

FABIAN POLICY REPORT



# HUNGRY FOR CHANGE

*The final report of the Fabian  
Commission on Food and Poverty*

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**FABIAN SOCIETY**  
61 Petty France  
London SW1H 9EU  
020 7227 4900 (main)  
020 7976 7153 (fax)

[info@fabian-society.org.uk](mailto:info@fabian-society.org.uk)  
[www.fabians.org.uk](http://www.fabians.org.uk)

**Report Author**, Cameron Tait

**General Secretary**,  
Andrew Harrop  
**Research Director**, Olivia Bailey  
**Editorial Director**, Ed Wallis  
**Editorial and Communications  
Manager**, Lucy Snow

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# SUMMARY

THIS IS THE FINAL REPORT of the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty. The Commission was established to look at the relationship between food and poverty in the UK. It asks how a fairer food system can be built that works better for people on low incomes.

Drawing on public hearings, expert testimony and the insights of people with experience of managing poverty, the Commission has uncovered a crisis of food access for many households in the UK. There are multiple cases of parents – usually mothers – going hungry to feed their children or having to prioritise calories over nutrients to afford their weekly food shop. Many people are feeling a deep sense of anxiety from the struggle to manage serious squeezes in household budgets that arises from the cost of living rising faster than income.

The Commission have defined this state of living as ‘household food insecurity’: the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so. But a lack of official measurement means nobody can be clear how many people are affected by household food insecurity in the UK.

Reducing and eventually ending household food insecurity needs an active approach from government to tackle its structural drivers. This requires:

## Action on incomes, not prices

The current government has aimed to deliver food affordability by keeping food prices low. But commissioners conclude this approach to affordability needs to change by focusing on boosting incomes. This is because it will not be possible to keep food

prices low while also combating climate change, improving diet-related health outcomes, and ending working poverty in the food workforce and supply chains.

## A coordinated approach

Changes in government policy over recent years show responsibility for household food security and public health in the UK is increasingly being handed over to individuals, businesses and charities. The hallmark of this transition of responsibility is the new role of charitable food in welfare provision.

The disjointed ‘big society’ approach to household food insecurity has not worked. The kind of leadership required to address the crisis of food insecurity can only be provided by government – no other actors on their own have the ability to develop the level of coordinated action needed to end household food insecurity.

The Commission proposes five long-term principles which should underpin strong government-coordinated action:

1. Everyone in the UK should have secure access to nutritious, sustainable food they can afford, and nobody should live in a state of household food insecurity.
2. Food banks and other forms of charitable food provision should become unnecessary by 2020.
3. Decent work is the best way of achieving sustainable food security for most households, but the social security system also has an important role to play for many both in and out of work.

4. The links between low income and diet-related ill health should be broken.
5. People on low incomes should be protected from price rises and other potential negative consequences arising from the essential action needed to address the long-term environmental, health and workforce challenges of the food system.

## Action points

Ending household food insecurity and tackling the unsustainability of the UK food system will take time. But the UK and devolved governments, regulators and local authorities can make immediate progress by taking the following actions now:

1. **The prime minister should appoint a new cross-departmental minister with a responsibility for eliminating household food insecurity.** The new minister should coordinate action across government departments while working in partnership with devolved governments, local authorities, regulators, businesses, trade unions, civil society and those in poverty to end household food insecurity in the UK.
2. **The new minister and devolved government leaders should take responsibility for the duty of UK nations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food, while civil society organisations should form an alliance to monitor government compliance.** This will locate the ‘right to food’ within a social justice framework in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, where the right to food is already a subject of debate, the cabinet secretary for social justice should consider taking a lead in enshrining the right into Scottish law.
3. **Robust measures of the extent of household food insecurity in the**



**UK should be introduced.** These measures can then be used to monitor and track trends in the nature and extent of household food insecurity across the four UK jurisdictions over time, and also determine the impact of policy decisions and other actions intended to mitigate and eliminate household food insecurity.

4. **The environment secretary should broaden the focus of the 25 year plan for food and farming, working with the new minister to include strategies to reduce household food insecurity.** The plan should include steps to improve access to affordable, healthy and sustainable food for those on low incomes and the skills and knowledge to properly enjoy such food.
5. **The government, together with regulators, consumer bodies and people in poverty, should launch an inquiry into the poverty premium, and work with businesses to remove poverty premiums for key living costs including food as well as utilities, housing, household appliances, and transport.** The poverty premium is the additional

cost of basic goods and services paid by those on low incomes. For example, this includes the additional cost of part-payments or hiring of kitchen appliances, the additional cost of using a pre-payment meter to pay for energy rather than by direct debit, or the additional cost of transport for those that can only afford to buy single tickets, rather than season tickets.

6. **The UK government should index working-age social security benefit upratings to the inflation experience of low-income households.** Low-income households experience a higher rate of inflation on goods and services than others. Indexing working-age benefits to match the inflation experience of low-income households would acknowledge this, as well as introducing an important safeguard to prevent those in poverty being hit by potential future food price rises.
7. **The Department for Work and Pensions should expedite action to reduce acute household food insecurity caused by social security benefit sanctions, delays and errors.**

While the government has responded to recent reports highlighting the need to fix the administration of social security payments, urgent action needs to be taken to roll out piloted programs across the country.

