



PRESS RELEASE

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Force-Fed: Our Food System is Threatening our Health

It is too difficult for typical British families to choose a healthy diet, a new report by the independent Food Foundation concludes, having analysed the food system through the lens of a typical British family.

While many believe that families have lots of choice on what they eat this report reveals that our choices are constantly and systemically steered towards unhealthy foods with through a manipulating and incentivising food environment that pushes us towards food that is not good for us, or our children. Importantly less healthy foods are a three times cheaper source of calories than healthier foods.

By looking at an average family's diet and typical shopping basket, its implications for health, and the drivers of food choice and food price, the Food Foundation's first report calls for cross-government action to curb the worst effects of the food environment and to use existing policy instruments to incentivise the food system to make healthy-eating easier.

With 4 major recommendations for Government action, the report calls for specific action on the following:

- Get rid of the distortions in the cost of food that favour unhealthy food and discriminate against healthier options, and introduce a tax on sugary drinks;
- Develop a new marketing code to prevent advertising, sponsorship and promotions of High, Fat, Sugar or Salt Foods through all non-broadcast channels, in supermarkets and eating out establishments. Ban TV advertising of these foods before the 9pm watershed.
- Clarify planning policy to prevent unhealthy eating-out establishments near schools and enforce the Government Buying Standards to help drive up

standards for all food service suppliers.

- Set upper limits for high-risk nutrients in processed foods.
- Set standards around transparency and publicly available information about products on sale (particularly processed food and fresh meat) so people know what they are eating and how it is produced.

“We have got to put a halt to this growing obesity time bomb with kids now becoming diabetic in their teens. In any other part of policy children becoming chronically ill would be stopped immediately. From seat belts to toy safety we keep our children safe but we have a blind spot when it comes to food and let it get away with outcomes that we wouldn’t allow from any other business sector.” said Laura Sandys Chair of the Food Foundation and former Conservative MP.

“If Government doesn’t make the food sector become more responsible we might need to consider imposing an ‘Irresponsibility Deal’ and penalise the sector for health outcomes that are directly associated with poor long term diets.”

The report shows that:

- In typical families all members eat a lot of highly processed foods (contributing 58-65% of calories) many of which are surprisingly unhealthy – the report specifically looks at a brand leading yoghurt which provides, in a single portion, almost the entire daily sugar allowance for a young child, and shows that it is a cheaper source of calories than a plain natural yoghurt.
- Half of the calories eaten by primary school children come from foods which are high in fat, sugar or salt. These foods are recognised to be bad, and cannot be advertised during children’s TV viewing slots. However, advertising is widespread during family viewing and through digital channels.
- Almost all secondary school children are not getting enough fruit and vegetables and fibre and all of them are eating too much sugar. Many are not eating a healthy school lunch. The report looks specifically at fresh vegetables and the policies which could help deliver a better price for producers and consumers.
- Adults, particularly men, in typical families are eating too much red and processed meat, now directly linked to cancer, and yet meat is relatively cheap and contributing to an environmentally unsustainable food system.

“Our diets are now the greatest threat to our health but acting now makes good economic sense too. Tackling obesity could deliver a return of £17 billion a year, including saving the NHS £800m a year. This problem cannot be addressed by piecemeal tinkering with the food environment, it needs deliberate, clear-sighted government leadership which looks at the food system as a whole and uses policy to make healthy and sustainable eating easier for everyday people.” said Anna Taylor the Executive Director of the Food Foundation and former head of nutrition at DFID.

The report will be unveiled at the Food Foundation breakfast launch on January 21st at the New Covent Garden Market. The Food Foundation is a new independent think tank

that tackles the growing challenges of the UK food system through the interest of the UK public. The Food Foundation aims to provide clear diagnosis of the problems caused by the food system and the role of policy and practice in addressing them.

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Notes to Editor

1. For further information contact Anna Taylor: 07791249567 or Alex Ward: 07780451377 Alex.ward@foodfoundation.org.uk
2. The Food Foundation is an independent organisation providing evidence-based research to inform government food policy. It is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn and Nuffield Foundations. Design and print costs for the report were met by Benenden. The report reflects the views of the authors and not necessarily the funders. More information can be found at www.foodfoundation.org.uk
3. A typical family has an average household income of £37,000 to 52,000 and there are approximately 1.5 million families of four in the UK who have an income at or below this level.