

Debate Pack
20 October 2022
Number

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The National Food Strategy and food security

1	Background	3
1.1	Definition of food security	3
1.2	National Food Strategy recommendations	4
	UK food security	5
1.3	Agriculture	6
	Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS)	6
	Land use	7
1.4	Standards in trade deals	8
1.5	Household food security and inequality	9
	Affordability of food	10
	Household food insecurity and free school meals	11
2	Press releases	13
3	Press and media articles	14
4	Parliamentary questions	15
	Oral questions	18

5	Debates	19
6	Further reading	20

1

Background

A debate on the National Food Strategy and food security has been scheduled for 27 October 2022. The debate will be opened by Esther McVey MP and Kerry McCarthy MP.

In 2019, the former Environment Secretary Michael Gove [commissioned an independent review](#), referred to as a “National Food Strategy” (NFS) to consider the UK food chain, including food security. The review was led by Henry Dimbleby, the co-founder of Leon restaurants, and the lead non-executive director at Defra.

The independent review published two reports. The first report, “[Part one of the National Food Strategy](#)”, was published on 29 July 2020, and considered how the Government should prepare for EU Exit and respond to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. A second, more detailed report, known as [The Plan](#) made a series of recommendations in 2021 targeting many aspects of the food system.

The Government responded to the National Food Strategy with a [Government food strategy policy paper](#) on 13 June 2022. This response to the NFS was originally intended to be a White Paper. The Library briefing on [the effects of Ukraine war on food production and security](#) (July 2022) contains more information.

1.1

Definition of food security

There are different ways to define food security.

The Government published a [UK Food Security Report \(UKFSR\)](#) in December 2021. It was the first time that such a report had been published under [section 19 of the Agriculture Act 2020](#), which requires the UK Government to report to Parliament on food security at least once every three years.

The UKFSR noted that “[food security is a complex and multi-faceted issue](#)” and that it was therefore structured around five principal themes “each addressing an important component of modern-day food security in the UK”:

1. Global food availability, which describes supply and demand issues, trends and risk on a global scale, and how they may affect UK food supply;
2. UK food supply, which looks at the UK’s main sources of food at home and overseas;

3. Supply chain resilience, which outlines the physical, economic, and human infrastructure that underlies the food supply chain, and that chain's vulnerabilities;
4. Household-level food security, which deals with issues of affordability and access to food; and food safety; and
5. Consumer confidence, which details food crime and safety issues.¹

1.2 National Food Strategy recommendations

The NFS made [14 broad recommendations in four areas](#):

Escape the junk food cycle and protect the NHS

- Recommendation 1: Introduce a Sugar and Salt Reformulation Tax. Use some of the revenue to help get fresh fruit and vegetables to low-income families.
- Recommendation 2: Introduce mandatory reporting for large food companies.
- Recommendation 3: Launch a new “Eat and Learn” initiative for schools.

Reduce diet-related inequality

- Recommendation 4: Extend eligibility for free school meals.
- Recommendation 5: Fund the Holiday Activities and Food programme for the next three years.
- Recommendation 6: Expand the Healthy Start scheme.
- Recommendation 7: Trial a “Community Eatwell” Programme, supporting those on low incomes to improve their diets.

Make the best use of our land

- Recommendation 8: Guarantee the budget for agricultural payments until at least 2029 to help farmers transition to more sustainable land use.
- Recommendation 9: Create a Rural Land Use Framework based on the three compartment model.

¹ DEFRA, [UK Food Security Report 2021](#), December 2021,

- Recommendation 10: Define minimum standards for trade, and a mechanism for protecting them.

Create a long-term shift in our food culture

- Recommendation 11: Invest £1 billion in innovation to create a better food system.
- Recommendation 12: Create a National Food System Data programme.
- Recommendation 13: Strengthen Government procurement rules to ensure that taxpayer money is spent on healthy and sustainable food.
- Recommendation 14: Set clear targets and bring in legislation for long-term change.