8. **Local authorities should establish food access plans that will identify any physical barriers to affordable, sustainable, nutritious food in their area and develop an action plan to overcome them.** Local authorities should build on the work already being done by the Sustainable Food Cities Network to boost access to affordable, nutritious food in local areas. This report sets out ten local authorities that could pilot these plans across the UK.

The choices that individuals make about the food that they buy, the time and methods used to prepare and cook that food, and how and what people eat are all informed by the environments in which those decisions are made. Instead of moral exhortations to people to eat better food, there needs to be a better understanding of the environment in which these choices are made – such as education, marketing messages and physical access – and action to change that environment.

The UK government should take the following action to recognise the role of environments in shaping food choices:

9. **The government should rule out future cuts to existing public health schemes and budgets, including local authority public health allocations, and should commit to protecting existing public health spending.** Public health initiatives are often investments which save money in the long term as the initiatives funded by these allocations often prevent the need for costly treatment further down the line.



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10. The Department of Health should launch a joint review of both broadcast and non-broadcast advertising codes with the aim of protecting children from the marketing of unhealthy food and drink products, as defined by the current FSA/Of-com nutrient profiling model. The Department of Health, in partnership with the new minister, should use the review to identify how unhealthy food marketing is reaching children and influencing their behaviour, and how a modern regulation framework can limit this influence.

11. The Department of Health, Treasury and devolved governments should consider piloting a sugary drinks duty to allow policy makers to make informed decisions as to whether further taxes should be introduced in order to improve diets and health outcomes. A new pilot tax on sugary drinks would allow the government to measure the change duties can have on food behaviours, measure the effects they have on low-income households,

and potentially create new funds to support public health initiatives. Should this pilot be successful, further taxes and duties could be introduced to improve diets and health outcomes.

Sustainably addressing household food insecurity requires a long-term approach. The changes that need to be made in order to ensure everybody has the ability and certainty of being able to acquire or consume an adequate quality and sufficient quantity of food in ways that do not socially exclude people are substantial.

In particular, eliminating household food insecurity sustainably will mean ensuring everybody has a sufficient income to be able to pay for basic living costs and afford an adequate diet. The UK and devolved governments should take the following actions over time to boost incomes for the most vulnerable:

12. In addition to an existing commitment to target full employment, UK governments should set long term goals of bringing everybody up to a minimum socially acceptable level

of income. The governments should adopt an approach similar to the minimum income standard research of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Centre for Research in Social Policy.

13. The UK government should proceed with raising the national living wage up to 60 per cent of median wages over future years, while taking an active approach to building coverage of the voluntary living wage. In addition to its welcome approach of raising the national living wage over future years, the government should aim to build coverage of the higher voluntary living wage.

14. The government should re-establish the link between social security and a subsistence level by linking universal credit to the minimum income standard. The fourth aim of universal credit – to tackle poverty – should be strengthened to include a specific reference to tackling household food insecurity.



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# ABOUT THE FABIAN COMMISSION ON FOOD AND POVERTY

**I**N THE AUTUMN OF 2014, the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty began an investigation into the relationship between food and poverty in the UK, and what steps could be taken to ensure the food system works better for everybody, including those on low incomes.

The Commission released an interim report in March 2015 (*A Recipe for Inequality: Why our food system is leaving low-income households behind*) and this final report sets out the Commission's findings and recommendations.

The Commission is hosted by the Fabian Society and generously supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The Commission is independent and is not affiliated to any political party.

The Commission is made up of experts in food policy and related fields including health, social policy, the environment, poverty and education. Over the past year commissioners have travelled across the UK to hear from the food industry, civil society groups, the food workforce, government, independent experts, and people with experience of poverty on the relationship between food and poverty. A call for evidence also invited written evidence submissions from key stakeholders.

An Expert Panel of people with experience of poverty had the dual role of steering the Commission's work and feeding in their lived experience of the issues the Commission looked at. The Panel members live in Manchester and Salford and the Commission met with the Panel three times. Comments from the group are included throughout the report.

The Commission's work was also supported by an advisory network of academics, practitioners, campaigners, policymakers, trade unionists, community organisers and people working with those in poverty.

The Commission held six public evidence hearings in London, Sheffield, Lincolnshire and Glasgow. Recordings of all the hearings are available on the Commission's website, [foodandpoverty.org.uk](http://foodandpoverty.org.uk).

The Commission also made evidence gathering trips to Grimsby and Boston in Lincolnshire to hear from farmers, food producers, food manufacturers, agricultural experts, and community and faith outreach workers; and to Glasgow to meet with Church and faith group representatives, Scottish government officials, community outreach workers, and members of the Poverty Truth Commission.

This research has been added to by the Commission's Secretariat who have conducted additional desk research, meetings and interviews.

