food. One particular issue for Scotland relates to the health and environmental impacts of Scottish methods of meat production. More evidence is required as to the carbon and environmental impacts of Scottish livestock rearing. Heavy reliance on the whisky industry as a national champion for exports is also sensitive in relation to health goals.

There are some examples of good practice on public food procurement. East Ayrshire has developed a council-wide initiative to improve the quality of school food, supported by Government funding. This involves promoting local sourcing and the education of school pupils about the health and environmental impacts of food. The NHS Quality Improvement Scotland standards offer a guide for how meals in the health service have to be prepared and produced for patients. The Estates and Facilities Department of NHS Scotland also discuss health targets and look at how these are being achieved.

These examples remain the exception rather than the rule and there is much more that Government and the wider public sector could do to ensure all public food contracts are based around sustainability principles.

Food waste is another significant issue in Scotland, as elsewhere. The Scottish Government's commitment to Zero Waste is welcome and as with food procurement there have been some good examples of action to reduce food waste but there is significant potential to do more.

Wales

The Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) sustainable development strategy, *One Wales: One Planet* was launched in 2009 and declared that sustainable development would be its 'central organising principle'.¹³⁹ The strategy refers to the WAG's commitment to the development of a *Quality Food for All in Wales Strategic Action Plan*.¹⁴⁰ This was to deliver a strong, healthy food culture in all parts of Wales so that all people's diets are safe, nutritious, balanced, and contribute actively to positive physical health and wellbeing. That overall action plan, promised to be a fully integrated sustainable development plan for food, has not yet emerged. Although strides have been made in policy development, there is still a long way to go.

As with all parts of the UK, the integration of health and culture into economic and environmental delivery is problematic. In Wales, like Scotland in the late 1990s, an outbreak of *e coli* 0157 food poisoning led to the appointment of Professor Hugh Pennington to review why this happened. 118 people were proved to be affected and one five year old child died. Pennington's report to WAG was, as in Scotland, a serious critique of the prevailing culture of low-cost public procurement, lax food inspection, poor auditing and regulation.¹⁴¹ Pennington concluded: "[t]he only systems that worked well were outbreak control and clinical care. There were system failures everywhere else."¹⁴² This is a sober reminder that 'changing culture' is not just a rubric for consumer behaviour change but for how governance works and how officials can easily be doing their jobs but not delivering public safety.

On a more positive note, WAG has a strong record of supporting local food initiatives, including the initiation of the agri-food partnership in 1999, and since developing various trade development programmes to ensure the support is delivered to businesses to maximise opportunities in the public and private/retail sectors.¹⁴³

WAG has engaged with the major supermarkets to encourage local purchasing that supports the rural economy and, particularly if produce is seasonal, can deliver a low carbon food system. The major supermarkets have responded to customer demand by introducing initiatives to increase the number of local lines listed and in the appointment of Welsh regional buyers with responsibility for local sourcing.

The last ten years have seen the introduction of a number of sector specific strategic plans to support producers and processing businesses develop their organisations and market their products, including the lamb and beef sector,¹⁴⁴ the organic sector¹⁴⁵ and the dairy industry.¹⁴⁶ WAG aims to facilitate improvements to some of the own-label products which are made by manufactures within Wales, large and small, by supporting the industry to help them investigate technical issues, energy efficiency, waste reduction and eco-design of their products and processes. Further strategic action plans for the red meat industry¹⁴⁷ and the horticulture industry¹⁴⁸ have also been developed.

The importance of food to the Welsh economy, culture and preservation of the natural environment has also been recognised by WAG which put in place a *Food Tourism Action Plan*¹⁴⁹ and a Local Sourcing Action Plan.¹⁵⁰ Specific attention is also being focused on community growing of food.¹⁵¹

In 2010, WAG launched and consulted on a new food strategy looking to 2020.¹⁵² The SDC welcomed the development of the strategy and noted that rising food costs and food inequalities can only be effectively tackled by using a sustainable, integrated approach. This will require stronger liaison between health, environmental, economic and rural strategies. We are pleased to see that gaps highlighted by the SDC, in consultation, have now been incorporated into the final strategy launched in December 2010, including ones on inequalities, the importance of community and home grown food and Wales' future production capacity. Specifically, the strategy makes explicit that it is founded on sustainable development principles. It highlights five key drivers for change: market development; food culture; sustainability and well-being; supply-chain efficiency and integration. A delivery plan is in preparation as this SDC report goes to publication.¹⁵³

Although Wales has developed aspects of a full sustainable food strategy, like Scotland and England, over arching coherence will be essential. Bearing in mind the sober conclusions of the Pennington E coli report cited earlier, it will be essential to ensure full engagement across different agencies and levels of Government.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland's first sustainable development strategy, *First Steps towards sustainable development*,¹⁵⁴ was launched in March 2006, and set out how Northern Ireland would deliver sustainable development within the context of the UK shared framework. Its successor strategy, *Everyone's Involved*,¹⁵⁵ was published in 2010.

Against this backdrop, in its first Strategic Plan¹⁵⁶ covering 2006-2011, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), set itself goals of achieving a competitive industry, with strong social and economic infrastructure in rural areas, enhancing animal, fish and plant health and welfare, and developing a more sustainable environment. Sustainable development is the over-arching driver of change, and the strategy has a goal of improving the competitiveness of the Northern Ireland agri-food industry.

DARD's Rural Strategy¹⁵⁷ will be replaced by a new Rural White Paper, with cross-departmental involvement. From 2007, the Rural Strategy has delivered Northern Ireland CAP policy, implemented on the basis of an inclusive approach to sustainable rural development and the integration of policies across government. It is a major initiative and a commitment to future development of sustainable rural communities.

The Food Strategy Implementation Partnership (FSIP) was established in November 2004 by the Ministers responsible for Agriculture and Economy. The FSIP provides direction and an industry focused steer to the Government and for the agri-food industry. The *Fit for Market Strategy*¹⁵⁸ aims to assist the food industry in Northern Ireland achieve its fullest economic potential, focusing in key strategic themes such as market understanding and development, innovation, capability development and supply chain management.