UK food security

Chapter 14 of the NFS considered UK food security and provided a history of UK food sources and levels of self-sufficiency – although the NFS pointed out that that greater self-sufficiency does not equate to increased food security as it makes a country much more susceptible to internal harvest failures or other local crises.²

The NFS acknowledged how governments and the private sector across the world were able to adapt to supply chain challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic. However, the authors warned that since these disruptions were caused by national lockdowns, the effects were more predictable and manageable. In the future, the next “big shock” to food systems may well be harder to mitigate.³

The NFS argued that the most likely threat is a “widespread harvest failure caused by climate change” with crops in the southern hemisphere most at risk according to UN estimates. The NFS also considered that increasing food demand could lead to significant environmental damage through increased land cultivation, deforestation, over-use of agrochemicals and over-exploitation of land and marine ecosystems.⁴

The NFS therefore called for:

- Increasing the frequency of food security assessments from every three years (as under the Agriculture Act 2020) to annual reports, consulting with a broader range of expertise to help future preparations.

² National Food Strategy: Independent Review, [The Plan](#), July 2021, p.130

³ National Food Strategy: Independent Review, [The Plan](#), July 2021, p.132

⁴ National Food Strategy: Independent Review, [The Plan](#), July 2021, pp132-4

- Changing farming methods to produce better environmental outcomes and higher yields. The NFS also suggested ways to work towards more sustainable land use in the UK, in part to protect domestic food systems.
- Ensuring that future trade deals do not allow cheaper imported food, produced to lower standards, to undercut higher standards in the UK.⁵

1.3

Agriculture

Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS)

The NFS recommended that the Government should “Guarantee the budget for agricultural payments until at least 2029 to help farmers transition to more sustainable land use”.

The Government intends to incentivise more environmentally sustainable farming practices through its new [Environmental Land Management \(ELM\) Schemes](#), which are replacing the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) in England. For more details, see the Library paper on [Farm funding: implementation of new approaches](#).

On 23 September 2022, the Government published a [Growth Plan 2022](#) which indicated that it would review the provisions for farm support. This led to speculation that Defra might change or delay proposed Environmental Land Management schemes. Several environmental organisations criticised the Growth Plan’s proposed measures on environmental grounds. For example, [the National Trust issued a statement](#) on 25 September, which was strongly critical of what other organisations such as the RSPB have called an “[attack on nature](#)”.

[Defra responded](#) on 28 September:

As set out in the Growth Plan, we will be looking at the frameworks for regulation, innovation and investment that impact farmers and land managers, to make sure that our policies are best placed to both boost food production and protect the environment. This includes looking at how best to deliver the Environmental Land Management schemes to see where and how improvements can be made, and we will continue to work closely with the sector to ensure these are designed and delivered in their best interests.

We’re not scrapping the schemes. In light of the pressures farmers are facing as a result of the current global economic situation, including spikes in input costs, it’s only right that we look at how best to deliver the schemes to see where and how improvements can be made.

Boosting food production and strengthening resilience and sustainability come alongside, not instead of, protecting and enhancing our natural environment,

⁵ National Food Strategy: Independent Review, [The Plan](#), July 2021, p.133

and later this year we will set out more details of plans on how we will increase food security while strengthening the resilience and role of farmers as stewards of the British countryside.⁶

Minette Batters, President of the National Farmers' Union (NFU), stated on 26 September that “my absolute priority is ensuring that farmers can continue to produce the nation’s food – so [I do support maintaining direct payments](#) in order to build a scheme that really will deliver for food production and the environment”. She added that “the NFU has always supported the ‘public money for public goods’ policy but we have called for a delay as the scheme was not fit for purpose and ready to roll out in its current form”.

Henry Dimbleby, who led the National Food Strategy, [told the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs \(EFRA\) Committee](#) on 18 October:

I am concerned when I see people saying that the result of the Ukrainian crisis is that we need to continue paying farmers to produce food. That is a tiny subsidy on the cost of food. It will not affect the first of those problems, and it will make the second problem worse.

Our response to the Ukrainian crisis in terms of food needs to be to double down on the environmental land management scheme to force through that transition faster and to support those living in poverty, not to go back to the disastrous policies of the common agricultural policy.

Land use

The NFS recommended the creation of a “[Rural Land Use Framework](#) based on the three compartment model”. The three compartment model refers to the “division of labour” between different uses of farmland:

Some farmland will have to be repurposed or adapted for environment projects. Some will have to be farmed at lower yields to enable nature to thrive. Some will have to become higher-yielding, lowcarbon farms, using new technologies to increase productivity without polluting the earth.