## Definitions

Throughout the evidence presented to the Commission, a number of different terms were used to describe the state in which one has inadequate access to sufficient qualities and quantities of food, together with the anxiety associated with it. The commissioners agreed it was important to introduce a clear definition of the term this report uses at the outset for clarity.

This report uses the term 'household food insecurity' to mean:

*'the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of*

*food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.'*

The rationale behind the use of this term is presented in Appendix 1.

## Acknowledgements

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## The commissioners

Geoff Tansey (Chair) is a trustee of the Food Ethics Council and curates the Food Systems Academy. He is a widely published and well renowned writer and consultant on food and agriculture and a Joseph Rowntree Visionary for a Just and Peaceful World awardee.

Niall Cooper is director of Church Action on Poverty. He also co-founded the



Debt on our Doorstep network for fair finance in 1999 and in 2000 he chaired the UK Coalition Against Poverty's Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power.

Dr Tara Garnett initiated and runs the Food Climate Research Network, based at the Environmental Change Institute. It focuses on the contribution that the food system makes to greenhouse gas emissions and solutions for reducing emissions.

Diana Holland is assistant general secretary of Unite for Transport, Equalities and Food and Agriculture, where she oversees the union's work representing food and agriculture workers in food farming, food manufacturing and in food retail. A long-standing anti-poverty campaigner, prior to this Diana was national organiser for women, race and equalities at TGWU.

Andrew Kuyk CBE is a food and sustainability consultant. He was previously director of sustainability and competitiveness at the Food and Drink Federation following a civil service career in the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its predecessor MAFF.

Dr John Middleton was vice president of the UK's Faculty of Public Health until July 2015. Prior to this he was director for public health in Sandwell for more than 27 years. He is honorary professor of public health at Wolverhampton University.

Jeanette Orrey MBE is co-founder of Food for Life, working on food culture in UK schools, and was a school dinner lady for over 20 years. Jeanette has won many awards for her work, including The Observer Food Award for 'Person who has done the most for the food & drink industry'.

### **Secretariat**

Cameron Tait is secretary to the Commission and lead author of this report. Cameron joined the Fabian Society as senior researcher in August 2014 and previously served as head of research to the Archbishop of York's Living Wage Commission.

Robert Tinker was a senior researcher at the Fabian Society until August 2015 and was previously researcher to the Fabian Commission on Future Spending Choices.

### **Narrative artist**

Sarah Woods is the Commission's narrative artist, who has gathered stories and experiences of people's relationships with food and poverty and has fed them back in to the Commission. Sarah is author of the Cardboard Citizens play Benefit, as well as an upcoming drama on food and poverty for BBC Radio 4.



# PREFACE FROM GEOFF TANSEY, CHAIR OF THE FABIAN COMMISSION ON FOOD AND POVERTY

**WE** NAMED THIS independent inquiry the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty in order to broaden the debate on the connection between these two issues in the UK. People on low incomes in the UK face a new struggle to acquire sufficient quantities and adequate qualities of food. Many people are caught between the pincers of rising food prices, household bills and housing costs on one side and stagnant incomes on the other. Something has to give for these families and the only thing to squeeze is spending on food.

Recent discussion of food and poverty has been too narrow, focusing on the growth of charitable food provision, such as food banks, and the role it plays in feeding hungry people. But charitable food provision is the tip of the iceberg – the links between food and poverty extend far beyond food banks. Critically, we need to recognise that food banks and charitable food providers are not solutions to household food insecurity, they are symptoms of society's failure to ensure everybody is sustainably well-fed.

The prime minister understands this, saying at a BBC Question Time event prior to the election "I don't want anyone to have to rely on a food bank in our country. It's important that they're there. I don't want anyone to have to rely on them." The people we have met who work in charitable food provision understand this, telling us that it is not right that such charitable assistance is necessary in our country. Users of charitable food provision we have spoken to understand this, speaking of the shame and embarrassment of having

to use these services. Experts who have spent decades looking at food and poverty understand this, telling us that the scale of charitable food assistance we now have need not be a permanent feature of society. And we as a Commission understand this too: when the last food bank closes down because there is no longer any need for it, we will know we are on the way to ending household food insecurity in the UK.

As a Commission, we want to see a country where your income no longer dictates how much nutritious food you have access to, or how likely you are to eat foods that are high in fat, salt, and sugar. We want to see a country where children are not bombarded by unhealthy food marketing; but are equipped to make their own food choices by an understanding of where food comes from and what is in the food they eat. We want to see a food system where everybody can easily acquire nutritious food they can afford without causing dire consequences for the environment, and for producers and workers both in the UK and around the world involved in food provisioning.

The good news is that many people and groups are already acting to change our dysfunctional food system. Local community networks such as the Kindling Trust in Manchester, Incredible Edible in Todmorden and elsewhere, and Nourish Scotland have brought people and groups together to take local action to address the structural unsustainability of the UK food system. National schemes, such as Food for Life, are working with schools and other institutions to create an environment in which

more people have access to the knowledge and skills they need to eat well. And internationally, the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation has advocated for member states to ensure there is adequate social protection for those on low incomes to be able to eat sufficiently well.