However, the longer term vision was set out in the report of the Foresight Leadership Group in its *Vision Twenty/Twenty* report in 2006¹⁵⁹ – the vision being one of a distinctive and competitive agri-food sector through integrating food, diet and health; leading edge food and ingredients; new alternative enterprises and mastering risk and change.

Focus on specific sectors led to the development of the Red Meat Strategy (2009) – a five to ten year strategy for the beef and sheep meat industry developed by the Northern Ireland Red Meat Industry Taskforce¹⁶⁰.

The FSIP, in collaboration with Government, largely completed delivery of the previous food strategy for Northern Ireland by 2007. An updated strategy, developed by an Industry Advisory Panel in partnership with DARD and Invest NI, was published in May 2010. For the first time key performance indicators that will capture and reflect the economic performance of the food industry in Northern Ireland are included. In addition to the themes from the previous strategy, energy and waste has been added with a view to recognising the sustainability dimension.

If the above documents and statements are the formal expressions of Northern Ireland's policy development on food sustainability, the reality – as with the rest of the UK and the other devolved administrations – is more complex and nuanced. Well-established food interests have viewed sustainable development as potentially threatening and political processes have been held up by wider events. In short, the aspirations to shift Northern Ireland's food system in a low carbon, low impact direction have not been translated into a discernible structural change. And yet, the possibilities and constituencies are there.

The return of peace has given policy space to think about what sort of economy Northern Ireland might have, in which sustainable food could hold pride of place. The room to do this is helped by awareness of the acute financial troubles now enveloping the Irish Republic, after its financial bubble has deflated. The wider politics makes more valid the case for moving sustainable food to the heart of regeneration in Northern Ireland. Its natural advantages – water, land, rural base, urban proximity, proud cultures, and more – all signify the opportunity to build better rural-urban linkages, to see food skills on land and in towns as a bond between the urban majority and the rural population, and to build a healthier diet based on authentic foods. Such possibilities, as throughout the UK, require a combination of political leadership, partnerships and concerted pressure from the rest of society.¹⁶¹

Business

Throughout the 2000s, business began to recognise the need to make their enterprises address the wider societal and environmental challenge of sustainable food. This happened due to a coincidence of pressures. There was an element of self-interest, but also a concern for reputational risk, and also a need to respond to criticism from civil society organisations challenging food businesses, particularly retailers,¹⁶² to change practices. Competition also played a part. For example Wal-mart's sustainability announcement in 2006¹⁶³ was quickly followed by M&S and Tesco announcements in early 2007.

In the 2000s, the UK's powerful food business sector, employing well over 3 million people, increasingly engaged with Government and civil society organisations to work more collaboratively towards sustainability goals. This was sometimes a challenging task. For example, the Food Industry Sustainability Strategy,¹⁶⁴ set up as a result of the Curry Commission and convened by Government to identify how the post-farm gate food chain can help achieve sustainable food supply systems, became a slow process. Trade interests were reluctant to agree industry-wide targets and the focus was largely on companies' own operations. Vital issues such as energy, water use, transport and waste can be seen either as brand-specific or generic, as competitive positioning or systems-wide. This dilemma was reflected and faced in the Food and Drink Federation's 2007 *Five-fold Environmental Ambition*,¹⁶⁵ with commitments on reducing CO₂ emissions; food and packaging waste; transport and water use. This was a step in the right direction but largely excluded the sustainability and ethical impacts within supply chains on issues as diverse as sustainable fish, fair trade, and sustainable palm oil, despite increasing pressure on companies from NGOs and others.¹⁶⁶

Towards the end of the decade, a number of leading companies did start to take sustainability much more seriously and make longer term and broader sustainability commitments. Arguably, the Co-operative Group was first, with its Responsible Retailing commitment in the mid 1990s, but Marks and Spencer's *Plan A*¹⁶⁷ launched in 2007 shifted the mainstream retailers by setting out ambitious targets and inviting consumers to engage. It was quickly seen as 'best in class' for the main retail sector, setting commitments to 2015 on climate change, waste, sustainable raw materials, fair partnerships and health and wellbeing. It has continued to revise and upgrade both delivery and targets, suggesting that *Plan A* is genuinely being hard-wired. Other companies too are acting.¹⁶⁸ Companies now jostle for position to be seen to

address sustainability issues. In 2010, for example, Unilever unveiled its *Sustainable Living Plan*¹⁶⁹ and PepsiCo UK made its *50% in 5* commitment.¹⁷⁰ Despite such corporate leadership, there is widely agreed to be room for better co-ordination to deliver a continual cycle of improvement.¹⁷¹

In the mid 2000s, government set up various initiatives to support business transition towards great resource efficiencies, including Envirowise, the Carbon Trust, and Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP). As concerns about packaging and waste grew and came into policy focus, retailers and food businesses signed the Courtauld Commitment,¹⁷² set up in 2005. This voluntary agreement with Government, and supported by WRAP, set targets to deliver reductions in packaging waste and help reduce food waste. With initial targets largely achieved, the agreement has evolved to more stretching targets. WRAP reports the costs associated with food waste generated within the UK food and drink supply chain and households at an estimated £17 billion a year (£12 billion from households and £5 billion within the supply chain).¹⁷³ The Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) has initiatives to reduce HGV miles, product and packaging waste and to help food companies manage water in their supply chains.¹⁷⁴

Voluntary initiatives have been the favoured approach across Europe, not just in the UK, to engage business. In 2005, the European Commission set up the *EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health*,¹⁷⁵ a forum for European-level organisations, including the food industry and NGOs to share their activities and identify best practice. Its weakness, according to critics, is that companies make individual commitments and monitor their own performance.

The European Food Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) Round Table¹⁷⁶ was launched in 2009 by the European Commission and food supply chain trade organisations to promote environmental improvement along the food supply chain.

Respondents to the SDC's survey for this report saw moves by business, particularly retailers, towards more sustainable and ethical sourcing as the top contribution from this sector in the last ten years. Particular mentions included sustainable fish and seafood (e.g. Marine Stewardship Council certification), use of sustainable palm oil in products, free range eggs, poultry and meat, and organic sourcing. Commitments to tackle waste reduction, including packaging, were also noted.

