



**Labour's
Policy
Review**

Feeding the Nation: creating a resilient, growing food industry

Foreword

Food will be one of the major challenges of the 21st Century. The world will need to feed 8 billion people by 2025. Lack of access to land and water and the changing weather are putting pressure on the global food system. In the UK rising food prices and stagnant wages have created a cost of living crisis and growing food insecurity.

A rising population, climate change and water stress will affect how the UK produces its food. We must grow more affordable food, more efficiently, waste less and with less damage to the environment.

Creating a resilient food supply chain will be at the core of Labour's food strategy: creating a supply chain that consumers trust; driving jobs and growth; and ensuring a sustainable farming sector in the UK.

Labour is committed to work with UK farmers and producers to meet these challenges, and ensure a resilient, safe and secure supply of food. Labour in government published Food 2030, the first national food strategy since the Second World War, setting out a vision for a sustainable and secure food supply in the UK. Since the general election, the Conservative-led Government has failed to follow this strategy

The recent horsemeat scandal sparked a debate about how Britain's food is produced, traced and regulated. It also highlighted the complex supply chain that underpins our food system, and exposed its weaknesses.

Food can drive the economy, not least when times are tough. Currently, Britain imports 40 per cent of our food. Labour believes there are opportunities to boost our food security, produce more food in the UK and to create new markets to export the best of British produce.

The more food we produce in the UK, the less we need to import, the more we are protected from currency fluctuations, and the more produce we can export. The food industry has the potential to create new jobs and create UK growth. 400,000 people work in food processing and manufacturing in the UK, and food exports amount to £11 billion.

Food 2030

Labour understands the need for an ambitious, forward-thinking food strategy to deal with future issues affecting both UK and global food security. In government we produced Food 2030; setting out a vision for a sustainable and secure food supply for the UK.

This vision is not yet a reality.

Ensuring transparency and public trust

The horsemeat scandal raised serious questions about the breakdown in the regulatory framework governing food. Research by Which? shows that just 7 out of 10 people have confidence in food safety when buying food in supermarkets, compared to 9 in 10 before the horsemeat scandal.¹ To date, no charges have been brought against anyone, despite the massive fraud committed against retailers and consumers.

Public trust is central to our food system. The horsemeat scandal revealed the complex supply chain in parts of the food industry, and the weaknesses in our national food regulation with a fragmented approach that created confusion about who was responsible. Labour is examining how we can restore trust in our food system by ensuring an effective role for the Food Standards Agency to speak up for consumers and ensure our food is safe.

Rebuilding a world class food system

Labour established the Food Standards Agency in 2000 in the wake of the BSE crisis. The crisis hit the reputation of British farming hard, as well as consumer confidence in how our food system was overseen. Key to the success of the FSA was its independence. Labour ensured that the FSA had the power to oversee our food system and to provide transparent, independent advice. This approach meant the FSA was a world leader in food regulation. After the 2010 election, the coalition government split up the FSA, hiving off responsibility for food composition labelling to Defra, nutritional labelling to the Department of Health and leaving the FSA responsible for food safety labelling. This created a fragmented regulator that struggled to deal with the horsemeat scandal.

¹ Which? March 2013 <http://www.which.co.uk/news/2013/03/horsemeat-scandal-dents-trust-in-food-industry-313016/>

Sustainable farming, a secure food supply

A resilient UK food system requires economic and environmental challenges to be reconciled. Labour believes that we can produce more food as a nation whilst addressing the decline in biodiversity that we have seen over the last 60 years.

Labour will work with the farming industry, food producers and voluntary sector to achieve 'sustainable intensification' - higher crop yields and more efficient production whilst recognising environmental constraints.

Over the last two decades, UK farmers have increased yields while reducing the use of fertilisers and greenhouse gas emissions. We will look to build on these achievements while reducing water use, fertilisers and pesticides, and reducing soil erosion which costs agriculture £45 million a year.

The natural environment provides many of the elements required to grow food, much of it for free. The National Eco-system Assessment published in 2011 stated that bees and pollinators were worth at least £430 million a year to agriculture, and inland wetlands worth £1.5 billion a year in improving water quality².