We need to have clear principles against which we can measure progress if we are to overcome the challenges posed by food and poverty in the UK and the world. With this report we have attempted to set out what these principles should be, and the action that is needed to put them into practice. But producing this report is only a small step on the road to eliminating household food insecurity and creating a fairer food system in the UK and globally. Achieving this will take real leadership from government at all levels, and action from a wide range of organisations and groups from business, civil society and the research community.

When it comes to food, we are all in it together. Everyone needs it. But far from everyone gets what they need. Many, probably a majority, of children born in the UK today will live beyond 2100. If we do not take action to establish a more sustainable food system that works better for the poorest as well as the rest of society, these children will lead very different, and in some cases, much diminished lives. It is in that long-term context we need to look at food and poverty.



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# Hungry for change

The final report of the Fabian Commission  
on Food and Poverty

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# INTRODUCTION

“When you only have £19 for food each week, you end up with the crap stuff.”

Member of the Commission’s Expert Panel of people with experience of living in poverty.

**T**HIS IS THE final report of the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty. The Commission was established to look at the relationship between food and poverty in the UK. It asks how a fairer food system can be built that works better for people on low incomes.

The Commission has uncovered a crisis of food access for many households in the UK. There are multiple cases of parents – usually mothers – going hungry to feed their children or having to prioritise calories over nutrients to afford their weekly food shop. Many people are feeling a deep sense of anxiety from the struggle to manage serious squeezes in household budgets that arise from the cost of living rising faster than income.

This report builds on our interim report, *A Recipe for Inequality: why our food system is leaving low-income households behind*, in which we laid out the findings from the evidence presented to us in a range of public hearings around the country.<sup>1</sup> As well as our public hearings, we have heard from many food industry professionals, experts on food and poverty, campaigners, government officials and community organisers about the relationship between food and poverty and what needs to change in our food system.

Crucially though, an Expert Panel of people with experience of managing poverty have guided us through the process and provided valuable examples of lived experience, which we have used in this report. We heard about how poverty affects

what you eat, how you eat, when you eat and even if you eat. We heard of the fear, shame, hunger, ill health, stress, and social exclusion people experienced who were managing poverty and its effects – and in particular what we have called ‘household food insecurity’.

The Commission have defined ‘household food insecurity’ as: the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.<sup>2</sup> We believe this is a more useful term than the more common ‘food poverty’, because it captures the wider issues of inadequate access to adequate food that go beyond the affordability of it and includes the fear of going hungry and mental stress.

## Outsourcing responsibility

Reducing and eventually ending household food insecurity requires an active approach from government to tackle its structural drivers. But over recent years, responsibility for household food insecurity and public health in the UK has increasingly been handed over to individuals, businesses and charities. While we may hear less nowadays from David Cameron about the ‘big society’, in his government’s approach to the crucial issues of food, poverty and public health, its ethos is alive and well.<sup>3</sup>

The goal of the big society was to create “a society with much higher levels of personal, professional, civic and corporate responsibility...where people come together to solve problems for themselves and their communities.”<sup>4</sup> It is in this vein that we can view the approach of the current Conservative and previous coalition governments to food, poverty and public health.

There is an obvious emblem of this shift of responsibility from state to society: food banks. In December 2012, the prime minister answered a question in the House of Commons about the rise of food banks by praising the “volunteers and people who work hard in our communities, part of what I call the big society, to help those in need.”<sup>5</sup> After the current government took office, Priti Patel, the new employment minister, went further by telling the House of Commons that “food banks play an important role in local welfare provision.”<sup>6</sup>

Here, by directly linking welfare and charitable food provision, the minister made explicit the direction of government policy and the greater role played by charities as government has reduced its own part. Indeed, charitable food providers have been an acknowledged aspect of welfare provision since September 2011, when Jobcentre Plus branches were asked to start directing claimants towards charitable food providers.<sup>7</sup> Ministers from both the previous and current governments have maintained that social security policies are not responsible for charitable food use.<sup>8, 9</sup> However, from 2010 to 2015 changes to tax and social security have meant that low-income households lost an average of 4 per cent of their income. This reduction in income does not necessarily represent causation of charitable food use, but it will have undoubtedly placed additional pressure on households already at risk of household food insecurity.

What’s more, there is evidence to suggest there has been a link between charitable food use and social security sanctioning and delays. Since 2010 the number of social security sanctions increased after a tougher line was taken by the government.<sup>10</sup> A number of studies – including the report on charitable food use commissioned by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, and independent research by Oxfam, Child Poverty Action

Group, the Church of England and The Trussell Trust – have all found that social security sanctions and delays (as well as other issues such as loss of employment) are factors in the acute need for charitable food assistance, and acute household food insecurity.<sup>11, 12, 13</sup>

The emphasis on personal, professional, civic and corporate responsibility can also be seen in the government's approach to public health. Government regulation on the nutritional qualities of food and limits on food marketing have been replaced with the voluntary Responsibility Deal with industry.<sup>14, 15, 16</sup> Similarly, the coalition government's leading public health initiative, Change 4 Life, has focused on the individual's own responsibility to eat well, ignoring the environments in which these choices are shaped.<sup>17</sup>

### **Current approaches have failed**

This outsourcing of responsibility leaves a number of different groups attempting to treat different symptoms of food insecurity separately, without the necessary coordination to address the structural causes of household food insecurity. Food banks and charitable food providers can only treat the symptoms, not eliminate the causes.

