

Press release

UK Health Forum

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UK Health Forum calls for the Agriculture Bill and future food system policy to prioritise human health along with the environment

The UK Health Forum is today calling on The Government to ensure that the Agriculture Bill and future food policy support human health improvements alongside environment objectives. The call comes as a three-part report, *Fresh Start: A framework for healthy and sustainable diets*, has found that the whole of the UK's current food system, from farm- to- fork, is failing to support the Government's own Eatwell Guide healthy eating goals.

For each food group in the Eatwell Guide, the Fresh Start report looked at consumption and production patterns compared to the recommendations, as well as the health and environmental impacts and cost of food. Among the major findings:

- The majority of agriculture subsidies support animal products such as meat, dairy and feed. These foods have the greatest impact on the environment in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and water use.
- Very little domestic agriculture support is earmarked for healthy and environmentally sustainable produce such as vegetables, fruit and pulses
- 58% of the vegetables we consume are home-grown, down from 81% in 1990. Similarly just 11% of the fruit we eat is home-grown, down from 19% in 1990
- We only grow small amounts of beans and pulses, and most are used to feed animals
- There is a three fold difference in price between unhealthy foods such as crisps, and healthy foods such as fish.

Reflecting these production trends, most people in the UK are also failing to eat sufficient amounts of healthy foods such as fruit, vegetables, pulses and fish. Around 90% of children do not eat 5 portions of fruit and veg a day; intakes of beans and pulses are very low, despite being healthy and sustainable sources of protein and fibre; adults manage just half of the recommended one portion of oily fish a week; and the majority of men eat more red and processed meat than recommended.

Instead, our food system is dominated by unhealthy, ultra-processed foods which are high in fat, salt and sugar. These heavily marketed foods make up over 50% of the food consumed in the UK, compared to the European average of 33%. We also suffer from some of the worst levels of diet-related conditions such as obesity in Europe.

Dr Modi Mwatsama, Director of Policy and Global Health and co-author of the reports said:

Last week the government announced a new Agriculture Bill that would deliver better outcomes for the environment. This is welcome, but unfortunately, health was only mentioned in relation to the health of plants and animals.

Our Fresh Start report shows that the agriculture and food system is not only failing animals and the environment. It is out of step with the government's own Eatwell Guide to healthy eating and significantly failing to support human health. The agriculture and food system is costing the economy £45 billion every year from food-related conditions such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

The Fresh Start report also examined 40 potential food system actions and includes a 10-point framework that the government could adopt as part of a healthy and sustainable agriculture bill and future food policy.

Commenting on the priorities, Dr Mwatsama added:

The priorities in the new Agriculture Bill and wider food system policies in the UK should be guided by the government's healthy eating goals. We have analysed 40 potential actions to facilitate this and put together a 10 point framework of priority actions as part of our Fresh Start report.

Farmers should be encouraged and supported to grow more healthy and sustainable produce such as vegetables, fruit, beans, pulses, and better meat.

There are 8 million pupils in state schools and 1.7 million people work in the NHS. These public sector institutions could support farmers by purchasing their healthy produce for the meals they serve.

We also urgently need advertising and social marketing campaigns to increase demand for healthier produce among the wider public. At present, only 1.2% of food advertising expenditure goes on vegetables.

These measures could be funded through taxes on carbon emissions – such as meat taxes – and duties on unhealthy foods, in the way that funds from the soft drinks industry levy are being used to fund sports in schools.

Ends.

Notes to editors:

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2. The three reports can be found by clicking on the links below.

- a. [*Fresh Start: A framework for healthy and sustainable diets – Recommendations for action*](#)
outlines a 10-point framework that could be supported within a joined-up UK-wide healthy and sustainable food system policy and Agriculture Bill
- b. [*Fresh Start: A framework for healthy and sustainable diets – Policy options review*](#)
analyses the evidence across 40 food system actions, from farm- to- fork, which have been implemented around the world
- c. [*Fresh Start: A framework for healthy and sustainable diets – Situational Analysis*](#)
examines how food and alcohol production and consumption patterns compare to official recommendations, and their impacts on health and the environment

3. The UK Health Forum is a health charity generating evidence to support better policymaking through policy research and modelling. For more information visit:
www.ukhealthforum.org.uk