

# Food Foundation Response to DEFRA's consultation on "*Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit*"

May 2018

## About the Food Foundation

The Food Foundation is an independent think tank working to address challenges in the food system in the interests of the UK public. We provide clear analysis of the problems caused by the food system and the role of policy and practice in addressing these. We develop and articulate food policies that support and guide the UK public to make choices that improve their health and well-being and we inform and generate demand for new and better public and private sector policy and practice.

## Summary

We urge the following four recommendations be incorporated into the Bill:

- 1) That *public health* be added to the list of 6 public goods which should be supported through the Agriculture Bill.
- 2) That environmental outcomes / environmental land management be expanded to include "health and environment" in keeping with the title of the consultation paper.
- 3) The Bill should commit to pilot and create new schemes which specifically support the production and consumption of *high quality, safe and healthy food*. These schemes could start with a specific focus on fruit and vegetables. These schemes could aim to improve productivity, reduce the environmental impacts of production and help to stimulate demand. The opportunities for achieving all these objectives are huge and represent a triple win.
- 4) The Bill should signal an intention to develop a set of national metrics and targets which would track whether our food production is moving towards the delivery of healthy and sustainable diets for everyone.

## Public Health as a Public Good

The development of the UK's own Agriculture Policy provides a unique opportunity. The new Agriculture Bill will set the framework for future food production in the UK at a time when the food we eat matters more than ever for our future success as a nation. We support DEFRA's proposal to move to a system of payment driven by public goods, as doing so will help to create a more sustainable food system.

However, the consultation paper is remiss in omitting public health as one of the public good outcomes. Despite being entitled Health and Harmony, the paper has no ambition to protect public health. Through incentivization of healthy food production, public health is a public good that agriculture is uniquely poised to help achieve.

We agree with the consultation paper when it states that “Farming is crucial to achieving the goals set out in our recently published 25 year Environment Plan,” but farming and agriculture is also primarily concerned with food production, and the quality of this food is crucial to alleviating the financial burden on the NHS and in helping to achieve the government’s childhood obesity strategy. What we eat is now the second largest driver of ill health and death in the UK – second only to tobacco. The public purse is bearing the consequences of this with soaring NHS bills resulting from heart disease, diet-related cancer, stroke, obesity related diseases and a burgeoning number of people being diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes.

There is a notable absence of any vision for how British food production can play a vital role in supporting British people to eat well and survive into old age without the crippling consequences of diet-related disease. Future agriculture policy matters for our environment and for our animals but it also matters for British citizens. Like the air we breathe and the water we drink, food is the source of survival, health and life. If much of the food available to us is doing us long term harm, the food system needs to be reformed and Agriculture Policy has an important part to play.

Eating more fruit and vegetables, and particularly more vegetables, saves lives. For every one of your five-a-day eaten, your risk of all-cause mortality decreases by 5% (Wang et al., 2014). In the UK, 33,000 deaths could be prevented every year if we all ate enough fruit and veg (Global Burden of Disease, 2016). The life-saving benefits of fruit and veg come largely from preventing diet-related chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes (Wang et al., 2014 and Li et al., 2014). Preventing diet-related diseases would also ease the financial burden in the NHS: obesity alone costs the NHS in England more than £6bn per year, and this is expected to reach £10bn by 2050. Diabetes adds on an additional £10bn in costs per year to the NHS.

Furthermore, beyond the healthfulness of the products that agriculture produces, agriculture has a number of more distal effects on health. Health and Harmony highlights the role of land use and agriculture in “cultural benefits that improve our mental and physical well-being.” Yet it is not just the cultural benefits of land use and agriculture that affect our health, but also what impact they have on water quality and food safety, and how medicines and other inputs into the system go on to affect human health (e.g. antibiotic resistance).

### The Case for Supporting Horticulture

With the possible exception of oily fish, fruit and veg are the only foods the Department of Health wants us to be eating more of in order to improve our dietary health and reduce the huge burden of diet-related illness on the NHS. On average, our fruit and veg consumption needs to increase by 64% to be in line with the Government’s dietary guidelines (Scarborough et al., 2016) – which amounts to 7-A-Day. Moreover, there are signs our consumption is at best stagnant, at worst declining slightly.