The story of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), an initiative led by Unilever in the 1980s due to awareness of its own unsustainable fish practices and reliance on threatened seas, is important. The MSC, now a non-profit independent body,¹⁷⁷ tells an important story for both its successes – in awareness raising, benchmarking, best practice sharing – and limitations. Certification schemes, labelling and consumer consciousness raising are useful but not the sum of what is necessary to deliver sustainable

sources of essential fish oils. The sober facts suggest that fish stocks are still under threat, not least due to long-term industrial fishing, compounded by the Common Fisheries Policy.¹⁷⁸ Some estimates suggest nearly 90% of all commercial fish stocks are over-fished in European seas, and a third of these stocks are now facing commercial extinction. Pressure on Governments to lead the radical reform that is necessary will inevitably continue.¹⁷⁹

Civil society

The UK has a strong network of civil society organisations working on food sustainability. Animal welfare is a particularly deeply-rooted and strong element of this network. Outsiders frequently remark on the strength and verve of the UK food NGO movement.¹⁸⁰ Today, Prime Minister David Cameron is overt in that appeal, with his notion of ‘Big Society’¹⁸¹. Many NGOs argue that this is exactly what they have been trying to do, through food.¹⁸² Fears are being voiced that financial cut-backs will stop local and national bodies pump-priming and maintaining this vibrant food movement at local, regional, national and international levels.¹⁸³ These include WWF’s *One Planet Diet* work,¹⁸⁴ Sustain’s *Good Food for our Money*¹⁸⁵ and *Children’s Food* campaigns,¹⁸⁶ and the NGO partnership running the school Food for Life Partnership.¹⁸⁷ Respondents to the SDC survey for this report also acknowledged the importance of Government’s campaigns such as WRAP’s *Love Food Hate Waste* Campaign, and *Five a Day*. Civil society’s push for sustainability has also included media engagement, such as harnessing TV campaigns fronted by chefs Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Jamie Oliver. Other partnerships are led by NGOs, such as for Fairtrade.

Civil society includes more than constituted NGOs. In academia and the professions there are many discipline-

specific and professional bodies, with a direct input of evidence and expertise on food policy and practice, who are increasingly reflecting their memberships’ alarm at the unsustainability of current food systems, advice and policy-making. There are already signs of remarkable international coalitions emerging to champion sustainable diets and the need to change consumer behaviour radically.¹⁸⁸

Participants in our survey recognised the role of civil society organisations in their awareness raising and advocacy work to shape public opinion and challenge government and industry. Most frequently cited included raising awareness of climate change, GM foods, palm oil and lobbying for reduced meat consumption; campaigning for better school food and promoting local food.

Civil society’s work to stimulate grassroots or community interest and action is viewed as a significant contribution through, for example, the development of community supported agriculture, farmers’ market networks and local food partnerships. Food has proved successful as a means to engage people locally around sustainability issues, for example, through the Climate Challenge Fund in Scotland and through the Transition Town movement.

Consumers

The sustainability impact of current patterns of UK consumption came into sharp focus during the decade with the well quoted, yet powerful, statistic – that if the whole world consumed as we do in the UK we would need three planets to sustain everyone.¹⁸⁹ Food is a significant contributor to this picture, for example it accounts for around a third of household consumption-related GHG emissions.¹⁹⁰

Consumers are increasingly encouraged to be conscious of where their food comes from and how it is produced.^{191,192} Consumer polling indicates that shoppers consider they can make a difference to: personal health (57%), British farming (41%), animal welfare (38%) the local economy (28%), the environment (23%) sustainable fishing (17%) and global warming (11%).¹⁹³ Yet there remains a value-

action gap between our beliefs or values and our actions, with green consumers remaining a minority.¹⁹⁴

As the SDC concluded in 2008, in the report of the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable, the Government cannot simply hope to persuade the whole of the population to act in the way that 'green' consumers do when many sustainable behaviours are more difficult, expensive or outside the norm.¹⁹⁵ SDC's further work to advise Government on priority elements of sustainable diets identified reducing the consumption of meat, dairy, fatty and sugary foods, and reducing food waste as the changes likely to have the most significant impact on making diets more sustainable.¹⁹⁶ UK households waste 8.3 million tonnes of food and drink, of which 5.3 million tonnes is avoidable, to the value of £12.2 billion with an impact of 20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions per year.²⁴⁵

The success of various market sectors and certification schemes aimed at promoting more ethical food production has been an important trend in the last decade. Whilst sales in organic products in the UK fell by 12.9% in 2009 to £1.84 billion, sales of organic food are still three times higher than in 1999 and over 50% higher than five years ago.¹⁹⁷

Awareness amongst consumers of issues around fairness and social justice has also increased – in 2010, 74% of people surveyed recognised the Fairtrade Mark,¹⁹⁸ compared to 20% in 2001.¹⁹⁹ Fairtrade sales in the UK in 2010 exceeded £1.1 billion in 2010, continuing double digit growth in the recession.²⁰⁰

Despite the failings noted above, demand for sustainable fish is on the increase. In 2010, the Marine Stewardship Council Annual reported that 187 fisheries around the world were either certified or under assessment – up nearly 50% on the previous year. Over 500 million individual items now carry the MSC ecolabel annually. Together, their estimated retail value is close to \$2.2 billion – an increase of 73% on the previous year.²⁰¹ In a sense, the story of fish is a parable for sustainability in food. What to do about fish was a test case for the now abandoned FSA-led Integrated Advice to Consumers project. The case for consumers to eat fish is nutritionally strong, while fish stocks are under serious threat. Yet advice to eat more fish continues to be given, putting the onus on consumers to choose wisely. What is required is a 'joining up' of policy on stocks, nutrition, environment, employment and consumer culture.

Progress towards sustainability

By 2010, both the outgoing Labour government and the incoming Coalition spoke the language of sustainability when articulating aspirations for the food system. But despite growing awareness and engagement across multiple sustainability issues by Government, business and civil society, progress in delivering a sustainable food system has been slow and incremental.