Charitable food providers usually issue short-term food packages, often as a form of last resort for households who have exhausted all other options.<sup>18</sup> As such, charitable food provision is only able to address the need for food during a crisis, not the origins of that crisis, such as low incomes and other barriers to affordable, nutritious food as part of an active, healthy life.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, many charitable food providers feel that governments should be acting so that they should not be having to do what they do.<sup>20</sup>

Individual businesses do not have the ability to prevent food insecurity either. While some companies have taken action to reform their practices and reformulate their products, the Responsibility Deal has failed to spark more widespread action

and as a result the coalition government failed to meet their own key public health targets.<sup>21, 22</sup> The potential costs of making food production more environmentally sustainable and improving conditions for the food workforce also highlight a tension for the food industry between, on the one hand, making food more affordable and on the other, ensuring that everybody involved in the supply chain gets a fair deal and environmental damage is minimised.

### **Government initiatives have focused on the individual's own responsibility to eat well, ignoring the environments in which these choices are shaped**

Exhortations to individuals to eat more healthily, such as the Change 4 Life programme, are unlikely to work if people can't afford good food. Decisions about food are shaped by a number of factors, in particular economic considerations. Because food is the most flexible part of the household budget, it becomes the most likely to be squeezed. The evidence shows that calorie for calorie, healthier food tends to be more expensive than unhealthy food and the struggle to afford other key living costs means many households have to prioritise calories over nutrients.<sup>23</sup> Recent allegations of a correlation between low income and poor cooking and food skills have been wide of the mark, with evidence pointing to low-income households being more likely to act like 'true economists' in the ways they change their purchasing, preparation and consumption of food relative to their changing levels of income.<sup>24</sup>

Government exercises designed to change the behaviour of individuals are always going to struggle to compete against the large marketing budgets of the biggest food brands. For example, McDonalds

alone spends nearly three times more on marketing each year than is spent on the entire Change 4 Life programme.<sup>25</sup> Given that food marketing tends to build preferences for types of food as well as brands, the combined marketing spend by fast food brands leaves government healthy eating programmes competing on a vastly uneven playing field.<sup>26</sup> A 2012 National Audit Office evaluation found that "the departments' strategy of working alongside the food industry to influence its approach to the marketing of foods and drinks that are high in fat, salt and sugar has not been successful in changing the way the majority of unhealthy foods are marketed."<sup>27</sup>

### **A new approach**

The emphasis on personal, professional, civic and corporate responsibility from the current and previous governments has moved responsibility to individuals, businesses and charities, but the power remains firmly with government. Current and future governments can only tackle poverty, improve access to food, and advance public health by taking coordinated action. To eliminate household food insecurity in the UK, governments need to take responsibility for it directly. This report sets out the principles and actions to guide this coordinated approach.



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# 1. FOOD AND POVERTY

**I**N ORDER TO understand how we can build a food system in the UK that works better for people on low incomes, it is important to be clear about the nature and scale of the problems people on low incomes face first.

This first chapter sets out what access to affordable, nutritious food can be like for people on low incomes in the UK, drawing from the lived experience of the Commission's Expert Panel, all of whom have experienced poverty and its consequences – poor health outcomes, stigma and stress, and an inability to participate in society. The chapter looks at the apparent rise of household food insecurity and what has caused it, with commissioners concluding that low incomes are the chief driver of household food insecurity.

This presents a major challenge for government, which has so far pursued an agenda involving a shift of responsibility for household food security to charities, businesses and individuals. Commissioners conclude that the current approach has not worked because it is disjointed and fails to address the root causes of household food insecurity.

## **Charitable food provision and household food insecurity**

Much of the public discussion of food and poverty has revolved around the rise of charitable food provision, such as the Trussell Trust's food bank model. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. The prevalence of charitable food provision is not an accurate indicator of household food insecurity. This is because most examples of charitable food provision are designed to treat *acute* household food insecurity, as people using these services have often

exhausted all other options. The Trussell Trust's food bank model involves the distribution of food boxes containing three days of nutritionally balanced, non-perishable food to people suffering from acute household food insecurity.<sup>28</sup> There has been a rise in public awareness of charitable food provision because of a sudden and significant rise in the number of occasions people in crisis across the UK have been provided with charitable food. For example, the number of occasions people in crisis were provided with food by the Trussell Trust food bank network grew from just under 129,000 occasions in 2011 to 2012 to over 1 million occasions in 2014 to 2015.<sup>29</sup>