In its June 2022 [Food Strategy](#), the UK Government committed to publishing a Land Use Framework in 2023 “to ensure we meet our net zero and biodiversity targets, and help our farmers adapt to a changing climate, whilst continuing to produce high quality, affordable produce that supports a healthier diet”. The Framework “will also reflect and respond to the work of the [House of Lords special inquiry committee into land use in England](#)”.

On 27 June, Dimbleby gave evidence to the Lords Committee and praised the Government’s commitment to a land use framework. He added “I think it will be the first properly done land use framework in any developed country. It could be fundamental. It could be completely ground-breaking in terms of how we change the system”.

⁶ DEFRA, [Government reiterates commitment to environmental protections](#), 28 September 2022

George Eustice MP, then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [told the House of Lords committee](#) in July that:

[...] a team has been working on this land use framework since the beginning of the year and possibly from late last year. It is a piece of ongoing work. It has been consulting.

That work will continue and progress, but obviously the publication of any land use framework will come after the next Government and it will be for the next Government to consider what they want to do with that and how they want to take it forward.

[...]

When that new Government are in place, they will want to think about this further. It is highly unlikely that we will be publishing anything in advance of your report. I am sure that whoever is in this post at that point will read your report carefully before they commit to publishing any consultation document that Defra might be planning.

1.4

Standards in trade deals

The National Food Strategy explained that:

Over the past 50 years, some farmers (particularly in the uplands) have seen their income and way of life eroded by forces beyond their control: declining lamb consumption, poorly designed subsidies, and underinvestment in communities and infrastructure. They have put in the hard graft – up at dawn and working into the night, 364 days a year – but have been left with some of the lowest incomes in the entire food system. Their farmland, too, has been degraded in the process. And now they fear a final blow. New trade deals could, unless very carefully finessed, put many of them out of business.

The Government is asking farmers to change the way they work for the public good. We must ensure they are properly recompensed. And we must protect them from unfair competition. The Government needs a trade policy that supports its environmental ambitions. Otherwise we will simply end up transferring damaging farming practices from one part of the planet to another, and driving thousands of our own farmers to the wall in the process.

The NFS therefore [proposed a mechanism](#) whereby, when making new trade deals, the Government “should only agree to cut tariffs on products which meet our core standards”.

A [report by the Trade and Agriculture Commission](#) (TAC) in March 2021 recommended that the UK should aim to:

- ensure that agri-food imports meet relevant UK and international standards on food safety and biosecurity
- match tariff-free market access to relevant climate, environment, animal welfare and ethical standards, remedying competition issues arising

where permitted imports do not meet relevant UK and international standards

- lead change, where needed, to the international framework of rules on trade and relevant standards, to address the global challenges of climate change and environmental degradation.

The TAC added that the UK government should work with trading partners within future [free trade agreement] negotiations to lower tariffs and quotas to zero where equivalence is demonstrated for these standards.⁷

The UK and Australia signed a free trade agreement (FTA) in December 2021. This is the first ‘new’ UK trade deal signed since Brexit; the UK’s other trade agreements have largely rolled-over previous EU deals. The Library briefing on the [UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement](#) (12 October 2022) covers the agricultural aspects of the FTA, including standards. It also sets out the background to the establishment of the TAC and stakeholder reactions.

The [Government’s Food Strategy](#) published in June 2022 states that “trade strengthens food security” as it “enables the whole country to have access to food and drink that would be impossible or impractical to produce domestically”. The Government also said that it would harness the benefits of new FTAs “whilst maintaining our world-leading domestic standards by using a range of levers within our bespoke trade agreements” as well as continuing to work internationally “to create a more resilient, environmentally friendly and healthier global food system”.

1.5

Household food security and inequality

Chapter Five of the NFS covers food security at a household level and inequality between households. It points out that unhealthy food is cheaper per calorie than healthy food and that deprived areas tend to have more fast food outlets and fewer shops selling fresh ingredients than average. This means low-income households can find it difficult to afford a nutritious diet. In fact, people on low incomes were more likely to suffer and die from diet-related conditions in 2019.⁸

The NFS recommends extending eligibility for free school meals, continuing to fund the Holiday Activities and Food programme, expanding the Healthy Start scheme, and trialling a “Community Eatwell” Programme, supporting those on low incomes to improve their diets.

