

Food Security

CIEH Response to Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

September 2022

About the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH)

CIEH is the professional voice for environmental health representing over 7,000 members working in the public, private and third sectors, in 52 countries around the world. It ensures the highest standards of professional competence in its members, in the belief that through environmental health action people's health can be improved.

Environmental health has an important and unique contribution to make to improving public health and reducing health inequalities. CIEH campaigns to ensure that government policy addresses the needs of communities and business in achieving and maintaining improvements to health and health protection.

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Key Points:

The CIEH are disappointed in the lack of detail, direction and ambition of the UK Government's Food Strategy and would urge the government to embrace and implement the recommendations of the Independent Report commissioned by Henry Dimbleby.

Several factors have affected the resilience of the UK's food supply chain which has resulted in rising food prices. These include the ongoing war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia, labour shortages, the UK's decision to leave the EU, and climate change.

While the CIEH do not currently hold a position on the most appropriate measures for tackling the inflationary pressures which are driving up food prices, we do feel that the UK must prioritise strengthening the resilience of the UK's food supply chain as a means of stabilising food prices in the long-term. We urge the UK government to do so by adopting the recommendations of the Independent Report commissioned by Henry Dimbleby.

With respect to access to healthy and nutritious food, it is apparent that income is a key factor in one's ability to access such food items and that educational interventions are least likely to work among adults on low income with the issue being affordability rather than awareness.

While it is encouraging that the UK government are consulting on a Land Use framework, we would urge the government to strike the right balance between ensuring food security with meeting the necessary targets to fight against climate change. We eagerly await the detail of this framework when it is published in 2023.

1. What are the key factors affecting the resilience of food supply chains and causing disruption and rising food prices – including input costs, labour shortages and global events? What are the consequences for UK businesses and consumers?

CIEH recognises that there are several factors at play which have impacted the resilience of food supply chains which have resulted in rising food prices. For example, the ongoing war in Ukraine is continuing to drive up the cost of staple products such as margarine and pasta as food prices soared by a record 10.6% in September.

Furthermore, the Ukraine and Russia are some of the largest exporters of wheat in the world, together accounting for 30% of global wheat exports.¹ The ongoing war in Ukraine, and sanctions on Russia, has posed significant challenges with respect to either country being able to export its wheat with McKinsey & Company suggesting that the 2022/23 wheat harvest is likely to be 30 million tonnes below normal levels.²

Labour shortages are also having a big impact on food prices. A House of Commons Committee Report into labour shortages in the food and farming sector published in April 2022 found that “labour shortages, caused by Brexit and accentuated by the pandemic, have badly affected businesses across the food and farming sector. If not resolved swiftly, they threaten to shrink the sector permanently with a chain reaction of wage rises and price increases reducing competitiveness, leading to food production being exported abroad and increased imports”³

Global inflationary pressures due to the pandemic, accentuated by the war in Ukraine which has seen the price of energy soar worldwide, has also had a considerable impact on food prices. The FAO Index has reached record levels in 2022, reaching a peak in March 2022, before decreasing slightly though still vastly outstripping 2020 and 2021 levels.⁴

Furthermore, the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the European Union has also had a detrimental impact on food prices. Research by the think tank, UK in a Changing Europe, has found that Brexit has added 6% to the cost of food prices from analysis they have conducted on food prices in the period 2019 to 2021.⁵

Finally, climate change poses a significant risk to food security and the resilience of our food supply chain infrastructure which will ultimately result in higher food prices for consumers. In 2019, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) said climate change would make it harder for the government to ensure the resilience of the UK’s food supply. The CCC identified several risks to food insecurity caused by climate change. It said more frequent weather extremes would cause damage to crops, livestock, and fisheries both in the UK and around the world.

¹ [Wheat Major Exporters - Gro \(gro-intelligence.com\)](https://gro-intelligence.com)

² [Global food security: New risks and disruptions | McKinsey](https://www.mckinsey.com)

³ [Labour shortages in the food and farming sector - Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk)

⁴ [FAO Food Price Index | World Food Situation | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations](https://www.fao.org)

⁵ [Post-Brexit imports, supply chains, and the effect on consumer prices - UK in a changing Europe \(ukandeu.ac.uk\)](https://www.ukandeu.ac.uk)

It also noted these weather extremes could damage farming infrastructure, adversely affecting productivity. While the CCC noted increased temperatures might improve yields in the short term for countries in the northern hemisphere, it threatened yields in other parts of the world. The CCC argued climate change was likely to result in greater volatility in domestic food prices unless the UK was able to adapt to these changes. It said climate change could lead to a 20% (mean) rise in food prices globally by 2050.⁶

2. What is the outlook for UK food price inflation in the short and medium term? What policy interventions should the Government consider to manage these pressures?

It is clear that UK food price inflation in the short and medium term will be intimately connected with economic performance and that fiscal and monetary policy are the required policy interventions from the government to manage these pressures. We at the CIEH hold no view on what the most appropriate fiscal or monetary policies the UK Government may be, rather preferring to focus on the need for the UK Government to develop greater resilience within the UK food supply chain which will have greater impact on stabilising food price inflation in the longer term.