As this report has sought to illustrate, there was also a steady flow of policy initiatives, sometimes as a response to crises e.g. over food safety, rising obesity and food price spikes, and sometimes purely in response to evidence and policy champions. This process of transition from the old production-oriented policy paradigm, modified by consumerism, has been described as the emergence of reluctant engagement shaped by crisis management.²⁰² However slow, faltering and limited this transition has been, the challenge of UK food unsustainability is now, if not quite 'on the table', at least 'knocking on the door of decision-makers'.

On a variety of fronts, one can trace a steady build-up of events, evidence and advice moving issues from the

'outer circle' championed by civil society and arms-length Government bodies, to the 'inner circle' of central Ministerial and government policy formation. Inevitably there could sometimes be ideologically significant struggles about the way forward. Nevertheless, a growth of policy can be tracked across the spectrum of sustainability mapped earlier in this report (see Table 2).

Participants in our research were fairly evenly divided between those who thought the UK food system had become more sustainable over the last ten years, and those who disagreed. Perhaps both are right. Awareness has grown; initiatives have begun; lessons have been learned. At the same time, the enormity of what needs to be done makes blind optimism look naive. Even those who responded negatively were able to provide examples of initiatives from Government, business and civil society aimed to address the sustainability of UK food.

The 2000s therefore cannot be dismissed as lacking governmental attention on food institutions and policy. The actions and reports provided in this report suggest that the decade was a period of change and some progress.

It spawned a combination of new institutions, some new thinking and some engagement. Interpretations vary about the reasons for the high level of activity in the UK: a strong civil society voice, a powerful food industry wanting a level playing field and worrying about its own survival, public pressure on politicians, delayed realisation of transformation food supply chains, a squeeze between pursuit of low cost food and demands for higher standards.

Historians will judge. Our interest here is that collectively, such pressures heightened the arguments for and about sustainability and food. The SDC has played its part in that process, but will no longer champion and push within Government. The question we address in the next section is where this combination of evidence, policy and practice might head in the 2010s.

Looking Forward

3.1 Where we are now

The UK Coalition Government came into office determined to undertake a period of severe restructuring, driven by an overall commitment to reduce the fiscal deficit generated in the banking crisis in 2008 and the ideology of smaller government/bigger society. All government departments were required to plan for significant cuts. Food policy and sustainability was no exception to this rule. In October 2010, the Chancellor's Comprehensive Spending Review announced that Defra, a relatively small department, had to plan for 29% cuts over the period 2011-2015 – higher than the Government average of 19%. By July 2010 Defra had announced the process of cutting around half of its 90 arms-length bodies, ranging from the Agricultural Wages Board to the Commons Commissioners and Inland Waterways Board, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (created in 1970 under Royal Warrant) and the Commission for Rural Communities.²⁰³ It retained the two largest, Natural England and the Environment Agency, though both were told to “end their lobbying work activities”.²⁰⁴ Funding was withdrawn from the SDC. Government also axed Regional Development Agencies.

Budget cuts to local and central government will inevitably diminish public sector capacities to continue the (albeit sometimes faltering) steps in the right direction of a sustainable food system. Those steps and the emerging systemic thinking were outlined in the previous section. Local authority cuts, for instance, might well mean a reduction in the frontline auditing and inspection, so necessary in ensuring the safety and integrity of food supplies.^{205, 206} There is also much uncertainty about the impacts of proposed changes to deliver public health at a local level. The language of ‘nudge’ and personal responsibility risks a failure to recognise the structural and institutional drivers that influence individual behaviour.²⁰⁷

The cross-government Cabinet Domestic Affairs (Food) Sub-Committee set up after Food Matters was not re-established. The Food Standards Agency remit was reduced to food safety alone with labelling and standards work (c.25 staff) moving to Defra, and nutrition (c.70) to the Department of Health. Projects with sustainability elements, notably Integrated Advice to Consumers and Healthier Food Mark, intended to establish healthy sustainable food via public sector food procurement, were dropped. Defra has committed to producing Government Buying Standards for Food, however these will only be mandatory for central government. Although it retained a

welcome use of sustainability language, Defra's Business Plan 2011-2015 was widely perceived as narrowing down the broader commitments mapped in *Food 2030*. The pursuit of ‘sustainable and healthy diets’, as advocated in SDC's advice in *Setting the Table*²⁰⁸ and featured highly in *Food 2030*, was removed; with the emphasis towards sustainable production.

The implications of the Chief Scientific Advisor's Foresight *Global Food and Farming Futures* project²⁰⁹ initiated under Labour are likely to be lasting, as are the reverberations from the Task Force on Farming Regulation²¹⁰ and the Government review into the cost and responsibility for sharing the burden of animal disease.²¹¹

The Department of Health's role in sustainability in England will come under pressure as the mechanics of planned NHS restructuring are worked through. In particular, its attention will be on the abolition of Primary Care Trusts, the details of how powers and budgets are to be devolved to local GPs, and the organisational structures of the new Public Health England.²¹² The *Healthy Weight Healthy Lives* strategy with its interesting commitments to alter environments has been replaced by a public health strategy²¹³ which prioritised individual consumer behaviour change, invoking ‘nudge’ psychology theory,²¹⁴ admired by the previous Government too.²¹⁵ The Cabinet Office also cut funding to the School Food Trust, suggesting it might become a charity.

Food 2030, the previous Government's fledgling food strategy was ground-breaking in providing a cross-government framework towards a sustainable food system and had wide stakeholder buy-in. After the election, unfortunately, it was soon in the doldrums, becalmed by a ‘not invented here’ attitude and a lack of commitment towards some of the potentially catalysing initiatives. A focus on ‘delivery’ by the new administration rather than ‘strategy’ raised expectations that the policy process might gain more momentum, but even the idea of a delivery plan fell out of favour by autumn 2010. Or so it was until in February 2011 the National Farmers Union's President complained at the NFU AGM about the lack of a “food plan”.²¹⁶ Responding to this, Caroline Spelman the Secretary of State reclaimed ownership of the drifting *Food 2030* process,²¹⁷ the first public statement of support. This apparent change of heart is much welcomed by the SDC. Details of how the process will be resumed and what it will take to deliver this are now a priority for Government.