⁷ DIT, [Trade and Agriculture Commission: Final Report \(executive summary\)](#), 12 March 2021

⁸ National Food Strategy: Independent Review, [The Plan](#), July 2021, p.62

DEFRA’s UK Food Security report 2021 sets out the following indicators to measure food security at a household level:

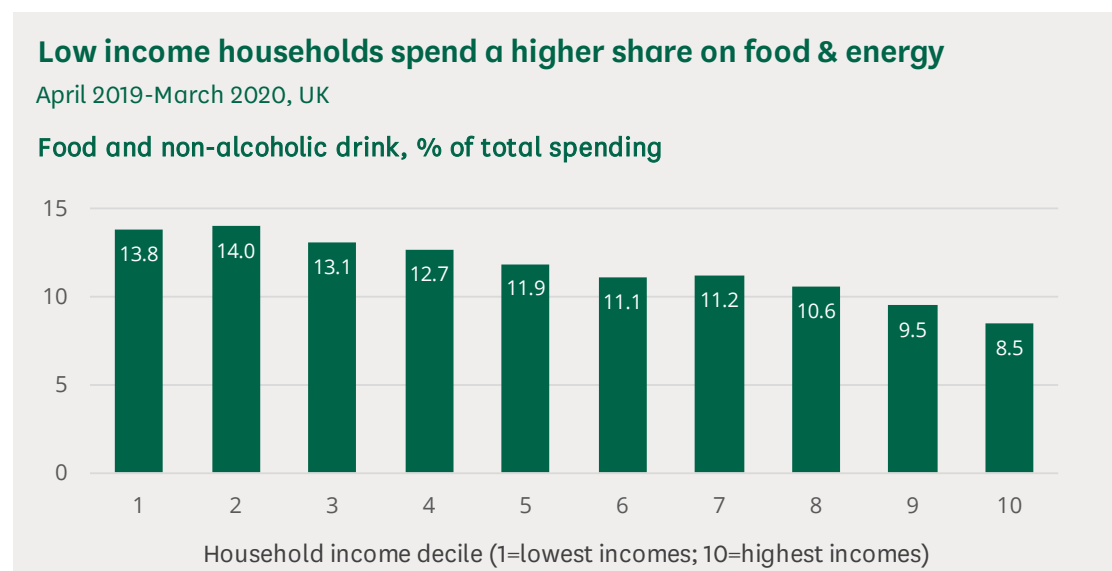
- Food expenditure growth, price changes of food groups, and low-income households’ share of spending on food;
- Household food insecurity and access to food shops in England;
- Eligibility for Free School Meals and the take-up of Health Start voucher scheme.⁹

Affordability of food

The Library briefing [Rising cost of living in the UK](#) provides statistics on the price of food in section 2.4 and the impact of rising food prices on low-income households in section 5.3.

Food and non-alcoholic drink prices were 14.5% higher in September 2022 than in September 2021, based on the official CPI inflation, the highest inflation rate since comparable records began in 1989.¹⁰ Food prices are rising faster than other prices: overall CPI inflation was 10.1% in September.

Low-income households spend a larger proportion than average on food: around 14% of the spending of households with the lowest incomes (the bottom 20%) went on food in 2019/20. This compares to 11.9% for middle-income households and 8.5% for the richest households (the top 10%).¹¹



Source: ONS, [Family spending 2019/20](#), March 2021 - data: [workbook 1 - table 3.2](#)

⁹ DEFRA, [UK Food Security Report 2021](#), December 2021,

¹⁰ ONS, Food and non-alcoholic drink component of CPI, annual rate of change, series [D7G8](#)