These figures offer a powerful indication that household food insecurity exists and is increasing in the UK, but they are not a measure of household food insecurity. The Trussell Trust are not the only charitable food provider and more importantly, charitable food usage is not the same as household food insecurity. This is because not everybody experiencing household food insecurity visits charitable food providers. Elizabeth Dowler, professor of food and social policy at the University of Warwick, told the Commission "we cannot use usage of food banks and other charitable sources as an indicator of food poverty" because charitable food use statistics "are markers of households, usually, facing extreme or crisis problems, not about longstanding, ongoing issues."<sup>30</sup>

The Commission's Expert Panel – the members of which have direct experience of poverty – said that stigma, embarrassment and inability to access charitable food provision had put them off visiting charitable food providers, even when they

were in crisis. "People are proud," one member of the group said, "and if people think they are going to get a label...they won't go". This fear of labelling, the group said, is bound up with a stigma surrounding food banks. "People don't want to be seen to use a food bank to be called a scrounger", one member said.

Access was also a concern for the group. "I was on the verge of it," a member of the panel said, "but what prevented me was the fact that you have to be referred." The need for referral – needed for many but not all charitable food providers – was seen as "degrading" and "embarrassing" by the panel. It was also not always easy to find and reach charitable food provision. "Some places aren't advertised," and it is only possible to find them "if you know about it" and sometimes the problem is the "accessibility of getting down to the centre which is on the other side of [town]".

The key point is that food banks are simply an indicator of a wider problem of household food insecurity. Tellingly, while every member of the panel had direct experience of household food insecurity as well as poverty, none of the panel had visited a charitable food provider. Instead, they had borrowed money from family, built up debt, continued to go hungry, or consistently eaten food lacking in nutritional quality.

## **What poverty and household food insecurity mean for people**

Living with poverty and household food insecurity can be a day-to-day struggle and the evidence shows that it leads to a higher likelihood of early death and being more likely to suffer from diet-related diseases.<sup>31</sup> But stories from people with experience of this struggle tell a deeper story of an inability to access food of adequate nutritional quality, and of fears and anxieties about social situations which many people might take for granted, like hosting a child's birthday or inviting friends to share a meal.

## Health

There is a social gradient in diets, and therefore, related health outcomes. Low-income households tend to consume fewer nutrients and fewer fresh fruit and vegetables than average-income households.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the higher the income of the household, the more nutrients, fresh fruit and vegetables are likely to be eaten, as shown by the charts below. Low-income households are more likely to eat foods high in sugar, fat and salt, which also tend to be marketed towards such groups.<sup>33</sup> The result of this (among other causes) is that people on low incomes tend to have a lower than average life expectancy and longer periods of ill health, and those in routine and semi-routine jobs tend to have a far higher mortality rate than those in managerial professions.<sup>34</sup>

During their lifetime, people on low incomes are one-and-a-half times more likely to develop diabetes than those on an average income, and children growing up in low-income households are three times more likely to be obese than those in high-income households.<sup>35,36</sup> The members of the Commission's Expert Panel also described a number of other diet-related health conditions that either they themselves or family members had experienced, including anaemia and psychological conditions such as depression and anxiety.<sup>37</sup>

The Commission's Expert Panel were clear about the reasons for the social gradient in diets: fruit and vegetables are more expensive than less nutritious food. "You can't afford to buy fresh fruit," one member of the group said, "you can't afford to buy the things that are healthy for you." Another member put it more bluntly: "when you only have £19 for food each week you end up with the crap stuff." This is borne out by the research – studies have shown that healthy foods are approximately three times more expensive than less healthy foods per calorie, and less healthy foods tend to have bigger reductions placed on them in retail promotions.<sup>38</sup>

Because of the relative affordability of less nutritious foods, pressure on household budgets has led to households 'trading down' on food by prioritising calories over nutrients.<sup>39</sup> One member of the Commission's Expert Panel described the way in which she shops at the supermarket:

*"I always look at the [calorie] value of something, how much you get for your pound. How much it is going to fill you up. You have to look at values to see if it's enough to fill you up."*

Studies show that this prioritisation of calories over nutrients became more typical during the recession. In oral evidence to the Commission, Martin O'Connell, senior research economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies, showed that over the course of the recession low and middle income households tended to spend less on food than previously, while maintaining the same number of calories.<sup>40</sup>

## Participation in society

A product of poverty and household food insecurity that is harder to measure, but arguably just as important, is the inability to participate in society and to do the things that most people might take for granted.<sup>41</sup> For example, people may be anxious about inviting guests around to their home for a meal, or even for a cup of tea, because of a lack of resources or the embarrassment associated with it.

Birthdays, Christmas and communal occasions also highlight anxiety around the ability to access, prepare and serve food in ways that do not socially exclude people. At a session of the Commission's Expert Panel in December 2014, one parent recalled how she tended to struggle at "times like now when it is coming up to Christmas". Previous research has shown that 44 per cent of parents in low-income households admit to struggling to find the money to pay for children's birthdays.<sup>42</sup> Other costs around these occasions such as buying

presents for the family mean that finances are particularly squeezed, with one Expert Panel member saying that she was "cutting back on food to be able to buy presents for the kids at Christmas."