The uncertainty about the direction of national policy (at the time of publication) could reflect the broader lack of clarity around how the Coalition Government intends to do business, with its commitment to ‘smaller government’, ‘big society’ and ‘localism’, with an emphasis on voluntary ‘responsibility deals’ with business coupled with ‘nudge’ to drive behaviour change, what has been termed ‘non-bureaucratic alternatives to regulation’.

There is confusion about what such approaches will mean in practice,²¹⁸ although the Health Secretary of State Andrew Lansley’s ‘responsibility deals’ with business to tackle public health challenges including obesity provide some indication. Yet, unlike the government backed Courtauld Agreement with business to reduce waste and packaging,

or the FSA’s Salt Reduction Campaign, we understand there are no plans for stretching targets, monitoring or reporting on progress. Initial plans for supermarket money-off vouchers for healthier foods have been criticised as a marketing opportunity for companies.²²⁰ Indeed, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs sent strong signals that the ‘Big Society’ agency could be dovetailed into food and environment policy world when she suggested that NGO voluntary efforts could take higher profile in national commitments to enhance biodiversity.²¹⁹

The impacts of changes to UK politics are less directly felt in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These administrations will hold their own elections this year.

Where the Coalition Government began

The Coalition Government “is committed to being the greenest government ever”, with the environment providing the natural foundation for society and economy and farmers recognised as providing a crucial role in managing the land. Defra has the key task of preparing the environment for climate change and to build resilience. Three priorities were stipulated:

- To support and develop British farming and encourage sustainable food production by:
 - Enhancing the competitiveness and resilience of the whole food chain to help ensure a secure, environmentally sustainable and healthy supply of food with improved standards of animal welfare,
- To enhance the environment and biodiversity to improve quality of life,

- To support a strong and sustainable green economy resilient to climate change, and
 - help to create the conditions in which businesses can innovate, invest and grow,
 - encourage businesses, people and communities to manage and use natural resources sustainably and to reduce waste,
 - work to ensure that the UK economy is resilient to climate change, and
 - enhance rural communities.

In addition, Defra would devote resources to prepare for threats from animal diseases and floods.

Source: Defra Business Plan 2011-2015

3.2 Priorities for Action

The SDC urges the Government to accelerate the process of building a genuine sustainable food system and food culture. Government cannot do this on its own, any more than it could be done by other interests on their own. Global food companies alone cannot resolve climate change or dietary change, any more than can individualised consumerism. But it is only Government that has the formal democratic mandate to lead the process and provide

accountability. To that end, the SDC identifies four priorities for action:

- Government leadership for sustainable food
- Sustainable food supply chains
- Sustainable consumption
- Fairness

Government leadership for sustainable food

The need for Government leadership to drive progress towards sustainable food systems is a clear and urgent message from our survey and from our previous work.²²¹ An emphasis on 'smaller government' and 'bigger society' would carry the risk of abdication of responsibilities.

An array of government policies, initiatives and regulations already influence the food system. Intervention is particularly crucial where:

- There is a need to manage and respond to long term challenges, such as oil-dependency,
- The risks of not taking action are too great to leave to markets or personal choice; two significant market failures in food are continued slow response to climate change and obesity,

- There is a need to create a new framework to encourage a different direction from strategic planning and investment by business,
- Interventions at other levels have not delivered the necessary outcomes, e.g. ineffective voluntary agreements or market failure, or when it is more effective (and cost effective) for government to act,
- international agreements require negotiation such as at EU policy level for food regulation and legislation.

A role for government in the food system's rapid transition to a sustainable state is thus both necessary and inevitable. The key question therefore is not should government be involved, but how? We identify the following priorities for government attention.

Clear goals and delivery

Government has a lead role to develop a clear positive vision and plan of how to get there. In Whitehall, *Food 2030* provides such a vision for a sustainable food system – catalysed by the Cabinet Office *Food Matters* report and developed with stakeholder buy-in. Although the Secretary of State at Defra has referred in positive terms to Food 2030,²²² more explicit work on delivery is needed. New co-ordination of work teams are needed across Whitehall and with Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, and with the EU. The goal of a sustainable food system will need to be supported by indicators to measure progress. Defra's previous work in this area²²³ needs to be acknowledged and used by the current administration.

We recommend the Coalition Government accepts full ownership of *Food 2030* as the first expression of an integrated sustainable food policy, and support this with a new delivery plan to be created by September 2011. This should be led by Defra, working with key departments including DH, FSA, BIS, DECC, HMT, Cabinet Office and CLG.

We recommend a Delivery Plan Implementation Group, led by a Delivery Champion inside government with a secretariat to co-ordinate and drive delivery cross-government and with external stakeholders. This should co-ordinate separate working groups for sectors of the food chain.

Cross government integration

As identified by the Cabinet Office *Food Matters* in 2008, cross-government policy integration is key to delivering sustainability outcomes. The loss of the Domestic Affairs (Food) Cabinet Sub-Committee has left a gap in Cabinet level buy-in. Mechanisms are needed to support cross-government integration and to prevent silo working.

We recommend a new cross-government Cabinet Office sub-committee for England to meet twice yearly. To ensure co-ordination with the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland we also recommend a Ministerial level co-ordinating committee between the four UK administrations.

Using appropriate levers

Enabling sustainable food production and consumption will require more than a 'nudge' to consumers and light touch civil society-led change, as conceived in some interpretations of Big Society thinking. It will require comprehensive and co-ordinated multi-sector movement and engagement, with a managed and constructive process of system change and use of a range of levers, from appropriate use of 'hard' measures such as fiscal and regulatory to 'soft' measures such as information and education.

We recommend, as part of developing a Delivery Plan for Food 2030, that Government conducts a review of the full range of policy levers needed for each action to deliver the strategy, and that these be tied into short-term (2020), medium-term (2030) and longer-term (2050) goals, in the vein of carbon commitments.