¹¹ ONS, [Living Costs and Food Survey](#), 16 March 2021

Household food insecurity and free school meals

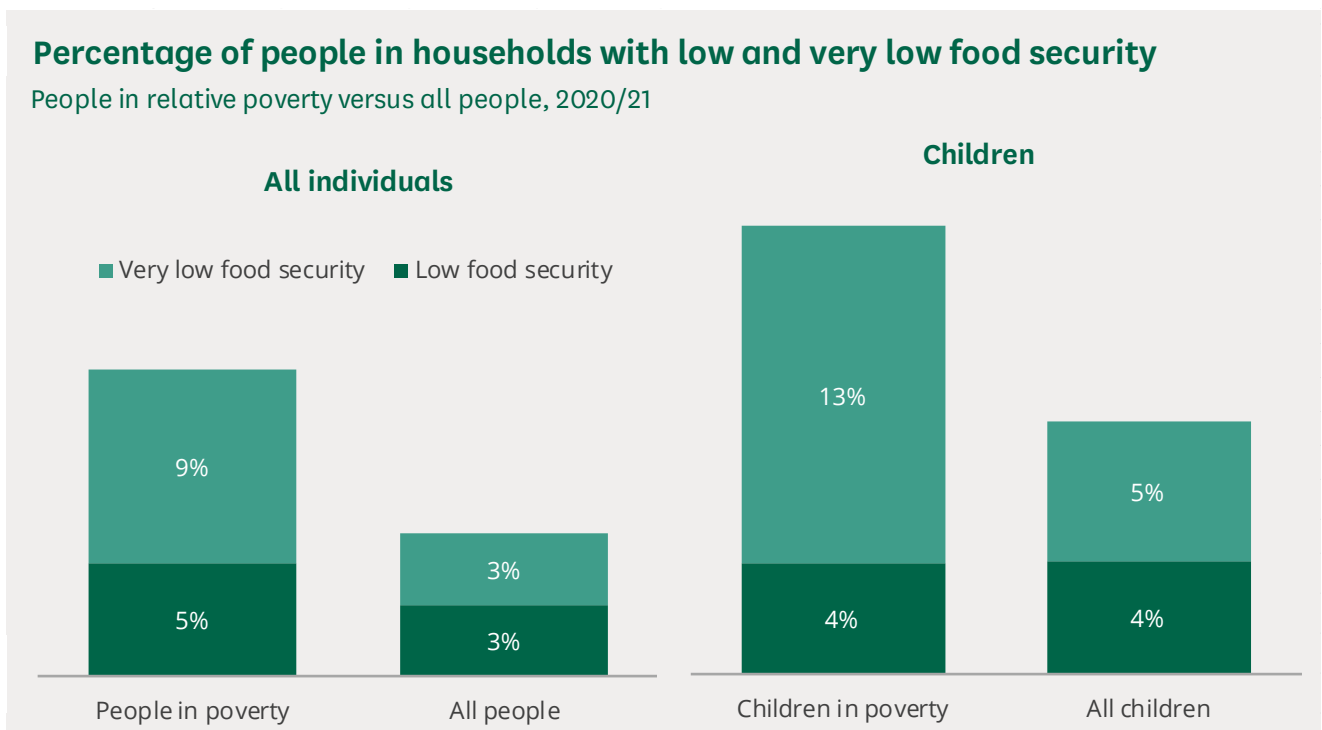
Household food insecurity, or ‘food poverty’

The Library briefing [Food poverty: Households, food banks and free school meals](#) provides statistics on household food insecurity, food bank use, and free school meals eligibility.

‘Low food security’ means the household reduces the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets. ‘Very low food security’ means household members sometimes disrupt eating patterns or reduce food intake because they lack money or other resources for food.

In 2020/21, 4.2 million people in the UK (6%) were in food insecure households in the UK, including 9% of children, 7% of working-age adults, and 1% of pensioners.

14% of people in relative poverty lived in food insecure households (households with either low or very low food security), including 17% of children in relative poverty.¹²



Source: Department for Work and Pensions, [Households Below Average Income](#), 2020/21

¹² DWP, [Households Below Average Income](#), 2022
 Someone is in relative poverty when they live in a household with income less than 60% of contemporary median household income.

Free school meals

In January 2022, there were around 1.9 million pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, representing 22.5% of state funded pupils.¹³ This eligibility rate has increased particularly sharply in the last few years (since 2018) and is the highest rate recorded since the mid-1990s.

This increase could be driven by many factors including the Covid-19 pandemic and the continued effect of [the transitional protections during the rollout of Universal Credit](#).

