

**October 2014**

**Additional Submission to EFRA Committee on Food Security: Consumer demand**

Eating Better welcomes the consideration by the EFRA Committee of the role of consumer demand in addressing issues of food security. As we said in our original submission (Dec 2013)

* Food security policy needs to focus on consumption as well as production,
* The evidence for addressing consumption is compelling, and
* Policy progress towards sustainable diets requires government leadership and Ministerial commitment.

To add further support to these recommendations we now make the following additional points:

**1. A growing body of research is emphasizing the importance of demand side measures** to address climate change, environmental sustainability, public health and global food security. Two examples of UK research recently published include:

* New [research from the universities of Cambridge and Aberdeen](http://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/v4/n10/full/nclimate2353.html) provides further evidence of the need to include demand side measures as essential to delivering greenhouse gas emissions reduction and provide global food security in 2050. Globally greenhouse gases from food production will go up 80% if meat and dairy consumption continues to rise at its current rate, the researchers warn.
* A comparison of [dietary greenhouse gas emissions of meat-eaters, fish-eater, vegetarians and vegans in the UK](http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10584-014-1169-1?sa_campaign=email/event/articleAuthor/onlineFirst) of 55,500 people’s diets by researchers at Oxford University found that meat-eaters have a dietary GHG impact two and a half times as high as vegans. The authors recommend “national governments that are considering an update of dietary recommendations in order to define a ‘healthy, sustainable diet’ must incorporate the recommendation to lower the consumption of animal-based products”.

**2. There is an important role for central government to support dietary transition to healthy sustainable eating patterns**

2.1 There is now good evidence of what constitutes a sustainable healthy diet[[1]](#footnote-1). However Eating Better has found that the evidence for advocating meat consumption in moderation as part of healthy sustainable diets has not yet translated in any significant way into policies and practices (from government & businesses) to support consumer behaviour change.

We are pleased that the collaborative work under Defra’s Green Food Project to develop principles of a healthy sustainable diet is currently being peer reviewed and is intended to be published by the Global Food Security Programme. Yet currently there is no commitment from Defra Ministers to translate the evidence this will provide into policies.

Eating Better’s policy recommendations (developed in collaboration with our 40+ supporting organisations and partner networks) recommends governments develop policies and practices to support a transition to less and better meat consumption and production including to:

* **publish and promote new official guidelines on healthy eating and environmental behaviour to include the benefits of eating less and better meat.** This will require updating of the Eatwell Plate to provide businesses, health professionals, educators and the public with integrated advice on healthy, sustainable diets. Cross departmental/agency working between Defra and Department of Health/Public Health England is vital as the objectives cannot be met by one department/agency alone.
* **introduce clear and mandatory procurement standards for caterers** to ensure that meals paid for by taxpayers in schools, hospitals, prisons, care homes and all government departments reflect environmental (eg carbon reduction commitments) and health factors, to include less and better (including higher welfare) meat.
* **Support and encouraging farming that produces meat in ways that benefit the environment, health and animal welfare** **and provides a fair returns for farmers.** This includes helping people reconnect with where their food comes from and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to support humane and sustainable farming.

2.2 Eating Better is one of 10 major organisations (RSPB, the National Trust, Friends of the Earth, the Food Ethics Council, Sustain, the Wildlife Trusts, the Soil Association, Compassion in World Farming and the Food Research Collaboration) that have come together to call for leadership and a new sense of direction and purpose in food and farming policy focusing on combined solutions to the many different, but inter-related, challenges we face.

Our report: [Square Meal: why we need a new recipe for farming, wildlife, food and public health,](http://foodresearch.org.uk/square-meal) published in July 2014 highlights the overwhelming evidence that demonstrates the need for major changes to national food and farming policy.

The solutions put forward are wide ranging and of relevance to this inquiry include **actively encouraging more sustainable diets** as central to reforming our unsustainable food system. This proposes that **a clear and robust set of principles should be developed for what constitutes a more sustainable diet,** including a ‘less but better’ approach to consumption of livestock products, and embedding guidance on sustainable sources of fish as part of healthy eating guidance. Such a set of guidelines and advice for consumers is a necessary step in developing policies and practices that support dietary transition, and are vital in incentivising less environmentally damaging farming systems that also provide better returns for farmers.

In addition, **Government should continue to encourage adoption of high quality schemes for meals** eaten in restaurants and cafes, like the Food for Life Catering Mark, and promote independent certification marks like Fairtrade.