The Natural Capital Committee is looking at how biodiversity can be accounted for to ensure that the true value of nature is reflected in decision making. We need to look at how we recognise and reward the most efficient use of natural resources, and environmental benefits and other public goods which would otherwise go unrecognised and unrewarded.

This is not just a challenge for the UK.

The European Union gives British food producers a home market of 550 million people. Bilateral trade deals have recently been agreed between the EU and Singapore, and with Peru. Any EU-USA trade deal will open new markets for British products. The Common Agricultural Policy provides £3 billion per year in revenue support to UK farmers. Labour's ambition is for a smaller, greener CAP that delivers better value for money, encourages a competitive farming industry in Europe and protects the countryside, environment and rural communities.

² The UK National Ecosystem Assessment <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx>

Fairness and transparency in the food supply chain

Labour, in government and opposition, has worked to provide transparency across the food supply chain. From consumer to producer, through the dairy code and the Groceries Code Adjudicator, Labour worked to ensure food is produced to a high standard and that producers got a fair price. We have also called for transparent contracts for dairy farmers.

The recent horsemeat scandal has highlighted the need for shorter supply chains and better traceability to make it easier for consumers and retailers to see where their food comes from. Strengthening and shortening the links between consumer and producer is good for the national economy, for our nutrition, and for pride in our communities and nations.

We will study how to encourage shorter supply chains to increase domestic resilience.

Public appetite for local food

Growing our own food, whether at home or on allotments is increasing. Britain has almost doubled the amount of food grown in gardens and allotments since 2008, with 5 per cent of fruit and vegetables now grown at home. Growing your own has become more popular as the cost of living crisis has taken hold. Through local food and grow your own schemes, opportunities may exist to help adults and children learn more about food and what makes a healthy diet. We will examine whether they may also have a role in making our food system more resilient.

British consumers are more interested in local food than ever, and being educated about local food production in the process. We have seen more in interest in local markets and farmers markets. Research by the Campaign for Rural England has also highlighted the important contribution that local food markets can make to the economy and regional growth³.

We want to promote British produce through procurement, for both government and those who contract for government. We will encourage schools and hospitals, local authorities and agencies funded by government to source more food from local and regional British producers.

³ Campaign for Rural England, From field to fork: The value of England's local food webs <http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/farming-and-food/local-foods/item/2897-from-field-to-fork>

Local Food Webs

The Campaign for Rural England worked with volunteers in 19 towns and cities across England to research the networks between the people who buy, sell and produce food. The research found that these 'food webs' contributed to the vitality of local economies by supporting diversity on the High Street, supporting independent outlets, and adding character to the retail offer in many areas. Local food webs offer distinctive and fresh local produce, contribute to the character of market and other towns drawing in visitors and tourism, offer markets for SMEs, and help foster innovation and new products. The project also revealed that big retailers can work with local producers to help encourage local networks. The research estimated that 'food webs' based on food sourced within a 30 mile radius, contribute nearly £7 billion to local economies and supports over 103,000 jobs.

Best practice in procurement:

Royal Brompton hospital

Mike Duckett, former head of catering at the Royal Brompton hospital, won a 2012 BBC Food and Farming Award for bringing about a real change in his hospital's food. Mike ensured every meal at the hospital was cooked on the premises using fresh, local ingredients, with thirty per cent of the food organic or locally sourced. The Royal Brompton is an example of how the public sector can innovate even with tight budgets to promote healthy nutritious food, and shorter supply chains.

Ensuring a growing food industry - supporting British food producers

The food industry has the potential to create new jobs and create UK growth. 400,000 people work in food processing and manufacturing in the UK, exports amount to £11 billion, and £70 billion is spent on eating out every year.

Labour sees the food industry as a driver of future growth, working with the farming sector and food businesses to create jobs and generate wealth.

The food industry has identified skill shortages as one of its key barriers to growth. Labour will work with the food industry to raise the profile of the career opportunities in the industry. We will examine how our proposal for regional investment banks can help SMEs and food businesses access the investment they need to expand and to train.