The UK commissioned Henry Dimbleby, co-founder of the restaurant chain Leon, to lead an independent review of UK food supply and food security. The first part of Henry Dimbleby's review, entitled the 'National food strategy', was published in June 2020.⁷ It identified both climate change and biodiversity loss as threats to UK food security. Mr Dimbleby made two recommendations in his first report intended to mitigate these environmental threats. He recommended the government should only cut tariffs on goods as part of new trade deals if these goods met UK standards for environmental and climate protections, as well as animal welfare (recommendation 5). He also recommended there should be a new statutory requirement that the government commission an independent report on all proposed trade agreements (recommendation 6). He said this review should include an assessment of the impact of any new agreement on the environment and climate change.

The second part of the Dimbleby review, published in 2021,⁸ made the following further recommendations intended to address the threats posed to food security by climate change and biodiversity loss. The review said the government should:

- Guarantee the budget for agricultural payments which support natural carbon removal and the development of semi-natural habitats, until at least 2029 (recommendation 8).
- Create a new rural land use framework, providing an assessment of the best way any given area of land should be used. This should include an assessment of whether an area should be used for: semi-natural land; low-yield farmland; high-yield farmland; or economic development and housing (recommendation 9).

⁶ [Outcomes-Supply-chain-case-study.pdf \(theccc.org.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Developing a National Food Strategy: independent review 2019 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁸ [The Report - National Food Strategy](#)

- Create a national food system data programme to collect and share data on the quality of land available for food production. The programme would also collect data on food production, distribution and retail and the environmental and health impacts of food (recommendation 12).
- Introduce legislation, referred to in the report as the Good Food Bill. The bill would include a requirement to publish a five-year action plan for UK food, including how the government intended to improve the food system's contribution towards protecting the environment (recommendation 14).

We at CIEH would urge the UK government to embrace and implement the recommendations outlined in Henry Dimbleby's reports in full as a means of producing a more sustainable, resilient UK food system.

3. How are the rising cost of living and increasing food prices affecting access to healthy and nutritious food?

The link between income and access to healthy and nutritious food is well established. 2021 research from the University of York found that families have a high awareness of healthy eating, but low income means that many struggle to access healthy food.⁹ This is likely to be exacerbated due to the rising cost of living and increased food prices which puts ever more pressure on the disposable incomes available to low-income households.

The research found that the pandemic, and the economic fallout resulting from this, had precipitated a sharp increase in food insecurity within the UK. Researchers found that roughly 16% of adults, some 7.8 million people, reduced meal sizes or skipped meals altogether due to insufficient income for food. This is roughly double the figure prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and is likely to have been greatly exacerbated due to the rising cost of living crisis and increasing food prices.

The research also found that educational intervention was unlikely to have much impact for low-income households accessing healthy and nutritious food as these people were well aware of the benefits of eating healthily, but simply could not afford these items noting that heavily processed food items were generally more affordable and that this was the key factor in deciding what food stuffs to purchase.

Should the government wish to improve access to healthy and nutritious foods, greater support for low-income households must be provided to ensure everyone has access to the necessary food for a healthy diet.

- #### **4. How will the proposals in the Government's food strategy policy paper affect:**
- a. the resilience of food supply chains?;**
 - b. the agri-food and seafood sectors?;**
 - c. access to healthy, nutritious food?**

⁹ [Families have high awareness of healthy eating but many struggle to access good food - News and events, University of York](#)

As we have previously stated,¹⁰ CIEH are of the view that the UK Government's food strategy policy paper is lacking in direction, detail and falls far short of the ambitious reform laid out in Henry Dimbleby's Independent Report. Dimbleby himself criticised the strategy claiming that it does not set out a clear vision for the future and cannot be considered a "strategy" due to its limitations.

While we are encouraged that the UK government's food strategy has included a commitment to establish a Land Use framework, which will be published in 2023, we await to see the detail of the proposals before commenting on the impact this framework will have.

More must be done to ensure that food waste is reduced throughout the supply chain. It is our view that mandatory reporting of food waste for large businesses must be introduced to help tackle this issue.

The UK Government's food strategy is short on detail in some crucial areas with a number of Henry Dimbleby's key recommendations ignored. There is no mention of the introduction of a salt and sugar tax, which is crucial in tackling obesity, and there are no targets put in place for the reduction in meat consumption, vital in our response to climate change.

Overall, the UK government's food strategy falls woefully short of what is required to ensure a sustainable, resilient food supply chain which ensures access to healthy and nutritious food for all.

5. How could the Government's proposed land use strategy for England improve food security? What balance should be struck between land use for food production and other goals – such as environmental benefit?

It is important that the Government's proposed land use strategy for England balances sustainable food production aimed at ensuring food security with the vital requirement that the UK meets its commitments to the environment.

The proposed strategy represents an opportunity to set in place a structured Land Use Framework in line with Dimbleby's proposed Three Compartment Model for land use change, combining the need for intensification, land sharing and land sparing to ensure we have sufficient food security. However, it is essential that any intensification is sustainable, embraces technological developments and incentivises regenerative farming practices.

¹⁰ [UK Government Food Strategy lacks direction \(cieh.org\)](https://cieh.org.uk/uk-government-food-strategy-lacks-direction)