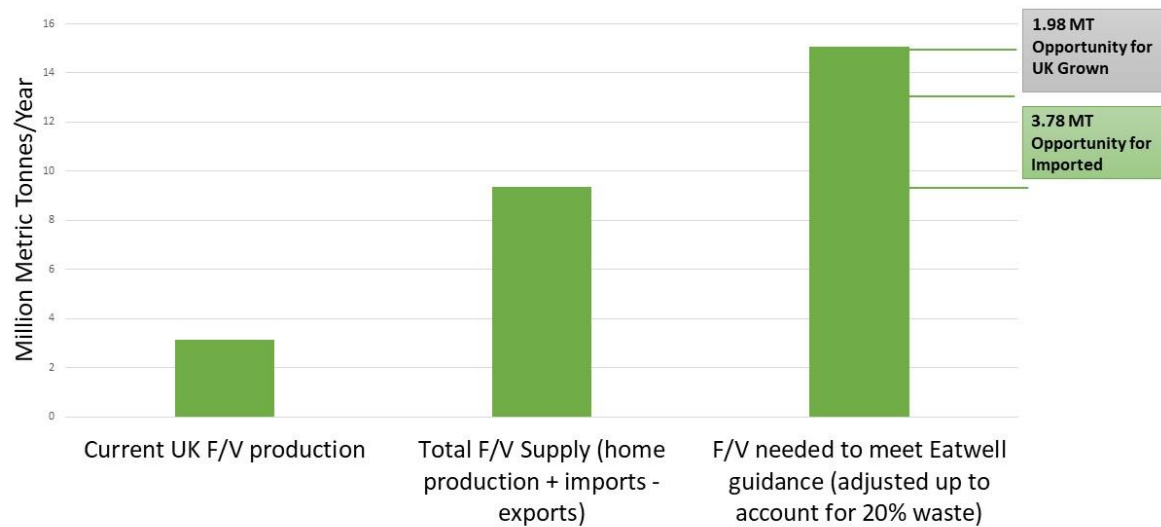
If we:

- 1) Continue to reduce household and supply chain waste of fruit and veg (as we have committed to do within the Sustainable Development Goals) and;
- 2) Maintain the same ratio of imports to UK production, and
- 3) Ate the amount of fruit and veg recommended by the Eatwell Guide,

this represents a market opportunity for British horticulture of 1.9 MT, equivalent to a 64% growth in British production.

This creates a potentially huge opportunity to not only increase production of existing varieties but to expand the number of varieties grown to maintain consumer interest and engagement in British produce.

## UK Fruit & Veg production, availability and requirements



Sources: DEFRA 2016 Horticulture Statistics. F/V requirements based on 2016 population estimate from ONS.

### Improving Productivity and Competitiveness

Unlike other sectors of agriculture where the aim to “allow our farmers to export more British produce” would apply, fruit and veg are heavily imported to the UK. However, there are significant opportunities to grow UK horticultural production in order to shift the balance of imports/home production.

The horticulture sector in Britain is highly productive compared to other sectors of food production. Horticulture currently only takes up 3.4% of the cropped arable land but delivers 25% of the value of arable crops (DEFRA, 2017). Fruit and vegetable production have a combined output of £2 billion, more than pig meat (£1 billion) or Lamb meat (£1.1 billion) and similar to that of poultry (£2.2 billion). Unlike other sectors of farming, fruit and veg growers in the UK have benefitted very little from the farming subsidies from the EU. The latest data on farmer incomes (for England only) show that horticulture farms got on average £5,300 in 2015/16 from EU payments, while dairy farms received £24,000, cereal farms £36,900 and poultry farms £8,800.

While this means that many horticulture businesses are economically more sustainable than other sectors of farming, this lack of public support combined with an extremely competitive retail environment means that margins for producers are generally extremely small (1-3%). These forces can serve to undermine innovation and prevent new smaller scale entrants from succeeding. Risk also tends to be passed down to the growers from the supermarkets, through, for example, late changes to orders, which further compounds the threats to business viability. These factors are also increasingly meaning it is more economically viable to relocate fruit and veg production overseas

where costs are lower with knock-on effects for the British economy and in some instances reducing the quality for the consumer.

Despite this level of productivity, we have a heavy reliance on imports, particularly for fruit. Thirty years ago, 83% of the veg we ate came from the UK. Now it is 54%. 17% of the fruit supply in the UK is UK grown, a similar proportion to 30 years ago though in the intervening years levels have fluctuated (DEFRA, 2016c). The Food Foundation's research in our [Farming for 5-a-Day report](#) has shown that there are significant opportunities to increase the productivity of at least a dozen types of our favourite fruit and veg in the UK and compete more effectively with European imports.