Working with others

Establishing effective delivery partnerships will also be key to delivering the transition towards sustainable systems. Success will require a range of approaches delivered by different actors, including government, including local government, business, scientists, the full range of civil society and communities.²²⁴ We see particular opportunities at local level to harness the enthusiasm of community-led initiatives with local authorities, public health bodies, schools, social enterprises and businesses through

local food partnerships to deliver healthier, sustainable communities.

We recommend that Government through Defra, CLG and DH encourages new local food partnerships to harness local bodies into the change process towards the goal of creating more sustainable UK food systems by 2030.

Using evidence

Following the leads given by the former Council of Food Policy Advisers, the Chief Scientific Adviser's Foresight programme, and the joint Research Council's food security programme, particular effort into building the evidence base to support the development of a coherent sustainable food strategy must remain a priority.²²⁵

Participants in our research identified under-investment by both the public and private sectors in research into sustainable agriculture, with an overemphasis on chemical

agriculture and biotechnology. Priorities for research identified in our survey include:

- Research into sustainable agricultural and horticultural production generally, but particularly growing crops using less water, greater nutrient use efficiency and reducing reliance on fertilisers and pesticides
- Greenhouse gas reduction including better understanding of the impacts of reduced meat

consumption and extensive life cycle analyses of food production chains; and the role of soil for carbon sequestration

- Defining sustainable diets including the modelling of diets to address the nutrition needs of different social groups, and the impact of dietary change on current food supply chains
- How best to enable behaviour change, including how consumers interpret and respond to messages about sustainable food.

The term 'sustainable intensification' needs to be clarified. The Foresight *Food and Farming* report makes much of this, to describe the need to produce more food from less sustainably, yet the term needs tighter definition for the UK context.

We recommend a new expert advisory body to advise Ministers and departmental policy teams on sustainable food, to narrow the gap between research evidence, policy and practice. Sustainable food needs to be a priority for the Government's Chief Scientist in his role to co-ordinate food and agricultural research across government.

We recommend the Government maintain and expand the Joint Research Council's Food Security Programme and link it more tightly to UK not just international needs and priorities.

Sustainable food supply chains

The way we produce, process and distribute our food has direct impacts on the natural environment, and climate change will increasingly affect food yield, nutritional quality, food safety and affordability. Yet the aspiration remains that a sustainable food system could bring multiple benefits to health, social wellbeing, prosperity, and the natural environment. The multiple threats identified by science must be turned into a more resilient food system, not least to climate change.

We need to see the whole of the food chain – primary production, processing, distribution, retail and catering – fully engaged and working towards meeting high sustainability criteria as part of both national and local directions of travel or plans. Such clarity of purpose is currently lacking, as the NFU has pointed out.²²⁶

UK production levels

The rise in UK home production during World War 2 continued until the early 1980s, since when it has been in slow decline. The decline in the UK's contribution to world food supplies is regrettable. FAO statistics show that in the world context the contribution of UK is small – less than 2%. Yet, in the last 25 years that contribution has declined – by a fifth for cereals, nearly half for livestock and over two thirds for fruit and vegetables.²²⁷

This decline needs to be reversed, not out of nationalism or ideology but because global evidence suggests the worldwide need to produce more food from less land

under pressured circumstances. The most recent review of scientific evidence by the Government's own Foresight Programme reiterates the position.²²⁸ We like everywhere need to prioritise food production on our soils, using our skills and resources wisely.

We recommend Defra and the administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland be charged with a policy imperative to produce more food, by sustainable means, in the UK. Priority should be given to horticulture, particularly fruit production and to lowering the GHG impact of meat and dairy production.

Farmers and growers

The long term viability of UK agriculture and horticulture and UK food security depend upon the UK producing food sustainably, mitigating greenhouse gases, protecting the environment and enhancing the landscape as a public good. A significant challenge will be achieving an acceptable balance between producing, and where appropriate, importing sustainable food for a growing population, and meeting the increasing calls for agricultural policy/subsidies to incentivise and reward environmental stewardship. In order to achieve this, a reconnection of environmental services and food-producing land is overdue. The CAP's de-coupling has not helped. The extent to which food production must respect environmental limits needs to be carefully considered.²²⁹ We also note the concern that UK farming is highly concentrated with a slow decline in farm labour. Of particular concern is the age profile of the permanent workforce, with a high proportion (estimated at 25%) over retirement age. This has led in part to the highest rate of fatalities for any industrial sector. Clearly this isn't sustainable.

We recommend that growers need to be encouraged to build eco-systems support into production, rather than seeing it as a separate income stream. We recommend an expert but multi-stakeholder inquiry be created to determine how this can best be achieved.

We recommend an inquiry into how to rebuild and support the small farm sector and the rise of part-time farming. This needs to include examination of capital availability, access to land, skills/education, and agricultural labour and biodiversity of small farms.

We recommend an inquiry into how to revitalise food growing skills and extension services. This should consider the role of Agricultural Colleges and the potential for a new combined Sustainable Agricultural and Food Advisory Service to support the transformation needed in UK production.

We recommend national strategy be given particular local and regional emphasis, since the UK has considerable variety of terrain, traditions and projected impact of climate change.

We recommend that the Government works with other Member States to lay the evidence and policy grounds to help evolve the EU's Common Agricultural Policy into a new Common Sustainable Food Policy, centred on the EU becoming a low impact, healthy and just food market.

Post farm gate

As documented in this review, some individual companies are making remarkable efforts to improve their environmental and social performance. These positive initiatives are being championed both on a company basis and industry-wide. Trade bodies such as the Institute of Grocery Distribution, Food and Drink Federation, British Retail Consortium and British Hospitality Association document this progress.

These moves need to be accelerated if the UK is transform how food is produced on a systems-wide basis. Action needs to move beyond the self-interest of making companies' own operations more efficient (lowering energy use lowers carbon emissions) to include wider sustainability criteria and values, as indicated in Table 2. This is where the transformation to sustainability can meet resistance. It means moving whole sectors faster than the slowest are prepared to move. It means greater

adoption of choice editing for sustainability to help 'norm' sustainable consumption, including health. Sustainable and ethical sourcing of food was considered a priority for food companies by participants in our research. We urge companies to continue to increase their efforts to reduce waste and not to use rising energy and food prices as a reason not to drive forward sustainability. Support for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) is also crucial in this process.

