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# Food Security – Report Summary

This is a House of Commons Committee report, with recommendations to government. The Government has two months to respond.

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(<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/52/environment,-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/>).

**Related inquiry:** [Food Security](https://committees.parliament.uk/work/6861/food-security/) (<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/6861/food-security/>).

**Date Published:** 28 July 2023

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## Summary

Recent shocks to food supply chain such as the covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have served as a reminder of the fragility of the food supply chain and the importance of food security. This Report considers the current challenges facing UK food supply and household food security. In particular, it considers the impact of high input prices, for example of energy and fertiliser, and consumer food prices on households, with more households reporting food insecurity than at the worst point in the pandemic.

We are concerned that the Government's UK Food Security Report (UKFSR), published in December 2021, is already out-of-date. With the Government not required by statute to publish the next edition until December 2024, we are calling for the UKFSR to be published annually to accompany an annual food security summit chaired by the Prime Minister. There is a need for policy coherence and for strong leadership on food security, and the Cabinet Office should undertake a comprehensive review of departmental responsibilities and structures regarding food policy and its various facets.

Several current and intersecting issues are particularly challenging for our food supply. These include labour shortages—for which we commend the recent report of the Independent Review into Labour Shortages in the Food Supply Chain—as well as fertiliser production and the associated carbon dioxide by-product which is vital to our food supply chain, while we look forward to the Government's forthcoming Land Use Framework.

Food price inflation is around levels not seen for some 45 years. While some supermarkets have noted their low margins, they are also paying high levels of dividends to shareholders. We are concerned that while many households are skipping meals, the Food Minister does not believe this constitutes a threat to our food security. We disagree, and we call on the Government to broaden its definition.

The high rate of food price inflation and broader increases in the cost of living have also caused an increase in food bank use. We visited food aid organisations in Liverpool and saw the excellent work they do for individuals in highly challenges circumstances. The Government's substantial support packages are welcome, but it should examine whether lower-income households have sufficient support to ensure their household food security without the need to regularly use food aid organisations. In addition, the Government should examine whether free school meals eligibility should be extended, but more immediately review the current rules that mean households in receipt of Universal Credit must have a post-tax income below £7,400 before benefits in order to be eligible for free school meals.

Obesity levels are already high at 30% of the population and this is forecast to increase to around 40% by 2035, creating very significant costs for the NHS. Poor diet means low-income, even food insecure, households, are more likely to be obese than the general population as healthy food tends to cost more per calorie. Individuals should take responsibility for their food consumption and make healthier choices where this is possible, and the Government should provide more support to make the right choices more accessible and affordable as part of a broader strategy to tackle obesity.

The Government Food Strategy did not cover the issue of health and food and we call on the Government to urgently address the issue. It should also consider proposals in the National Food Strategy's independent review, such as the sugar and salt reformulation tax, and provide analysis of the impact on healthy eating of its decision to further delay the ban on volume price promotions on food high in fat, sugar and salt—such as buy one, get one free (BOGOF) deals—until October 2025.

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