### Options for Supporting Public Health in the Agriculture Bill

We believe The Agriculture Bill should create powers for the Government to develop specific schemes which support the production and consumption of healthy food. Like clean air, and clean water, public health should be regarded as a public good which warrants specific support from policy measures and public money. The Bill should also commit to establish a set of national indicators and targets to monitor improvements in how our food system is impacting on public health and the environment.

We would therefore urge the following four recommendations be incorporated into the Bill:

- 5) That *public health* be added to the list of 6 public goods which should be supported through the Agriculture Bill.
- 6) That environmental outcomes / environmental land management be expanded to include "health and environment" in keeping with the title of the consultation paper.
- 7) The Bill should commit to pilot and create new schemes which specifically support the production and consumption of *high quality, safe and healthy food*. These schemes could start with a specific focus on fruit and vegetables. These schemes could aim to improve productivity, reduce the environmental impacts of production and help to stimulate demand. The opportunities for achieving all these objectives are huge and represent a triple win.
- 8) The Bill should signal an intention to develop a set of national metrics and targets which would track whether our food production is moving towards the delivery of healthy and sustainable diets for everyone. For example, this could involve monitoring the affordability of a healthy diet.

By developing schemes which support the productivity of British horticulture we will be increasing the resilience of the sector, helping to mitigate price fluctuations which could depress demand, and helping to drive innovation and consumer engagement. Schemes which help grow competitiveness of British fruit and veg growers of all sizes could:

- Provide financial incentives and grants to support farmers to move into or start horticultural production; young farmers; and growers with smaller farms who prioritise innovation, ecological growing techniques and direct engagement with customers but are unable to deliver the scale needed to compete with the established large-scale growers. This could include support for peri-urban and community supported agriculture (CSA) growing schemes.
- Improve access to land for new entrants in horticulture by safeguarding and rebuilding the County Farms network and encouraging the establishment of start-ups on other established farms.

- Investment in skills, training and apprenticeships in ecological production methods as well as a seasonal worker permit scheme.
- Adopt and expand the existing Producer Organisation scheme or develop other collaborative schemes to support a range of matched funded capital investments to increase productivity and competitiveness in horticulture (including for glasshouses, irrigation, machinery, orchard planting etc). This would also allow for increased investment in labour-saving technologies where they exist.
- Develop a new R&D and innovation strategy aimed at strategic increases in productivity of specific crops, for example, the Brexit Boosters as outlined in our report Farming for 5-a-day, so the UK becomes a world leader in these crops, and expanding the diversity of crops grown. 'Brexit Booster' crops include: tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, lettuce, mushrooms, peppers, spinach, courgettes, cherries, broccoli and cauliflower.

Growing produce in the UK offers a real opportunity for British citizens to connect directly with the source and provenance of the fruit and vegetables they consume. Schemes which help grow demand for British fruit and veg could:

- Specifically provide support to small growing schemes which create very short supply chains between the producers and consumers opening opportunities for a range of wider benefits. These include a smaller agro-ecological footprint, reductions in refrigeration and packaging and a much stronger connection and trust between people and the produce they are eating.
- Support local authorities and other public bodies which are procuring food for catering purposes to increase the incorporation of fruit and veg into the food they serve, as well as increase the volume they procure from local growers. This would build directly on DEFRA's work on the Government Buying Standards, Balanced Scorecard and online Food Marketplace – all of which are not yet implemented at sufficient scale.
- Help provide match funding for producers who collaborate on marketing of fruit and veg aimed at driving up consumption particularly for vulnerable groups (children, those on a low income etc). The Peas Please initiative has launched VEG POWER, an advertising fund for vegetables, which provides a key opportunity for this.
- Help stimulate new voucher schemes at local level between retailers, health service providers and producers which create incentives for those on a low income to consume more fruit and vegetables. There is a growing body of evidence on the effectiveness of these schemes and their potential implementation models from the USA documented in our recent report: [Eating Well for Less](#). The provision of fruit and veg prescriptions would be an obvious innovation within the context of social prescribing, and could benefit farmers, retailers and health service providers at the same time.

## Conclusion

We recommend that Ministers develop a clear vision for British horticulture which seizes the opportunities Brexit will bring for increasing productivity and keeping fruit and vegetables affordable and accessible for all. This should include a package of support within the new Agriculture Bill which is aimed at improving health and well-being, to run alongside efforts to improve the environmental impact of farming. This would serve to correct existing and potential market failures associated with the high externality costs of our food system born by the health service, and offer genuine public good for public money.