The inability to access adequate quantities and qualities of food can have detrimental psychological effects. The Commission's Expert Panel described how many of these psychological effects relate to the family. "I cried going out to work because I felt inadequate", one member recalled. "You feel a responsibility of guilt", another member said, "it's horrible, the lies you tell your children." The prioritisation of children often led to parents going without food in order to make sure their children had a meal. "I've gone out to work hungry to make sure there's enough food left back at home for them" one mother on the panel said, responding to another mother who had explained "as long as I see the kids have eaten, I will sit without food." Research conducted with people using charitable food has shown that similar sacrifices are made by many more parents: 20 per cent of the charitable food users had skipped meals to feed their children.<sup>43</sup>

The example of mothers skipping meals to feed their children raises the role of gender in poverty and household food insecurity. Research has shown that mothers in two parent households are more likely to manage squeezes to household budgets, and the costs of doing so.<sup>44</sup> And because 90 per cent of single parents in the UK are women, women are also much more likely to manage household budget squeezes (and again, the costs of doing so) in single parent households.<sup>45</sup> Women are also more likely to be more economically dependent in households than men, so tend to be at greater risk of falling into household food insecurity from relationships breaking down.<sup>46</sup> Women are therefore at greater risk of household food insecurity than men, and are likely to suffer more acutely from the effects household food insecurity than men in the same household.

## The drivers of household food insecurity

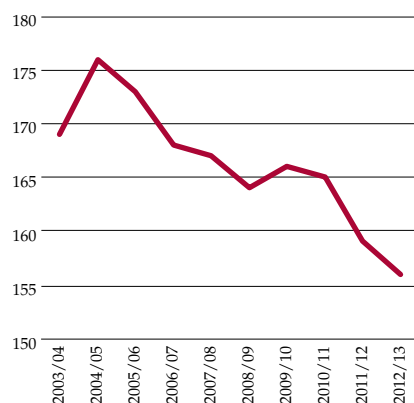
There are currently two key drivers of household food insecurity. First and foremost is that low incomes, relative to prices, deny economic access to adequate quantities or sufficient quality of food.<sup>47</sup> Behind this lies a related but different driver: physical access to adequate quantities or sufficient quality of food.

### *Low incomes denying economic access to adequate food*

Low incomes are the biggest barrier to accessing a sufficient quality and quantity of food. Real disposable income in low-income households has fallen in recent years because of weak wage growth and social security reforms. Meanwhile, key living costs such as housing and energy have risen, leading to increasingly squeezed food budgets in many low-income households.

From 2004 to 2013 the real disposable income of the poorest fifth of households fell by £20 a week to £156 a week (see the chart below). This fall came after a steady rise in disposable income in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

**FIGURE 1: Disposable income for lowest income quintile, 2003/04–2012/13**



Source: Households Below Average Income 1994/95–2012/13 (Department for Work and Pensions, July 2014). Disposable income measured in £pw, equivalised at 2012/13 prices.

This means that many low-income households will have had to adjust their expenditure on food and other living costs accordingly.

This fall in disposable income has been accompanied by a rise in food prices in recent years. After decades of falling food prices, the price of food relative to other goods has risen since 2006 because of a poor northern hemisphere harvest in that year, a material rise in the price of oil, and a structural change in international demand.<sup>48</sup>

Other prices have also risen, increasing the cost of living for low-income households. As one member of the Commission's Expert Panel put it, "I see prices go up and I get less and less and less." Indeed, the work of Donald Hirsch, director of the Centre for Research in Social Policy, has shown that in order to maintain a basic but socially acceptable standard of living, families need to spend at least 31 per cent more on basic living costs in 2015 than they did in 2008.<sup>49</sup>

The combination of a fall in disposable income and rising living costs (including but not limited to food) has meant that low-income households have to manage their budgets more carefully. The result of this is often that the food element of the household budget is squeezed more than any other. This is because in buying food, it is possible to trade down – buying food that is cheaper and often lower in quality and levels of nutrients – in ways that it is less easy to do with more fixed costs such as energy and housing. As Hirsch put it in his written evidence to the Commission, "households without enough to meet all their needs with their overall income have to make choices about what to prioritise." This is what leads people to choose calories over nutrients.

Sudden income shocks can cause more acute problems. A report on charitable food use commissioned by Defra showed that short-term shocks, such as delays or sanctions to social security payments or sudden loss of employment, are the biggest

causes of crisis.<sup>50</sup> This finding was echoed by research conducted with users of food banks across the UK in 2014 by the Child Poverty Action Group, Church of England, Oxfam and the Trussell Trust.<sup>51</sup>

Social security sanctions and delays to payments can have a sudden and acute impact on households that have little or no savings and little room to make savings in other areas. The Commission's Expert Panel reported experiencing a range of problems with the social security system which had led them to be denied money for a period of time. One member of the panel described being sanctioned after losing a long-term job. The sanction meant he had no income coming in and fell behind on mortgage payments. "I lost my house," the member of the panel said, "I was eight weeks without anywhere to live. I was homeless." Another member of the panel described being "left for three months without a decision from the job centre" after becoming unemployed. "That time was really hard for me", she said.

