



The Food
Foundation

Corporate Lobbying: the dark side of the plate

Technical Report

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FULL METHODOLOGY

Data source(s)

The UK government website (gov.uk) 'Transparency and freedom of information releases' was searched across 11 departments for ministerial meetings with the UK food industry and their major trade associations:

1. the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)
2. HM Treasury (HMT)
3. the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
4. the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)¹
5. the Department for Business and Trade (DBT)
6. the Prime Minister's Office (PMO)
7. the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)
8. the Department for Education (DfE)
9. the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ)
10. the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
11. the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

Two departments (DLUHC and DfE) were subsequently excluded from analysis as no (obvious) meetings on food were recorded. Our analysis therefore focussed on the remaining nine government departments from January 2020 up to and including Q2 2024 (only data up until Q2 2024 was available at the time of the analysis). Information from DBT, DESNZ and DSIT only covered the period from their creation (February 2023, when BEIS ceased to exist) until and including Q2 2024.

Private sector information was also accessed from the websites of the following trade associations²:

- The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB)
- British Retail Consortium (BRC)
- Dairy UK
- Food and Drink Federation (FDF)
- Hybu Cig Cymru/Meat Promotion Wales
- National Farmers Union (NFU)
- The Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD)

Methodology

The Food Foundation originally commissioned external consultants to conduct wider framing research and carry out analysis of publicly disclosed meetings held between the food and beverage industry, their trade associations, and ministers, in response to a package of high fat/salt/sugar (HFSS) policies that have been legislated for in the UK over the past five years. A secondary objective also sought to shed light on the meat and dairy industry's lobbying against policies supporting a dietary shift away

¹ BEIS existed until February 2023 when it was split to form the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). Records of BEIS ministerial meetings are therefore only available until February 2023.

² Trade associations are defined as an organization of businesses in the same industry or with similar interests that work together to promote the industry and advance their members' interests. We have included membership bodies representing sector interests in our analysis.

from meat. After conducting a first round of research we conducted further analysis of the ministerial meeting registers in-house, broadening our search out to include companies from across the food system, and – given the lack of information on the topics and/or policies discussed in meetings – looking at a wider range of meetings between 2020 and 2024.

We pre-identified 11 food and beverage manufacturers, including some of those assessed by [InfluenceMap's Lobby Map](#), who are most relevant to the UK and most of which are part of The Food Foundation's [Plating Up Progress](#) benchmarking analysis. These were:

- Nestlé
- Unilever
- Mars
- Nomad Foods
- Premier Foods
- General Mills
- Danone
- Mondelez
- PepsiCo
- Greencore
- Samworth Brothers

We also used The Food Foundation's Plating Up Progress benchmarking analysis to pre-identify companies from other key food sectors:

Food retailers

- Aldi
- Asda
- Co-op
- Iceland
- Lidl
- M&S
- Morrisons
- Ocado
- Sainsbury's
- Tesco
- Waitrose (John Lewis is included under the searches for Waitrose as it is not always possible to identify where meetings are with Waitrose specifically and where the broader group is represented)

Contract caterers

- Aramark
- Compass Group
- Elior
- ISS
- Sodexo

Casual diners

- Mitchells & Butlers
- Nando's
- The Restaurant Group
- JD Wetherspoon
- Whitbread

Quick service

- Burger King
- Domino's
- Greggs
- KFC
- McDonald's
- SSP

Food wholesalers

- Bidfood
- Brakes

We also noted a significant number of meetings with food delivery companies, so added the following organisations to our search: Just Eat; Deliveroo; and Uber Eats.

All lobbying activity across these departments was analysed by assessing 'gifts, hospitality, travel and meetings' from January 2020 up to and including June 2024. CSV files of quarterly ministerial meeting records were searched for each of the organisations in the pre-identified lists. In some cases, organisations were recorded in different ways, so searches were repeated for the most common spellings or abbreviations e.g. "Marks & Spencer", "Marks and Spencer", "M&S". Each record identified

was cross checked to ensure that it related to a new ministerial interaction. The searches across departments with broad remits resulted in huge numbers of returns and meeting data.

For clarity of language, we have used “meeting” as an overarching term for the number of organisations’ interactions with ministers. The actual number of bilateral meetings was lower due to some cases where multiple organisations attended one meeting with a minister; for instance, three trade associations might have attended the same meeting, which we counted as three ministerial interactions but is only recorded as one meeting in government registers.

Our research noted that in addition to the above trade associations, the Country Land and Business Association (CLBA) held a significant number of meetings with government.

Our research also identified a large number of smaller, livestock-focussed trade associations frequently meeting ministers:

- The National Sheep Association
- The Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers
- The National Beef Association
- The National Pig Association
- The British Poultry Council
- The British Egg Industry Council
- The British Meat Processors Association
- The Association of Independent Meat Suppliers

Given the thousands of entries, we chose to tally the relevant meetings across the nine departments for the years 2020-2024 (by company/trade association). Finally, to compare the level of industry lobbying with lobbying by NGOs working in the food systems space, we also analysed the number of NGO meetings between 2020-2024. The food and health focused NGOs we pre-identified were:

- The Food Foundation
- British Heart Foundation
- Obesity Health Alliance
- Diabetes UK
- Cancer Research UK
- Trussell Trust
- FareShare
- Bite Back
- Sustain
- The Soil Association
- Action on Salt
- Action on Sugar
- Alexandra Rose Charity
- The Food Farming and Countryside Commission