We recommend that the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) consider how to build skills, research capabilities and infrastructure to support thriving small business food sectors. This should include development of local food hubs and opportunities at a regional and local level for learning and sharing of expertise.

The important role of the catering sector needs to be acknowledged, as a major employer of 1.4 million people and a driver for change towards health and sustainability. Food procurement within the public sector offers a significant opportunity to use public money to drive sustainability within supply chains (and for consumers). The SDC would like to see public sector food procurement programmes operating to an agreed set of standards, which 'choice edit' out less healthy and unsustainable foods from public contracts. Governments need to champion sustainable procurement standards which encourage improvement in access to more nutritious and sustainable

foods not just within its own estate but throughout the public sector including schools, hospitals, social care and prisons and also through encouraging the private sector through its workplace provision of food.

We recommend mandatory health and sustainability standards for all publicly procured food. In doing so, we recommend Government draw on pioneering work such as the *Food for Life* scheme to create a common public set of standards. We recommend the creation of a sustainable procurement delivery team and 'Tsar' to drive progress.

Sustainable consumption

Defra's Business Plan 2011-2015 indicated a shifting of emphasis in its priorities towards production. Sustainable consumption needs to have equal emphasis to encourage

healthy, sustainable diets and address ways in which people can begin the inevitable and necessary behaviour change in consumption.

Sustainable Diets

Participants in our research identified a number of sustainable consumption priorities for government, business and civil society. As the SDC's work to help define a sustainable diet showed,²³⁰ the supposed conflict between health and environment in broad advice to consumers is not as great as sometimes voiced. Nevertheless, more detailed work to identify how to integrate advice to consumers in a more coherent way is long overdue. The Swedish Government's detailed first attempt, submitted to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in 2008 for EU-wide consideration, was withdrawn after criticisms from some member states that advice to eat locally-derived foods with lighter footprints might infringe the free flow of goods within the European market. The SDC views this

as potentially spurious and flouting the drive to reduce Europe's GHG emissions. The UK Governments should support renewed attempts to define sustainable diets and to refine advice to consumers to begin to change behaviour.

We recommend the need for UK bodies to define sustainable diets, taking note of local and regional variations, and to consider how policy can enable people to consume accordingly. This should be a new action led by Defra and the Department of Health, taking advice from specialist bodies such as the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, the Food and Environment Research Agency, the Food Standards Agency and the Environment Agency.

Food Waste

Tackling food waste is now recognised as an on-going priority. The levels of UK food waste by consumers is unnecessary and an indictment of a wasteful food system. International experience is growing on how to lead and

then consolidate behaviour change.²³¹ Ways to help consumers and food businesses reduce and reuse food waste requires more thought and help.

We recommend that Defra’s forthcoming waste strategy prioritises actions to reduce food waste, including goals towards zero food waste to landfill by 2015.

We recommend that Defra, CLG and DH create a joint working party with invited academics, consumer groups and industry specialists to take stock of how best to help shift consumer behaviour more rapidly. This should take note of international experience.

Behaviour Change

A further priority is understanding the ways in which people can best be enabled towards sustainable consumption. The SDC is encouraged by Defra’s research on consumer attitudes and behaviours to sustainable food. We would further encourage the Government to investigate and review the issues raised over meat and dairy consumption. As evidence is emerging, we consider that space for such public dialogue is opening up. For example, work recently undertaken by the Food Ethics Council and WWF-UK demonstrates that there is consensus that in general, it is appropriate for the UK Government to seek to reduce GHG emissions relating to what we consume.²³²

SDC’s research suggests that ‘nudge’ alone will be insufficient to enable the necessary transformation.²³³ While Government has supported a range of campaigns around food and health, dietary habits have not yet changed significantly. The Government should be wary of putting

too much reliance on only one lever of behaviour change when the full range is far wider, from ‘soft’ measures such as information, labeling and nudge to ‘hard’ ones such as fiscal, regulatory and pricing. Food labelling is often seen as the means to help consumers shop more sustainably. While labelling can assist the committed ‘green’ or health-conscious shopper, it is less successful as a general motivator of behaviour change. Policy should not rely solely on labelling to reshape consumer demand and aspirations.

We recommend that Defra co-ordinate work to consider how the full range of levers of governments and others can be applied towards enabling sustainable diets.

We recommend further consideration of how standards and information can be used by consumers, taking note of new technology developments.

Food Education

Food education in schools, needs to be a priority. SDC would like to see Sustainability Food Education becoming a theme around which exciting education could develop. We note the inspiring role that partnerships can have between NGOs and schools, for instance the Lottery-funded Food for Life Partnership.²³⁴

We recommend schools be supported to put further emphasis on practical food experience, including cooking skills and food growing, and to help educate future food citizenship skills including understanding of how marketing affects food choices.

Civil Society

Civil society sustainable food initiatives can provide a diversity of benefits. In both rural and urban communities, the UK has a rich tradition of projects with economic, environmental and social benefits, such as of community market gardens, allotments, gardeners’ clubs, and community growing schemes. Their lessons and insights into what could help them expand and be recognised as

champions of more sustainable food need to be understood better.

We recommend governments draw on the experiences from civil society initiatives and establish opportunities to share learning and influence policy.

Fairness

Participants in our survey said addressing fairness in the food system is a priority. The SDC welcomes the Coalition government's commitment to 'fairness'.²³⁵ The SDC sees fairness as key to the social dimension of sustainability in food policy. This strand, however, needs better

integration in strategies on poverty reduction, international development, trade and labour issues. We see a number of areas where the ethos of fairness could be translated into practice.