Raising skills in food engineering

The food industry estimates that it will need to replace 40 per cent of its current workforce by 2020. In a sector where 86 per cent of companies have less than 20 employees encouraging higher level skills can be a challenge. The industry still struggles to find suitable candidates for engineering, science, and food technical positions. Of the 2.5 million students enrolled in higher education degrees, only 3,360 are pursuing food degrees.

The Food and Drink Federation (FDF) have developed their own higher education course to provide a dedicated skills route for graduates and to help reposition the food industry as a highly skilled industry. The FDF are working with the National Skills Academy for Food and Drink and Sheffield Hallam University to develop a Masters degree in Food Engineering course which will be launched in September 2013. The project is supported by the Employer Investment Fund and demonstrates an innovative sector response to a skills need.

The Government estimates that the farming sector needs 60,000 new entrants over this decade (2010-2020) to boost supply and to replace an ageing workforce. New entrants to farming face challenges around access to land with increasing land values and the decline in county council owned tenant farms. If these jobs can be secured in UK agriculture we will see a multiplier effect as these newcomers bring fresh ideas and create further opportunities in manufacturing, retail, and catering.

British food is some of the finest produce in the world. From Melton Mowbray Pork Pies to Single Gloucestershire Cheese, from Welsh Lamb to Kentish Ale, we can take pride in the quality and distinctiveness of British produce.

But we need to do far more to celebrate and promote the unique identity of many special British foods, to highlight the relationship between products, people and places. Labour will examine how we can further promote the 'Best of British' food to consumers at home, and around the world.

We can build on the successes of the food industry to support further growth and the creation of new jobs.

Encouraging iconic British foods

Protected Food Names have allowed iconic European foods to protect their heritage and boost sales. In the UK, British favourites like Melton Mowbray Pork Pies, Stilton Blue Cheese and Cumberland sausages have all been granted protected status; with products like West Country Lamb, Anglesey Sea Salt, and Colchester Oysters currently under consideration. European Protected Foods, both protected designation of origin (PDO) and protected geographical indication (PGI), link products to a geographical area. A PGI only requires one stage of the production process to take place in the geographical area it is associated. A PDO requires a product be produced, processed, and prepared in the geographical area it is associated with.

To apply for European Protected Status, producers making the same product decide on a recipe, production methods, and an area of geographical importance. They submit an application for the protected status to DEFRA, which if accepted is then submitted to the European Commission.

The UK currently has 46 Protected Food Names. We rank much lower than some of our EU neighbours - Italy has 252 protected foods, France 198. In terms of value, the UK ranks 4th in the EU with sales worth roughly £1 billion, much of which is due to Scotch and Welsh Beef and Welsh Lamb. The potential to boost regional and speciality foods is great. What more can be done to promote these British foods to consumers, and to boost UK food sales around the world?

Technology and Innovation

Innovation is vital to the future growth of the food industry. Britain is home to some of the world's best universities and research centres on agricultural, food, life and environmental sciences. We need to find practical and commercial applications for this research in domestic food production to help us achieve a sustainable food supply.

By focusing on productivity gains and resource efficiency through technology and innovation, the food sector will continue to compete effectively in the global economy.

The Foresight Global Food and Farming Futures project made two significant conclusions about the role of technology and innovation: major advances in sustainable food production can be achieved with the concerted application of current technologies (given sufficient political will); and the importance of investing in research sooner rather than later to enable the food system to cope with the challenges of the future.

Biotechnology cannot, by itself, increase the UK's domestic food supply, but it can be one of the tools used to ensure better resilience in the UK food chain, and to reduce environmental damage.

Genetically Modified Foods

Labour has always adopted a science-led approach to GM and other food technologies, based on the best evidence available and engaging with food producers, consumers, farmers and scientists. GM may have a role in UK food security and environmental protection, but public views - informed by the science - must also be heard.

Public and political acceptance is vital, as is proof of its benefits to the environment and producers.