¹³ Department for Education, [Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2022](#), 9 June 2022

2

Press releases

[The Rock Review: summary and recommendations](#)

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

11 October 2022

[Environment Secretary commits to sustainable horticulture growth](#)

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

11 October 2022

[Genetic Technology Bill: enabling innovation to boost food security](#)

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

25 May 2022

[Food security is now top of our agendas since Russia's invasion of Ukraine: UK at the UN](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

18 May 2022

3

Press and media articles

[Hundreds of farmers warn MPs 'fragile food system at critical turning point'](#)

The Independent

21 October 2022

[Fossil fuel cost rises and climate change 'adding £407 to household food bills'](#)

The Independent

21 October 2022

[Food security 'undermined' by liberal trade deals, says FUW](#)

Wales Farmer

20 October 2022

[UK inflation rises back to 40-year high of 10.1% as food prices soar](#)

The Independent

19 October 2022

['Hungry kids cannot learn': Leon co-founder Henry Dimpleby backs free school meals campaign](#)

The Independent

19 October 2022

[Westminster has its head in the sand over food security](#)

The Scottish Farmer

14 October 2022

[Why Politicians Should Be Talking About Food](#)

Tony Blair Institute for Global Change

29 September 2022

4

Parliamentary questions

[Nutrition: Costs](#)

28 Sep 2022 | 51595

Asked by: Lucas, Caroline

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the independent report entitled National Food Strategy, published on 15 July 2021, whether she has had recent discussions with the (a) Chancellor of the Exchequer and (b) Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the implications for her policies of the recommendation that the true cost of eating healthily should be calculated into benefits payments; and if she will make a statement.

28 Sep 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 51595

Answered by: Dr Caroline Johnson | Department of Health and Social Care

There have been no specific discussions. The Office of Health Improvement and Disparities will explore options to assess the cost of a healthy diet with a focus on families.

[Agriculture and Food Supply: Carbon Dioxide and Fertilisers](#)

21 Sep 2022 | HL2271

Asked by: Baroness Jones of Whitchurch

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking, if any, to ensure the availability of fertiliser and carbon dioxide to the farming and food sectors following the announcement by CF Fertilisers that they are halting production in the UK.

Answered by: Lord Benyon | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

It is disappointing that CF Fertilisers has taken the decision to halt ammonia production at Billingham. However, since last autumn the CO₂ market's resilience has improved, with additional imports, further production from existing sources such as anaerobic digestion and bioethanol and better stockpiles. We expect the supply of ammonia (from imports by CF Fertilisers) and production of nitric acid and fertiliser to be unaffected. While the Government continues to examine options for the market to improve resilience over the longer term, we urge industry to do anything it can to meet demand, which is in the best interest of businesses and the public.

National Fertiliser Supplies

CF Fertilisers produces ammonium nitrate fertiliser and nitric acid in the UK at Billingham. The company expects to fulfil all ammonia and nitric acid contracts and all orders of Ammonium Nitrate contracted for delivery in the

coming months. The supply and price of these products is a commercial matter for CF Fertilisers, and we expect supply to continue.

While global fertiliser prices have risen, the supply chain providing imports of fertiliser to the UK has remained dynamic. We are continuing to monitor the security and stability of fertiliser and other supply chains and work closely with colleagues across government and devolved administrations as well as industry figures.

Carbon Dioxide Supplies

Defra is working with sector stakeholders to encourage contingency planning and resilience and understand that various CO2 supply companies in the UK are working on or have secured additional CO2 to mitigate shortages. We are confident CO2 stocks are secure for the coming winter.

[Agriculture: Land](#)

20 Sep 2022 | HL2273

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the CPRE report Building on our Food Security, published on 22 July, which identified a hundredfold increase in house and infrastructure construction on prime agricultural land since 2010.

Asked by: Baroness Jones of Whitchurch

Answered by: Lord Benyon | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

We welcome the CPRE report and analysis on development on prime agricultural land. This report highlights some of the ongoing and emerging challenges of use of land to achieve food security, housing need and energy security.

The Government recognises the importance of food security, which is why we published the Food Strategy earlier this year. The Food Strategy puts food security at the heart of the government's vision for the food sector. It aims to broadly maintain the current level of food that we produce domestically and boost production in sectors where there are the biggest opportunities. We are seeking to deliver as much as we can on our limited supply of land, to meet the whole range of Government commitments on food, housing, climate, and the environment. To help achieve this, we will publish a Land Use Framework in 2023 which will set out land-use change principles to balance these outcomes.

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out clearly that local planning authorities should consider all the benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land when making plans or taking decisions on new development

proposals. Where significant development of agricultural land is shown to be necessary, planning authorities should seek to use poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.