Fairness in the food economy

Fairness within supply chains, particularly 'unfair' competition in the retail sector, continues to be a focus of concern. Participants in our research wanted to see 'fair trade' start at home with UK farms. Lessons should be learned from the Ethical Trading Initiative²³⁶ and the UK Ethical Growers initiative.²³⁷

The terms of operation for the Groceries Code Adjudicator should include sustainability criteria. Likewise, the judgement of the Competition Commission on retail concentration which currently recognises the consumer benefit of proximity and travel time to shops would be

enhanced by a broader understanding of sustainability. A shift in thinking, to provide long term reorientation is needed in this respect in the competition policies of both the UK and EU.

We recommend the Groceries Code Adjudicator and the Competition Commission should operationalise sustainability as a key theme in redefining how markets work and what is meant by efficiency and market power. We recommend that the Groceries Code Adjudicator's and Competition Commission's terms of reference should include sustainability criteria.

Fairness in trade

Growth in the fair-trade movement has provided a beacon for good practice in international trade.

We recommend that Defra, BIS and HM Treasury consider how to move the concept and delivery of fair-trade beyond a niche in the food market, and harness the experience of large companies in particular foods in this respect.

Fairness in society

Governments need to recommit to dramatically reduce the inequalities in our society which determine health divisions.²³⁸ Diet and food culture are key factors in the marked inequalities of health. With food price rises currently present (and likely to continue long-term), the impact of price pressures on low income consumers is likely to be expressed in health disparities widening further. Indices should be developed to show geographic variations in price and availability of healthy food and health outcomes, and these data sources used to develop remedial strategies including encouraging community-led responses.

We recommend Governments of the UK need to be explicit about how they are addressing food and health inequalities through their policies. New fiscal policies are required to improve affordability of healthy and sustainable food choices. The cost of ensuring a nutritious and sustainable diet should be reflected in setting minimum wage and benefit levels.

Fairness for labour

Food supply chains are often dependent on low wages, poor working conditions and migrant labour on the land and in some parts of food supply chains. The number of migrant plantation and food workers in UK is probably double (300,000) the number of permanent farm workers (150,000). Development NGOs have been effective for decades in highlighting the poor pay of some primary producers. Concerns about 'hidden' low waged and poor conditions have not been dissipated by the minimum wage and that is likely to get worse with the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board. In the USA, the Economic

Research Service of the US Department of Agriculture publishes annual expenditure on domestically produced food to enable individuals to see where in the food chain their 'food dollars' go, e.g. what percentage farmers receive.²³⁹

We recommend that Defra and the Office for National Statistics regularly publish a breakdown of where in the food chain consumers' 'Food Pound' goes, both generally and for specific staple foods.

Fairness in animal welfare

Legislative progress on animal welfare has been made through European Directives on sow stalls and battery cages. This is welcome. There are, however, new pressures on primary production, signalled already with proposals to introduce into the UK huge intensive dairy operations. Price pressures also encourage retailers to purchase foods from countries with weaker standards and where land and labour

are cheap. Vigilance is necessary to ensure implications for animal welfare are protected from developments such as cloning and super dairies.

We recommend that Defra, the Chief Veterinary Officer and animal welfare organisations convene a forward look at future foods and animal welfare.

Fairness in access to land

The UK has highly concentrated land ownership. Farm sizes have steadily enlarged. Yet the desire by the UK's highly urbanised population to have access to land has not diminished, as has been expressed in rights to roam legislation and the remarkable growth in membership of charities such as the National Trust, Woodland Trusts and their equivalents throughout the UK. In the 1930s, land settlement movements led to county councils being given powers to purchase and pump-prime small-holders. We need a 21st century equivalent policy imagination, to encourage ladders for future farmers and growers to come from the towns into primary food production along the lines of 'Landshare'.²⁴⁰ Recommendations made about skills pathways above are made with that in mind. At the same time, more equitable and affordable routes to land

use for potential small-scale food growers is a policy issue waiting to be addressed. Access to land was seen as a priority by many in our research. Note should be taken of the experience of different models such as co-operatives and urban-rural consumer-grower partnerships such as Hackney's Growing Communities.²⁴¹ The positive role of small scale farming schemes and of their potential to raise land productivity is again on the international policy agenda.^{242, 243, 244}

We recommend Defra create a Commission of Inquiry to explore current barriers to access to land for sustainable food production, taking particular note of the needs of young people wishing to come into food growing.

Annex 1

SDC publications contributing to Government policy development on sustainability and food

2010

Sustainable Development: The key to tackling health inequalities (February)

Becoming the 'Greenest Government Ever': Achieving sustainability in operations and procurement – Sustainable Development in Government 2009 (July)

2009

Setting the Table – Advice to Government on priority elements of a sustainable diet (December)

Low Carbon Wales – Regional Priorities for Action (November)

Scottish Third Assessment – Sustainable Development Progress by the Scottish Government (November)

Food Security and Sustainability: The perfect fit. SDC Position Paper (July)

Challenges to Government – Sustainable Development in Government 2008 (May)

Prosperity without Growth – The transition to a sustainable economy (March)

2008

NHS England Carbon Footprinting (May)

Health, Place and Nature (March)

Sustainable Development in Government 2007 (March)

Green, healthy and fair – A review of the government's role in supporting sustainable supermarket food (February)

2007

\$100 a barrel of oil: impacts on the sustainability of food supply in the UK (November)

Review of the environmental dimension of children and young people's wellbeing (March)

Sustainable Development in Government 2006 (March)

2006

Climate Change – the UK Programme (July)

I will if you will – Towards sustainable consumption (May)

Sustainable Development in Government 2005 (March)

The Good Corporate Citizen website (February)

2005

Sustainable Development in Government – Leading by Example (December)

Double Dividend? Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals (December)

The Role of Food Retail: A Sustainable Consumption Roundtable response to the draft Food Industry Sustainability Strategy (July)

Sustainable Implications of the Little Red Tractor scheme (January)

2003

Securing Good Health for the Whole Population
(Wanless Review): Submission from the SDC (November)

Healthy futures #1 – Sustainable development opportunities
for the NHS (October)

Policies for Sustainable Consumption (September)

Sustainability of Sugar Supply Chains (April)

UK Climate Change Programme: A policy audit (February)

2002

*Putting Sustainable Development at the Centre in Northern
Ireland* (October)

Sustainable Food Procurement in the NHS (May)

2001

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