**Government should also commit the ONS to develop a new Sustainable Diet basket of measures**, to accompany the Consumer Price Index, and work to make food from sustainable sources more accessible than unsustainable sources.

2.3 Eating Better has also taken part in cross sector collaboration between academics, industry and NGO representatives, convened by the Food Climate Research Network and the Wellcome Trust, which concludes that **government leadership and substantial investment in research are needed to shift global consumption habits towards eating patterns that are both healthy and sustainable**. The report, [Changing What We Eat**,**](http://www.fcrn.org.uk/fcrn/publications/new-fcrn-report-changing-what-we-eat-call-research-action-widespread-adoption-sust)outlines the work needed to shift societies to consumption patterns that can meet both public health and environmental goals and includes characteristics of healthier and less GHG and land-intensive eating patterns.

3. **What are the main issues facing individuals?**

How to stimulate a long-term cultural shift towards healthy and sustainable eating patterns in which less and better meat eating is the norm rather than the exception is a new area of interest for dietary behaviour change. To assist understanding Eating Better has undertaken a review (due to be published November 2014) of what is already known about existing consumption patterns, trends and relevant behaviour change research. This includes our own quantitative public attitudes research undertaken in 2013.

Good evidence now exists of the need to shift diets towards lower levels of meat consumption, among high consuming individuals and countries such as the UK. Yet in our review we found limited research that sought to directly understand the public’s knowledge, attitudes and behaviours towards eating less meat or how best to achieve this dietary transition. Alongside public policy initiatives outlined above, **Eating Better is calling for practical research to develop new pilots and projects to test behavioural approaches and to evaluate existing initiatives towards reducing meat consumption. This will require the support of funding bodies.**

Our own research shows that awareness of the need for such change among the public is growing, though is relatively low compared with other drivers for dietary change. In 2013 we found an increase in the public’s awareness of the significant environmental impacts of producing and eating meat from just one in seven (14%) in 2007 to nearly one in three people (31%). 34% said they were willing to eat less meat with 25% saying they had already cut back. And despite the economic recession, we also found significant willingness (around 50%) to choose ‘better’ meat, if it tastes better, is healthier, produced to higher animal welfare standards or provides better financial returns to farmers.

Habitual behaviours towards food choices and the strong cultural and personal significance of meat eating for many are potential barriers to change. The evidence shows that men in particular tend to be higher meat consumers and less willing to consider eating less. By comparison, women eat less red meat and young people appear more open to ‘flexitarian’ eating with the highest proportion of non-meat eaters, potentially indicative of a generational shift in attitudes and behaviours towards meat eating. As [Dutch research](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0195666314000907) has found, a mixture of strategies to reduce meat consumption in the western diet are needed to help people, including smaller portions of meat (“less”), smaller portions using meat raised in a more sustainable manner (“less but better”), smaller portions and eating more vegetable protein (“less and more varied”), and meatless meals with or without meat substitutes (“veggie-days”).  Different approaches may appeal more to different consumer audiences.

Concerns about meat authenticity, provenance and safety, brought to the public’s attention by the horsemeat scandal last year and concerns about *Campylobacter* contamination in chicken this year, have impacted on consumer attitudes but less clearly on longterm purchasing behaviour. With rising food prices and squeezed household budgets in recent years, many consumers have been ‘trading down’, though ‘quality’ remains important and we also found evidence of ‘trading up’ with local butchers in particular benefiting.

We have identified a number of potential drivers for motivating behaviour change towards less and better meat eating including concern for health, concern for farm animal welfare and cost savings of eating less meat. Concern for climate change, the environment and feeding the world more fairly currently rate lower as potential motivators, most likely due to lower levels of awareness of the impacts as well as lack of personal salience or benefit.

There is an important role for education in raising awareness not just of the public health impacts of our eating patterns but also of the environmental and social impacts. However, it is increasingly well understand that successful behaviour change towards public health goals and sustainable consumption, requires an approach that goes beyond an emphasis on ‘education’ and persuading individuals to change their behaviour to include the role of government policies, business practices and civil society initiatives working in synergy to facilitate desired behaviours.

October 2014

1. Garnett, T (2014) What is a Healthy Sustainable Diet? Food Climate Research Network <http://www.fcrn.org.uk/fcrn/publications/fcrn-discussion-paper-what-sustainable-healthy-diet> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)