We work closely with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to ensure that planning policy continues to support agriculture and food production as well as delivering other goals for housing, infrastructure and the environment.

Farmers: Apprentices

16 Sep 2022 | 45684

Asked by: Julian Sturdy

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to incorporate farming apprenticeships into its policies on national food (a) security and (b) strategy.

Answered by: Mark Spencer | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Defra continues to speak regularly with the agricultural sector and other Government departments, including the Department for Education, and industry bodies to understand labour supply and demand, including both permanent and seasonal workforce requirements, and to ensure there is a long-term strategy for the agricultural workforce.

As announced in the Government Food Strategy in June, the Government has now commissioned an independent review which will consider how automation, domestic labour and migrant labour can contribute to tackling labour shortages in the food supply chain. As part of domestic labour, we will consider recruitment, retention, skills and progression in the food sector. The review will focus on farming, processing, and food and drink manufacturing as sectors which are critical for food production and food security.

There are currently 40 high-quality apprenticeship standards available in the agriculture, environmental and animal care sector, including stockperson, crop technician and horticulture & landscape technical manager.

Cereals: Production

23 Jun 2022 | HL837

Asked by: The Earl of Sandwich

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they will take, if any to increase grain production in the UK in the light of current global supply shortages; and what discussions they have had with other governments regarding the expansion of grain production globally in response to those shortages.

Answered by: Lord Benyon | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The UK has a highly resilient food supply chain which has coped well in responding to unprecedented challenges in the past few years. The UK is highly self-sufficient in most grains production, with 88% of cereals consumed in the UK in 2020 produced domestically.

Our fantastic British farmers are world-leaders and carefully plan their planting to suit the weather, their soil type, and their long-term agronomic strategy. It is not Government policy to determine which cereals or other crops farmers should prioritise to include in their rotation. In 2021 we permanently removed Basic Payment Scheme 'greening measures' on crop diversification and ecological focus areas, meaning when farmers are making crop planting decisions, they are free to react to market signals.

We continue to keep the market situation under review through the UK Agriculture Market Monitoring Group, which monitors UK agricultural markets including price, supply, inputs, trade and recent developments. We have also increased our engagement with industry to supplement our analysis with real-time intelligence and to identify where mitigations are available.

Globally, the UK is engaging with likeminded partners through multi-lateral forums including the World Trade Organization, United Nations and G7 to build consensus on the importance of keeping markets open to support global food security and facilitate the smooth functioning of global trade.

We welcome the World Bank's announcement of \$30 billion to address food insecurity globally over the next 15 months, which responds to the UK's calls for the Bank to mobilise funding to tackle the growing crisis. With G7 allies, we support the launch of the Global Alliance on Food Security, to scale up a rapid, needs-based, coordinated response which avoids a fragmented global response. As an initial response the UK has committed another £10 million to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program to build resilience in agriculture and food security in the poorest countries, bringing our total contribution to £186 million.

Oral questions

[Cost Increases: Food Producers and Consumers](#)

08 Sep 2022 | 719 c355

[Food Security](#)

23 Jun 2022 | Answered | House of Commons | 716 c950

[National Resilience Strategy: Food Security](#)

09 Jun 2022 | 715 c926

5

Debates

[Climate Change and Biodiversity: Food Security](#)

8 September 2022 | 824 cc333-366

That this House takes note of the impact of climate change and biodiversity loss on food security.

[Support for Local Food Infrastructure](#)

08 Sep 2022 | 719 cc157-180WH

That this House has considered the matter of support for local food infrastructure.

[Food Security](#)

31 March 2022 | 711 cc381-406WH

That this House has considered food security.

6

Further reading

Library briefings

Library debate pack on [Global food security](#), 20 October, 2022

Library briefing on [the effect of the war in Ukraine on food production and food security in the UK](#), 18 July 2022

House of Lords Library briefing on the [Impact of climate change and biodiversity loss on food security](#), 1 September, 2022

UK Government reports

DEFRA's [United Kingdom Food Security Report 2021](#), December 2021

DEFRA [Government food strategy](#), June 2022

The Government-commissioned [National Food Strategy for England](#), June 2021

Other

[Food Security in the UK](#) is a review of the Government's Food Security Report published by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board on 23 March 2022

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