A sudden loss of income can also be experienced by those in employment. This problem was highlighted in Boston, Lincolnshire, where civil society organisations described the "prevalence of zero-hours contracts". These contracts meant that employees were unable to plan, and could be in seemingly steady employment before then spending a week "waiting on the sofa, watching their phone, waiting for a call to come in". In his oral evidence to the Commission, Michael Heasman, senior lecturer in food policy and management at Harper Adams University, said that zero-hours contracts are estimated to have increased three-fold since 2010, with 1.4 million contracts being used. This number has since risen by 6 per cent, up to 1.5 million contracts.<sup>52</sup>

Whether through sudden loss of employment, sudden loss of social security payments, or both, income shocks can push people who are already struggling into acute household food insecurity. This



squeezes the food budget even further, catalysing the prioritisation of calories over nutrients.

*Physical access to a sufficient quantity and quality of food*

People on low incomes are more likely to have difficulty physically accessing nutri-

tious and affordable food. This is because of higher food prices and reduced choice in local shops, and unavailable or unaffordable transport to larger, more affordable stores. For these reasons low-income households often have to pay more for everyday goods and services than higher income households.

The Commission’s Expert Panel described the difference in prices in different shops, with one member saying “the local corner shops or the Metro Tescos and Asdas, they’re not as cheap...they’ve not got anywhere near the same as what the larger supermarkets have and they are dearer.” The major supermarkets are quite open

**BOX 1: WHAT IS BEHIND THE FALL IN DISPOSABLE INCOMES, AND IS IT LIKELY TO CONTINUE?**

The drop in disposable incomes in recent years was caused by weak wage growth and social security reforms. Over the coming years, the biggest threat to disposable incomes is likely to come from social security changes.

The chart below shows the rises in regular weekly pay began to fall in 2008 – at the beginning of the recession – falling below the level of inflation until the end of 2014. For these years, prices were rising faster than wages.

Meanwhile, there has been little reduction in the proportion of people in low paid jobs over the last two decades. The number of people in low pay (calculated as being paid below two thirds of the median wage) rose from 15 per cent in 1975 up to 23 per cent in 1996 and has remained at roughly that level ever since, standing at 22 per cent in 2013.<sup>53</sup> The cur-

rent government’s policy to implement a ‘national living wage’ (different to the higher voluntary living wage) is likely to lead to this figure declining in future years as the wage floor will reach 60 per cent of median wages by 2020 (this policy, together with other initiatives to raise wages, is discussed in chapter three).

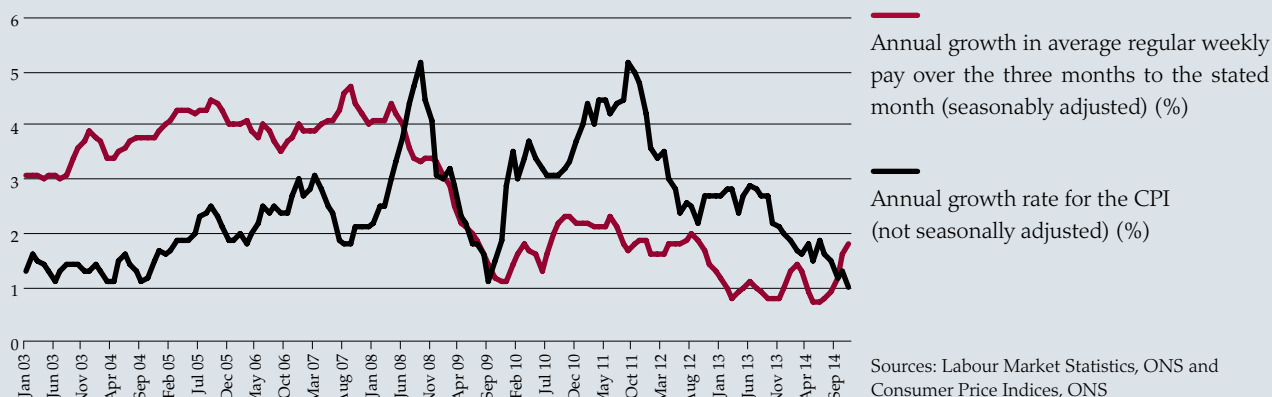
Social security changes have also had an impact on incomes in poorer households. According to the IFS, low-income households lost a higher percentage of their income than any other income group as a result of the tax and social security changes introduced by the coalition government between 2010 and 2015.<sup>54</sup> The bottom income quintile lost around 4 per cent of their annual income from tax and social security changes over the last five years, compared to the median loss of around 1 per cent of income.

The new government’s changes announced in the 2015 summer budget are likely to depress the incomes of low-

income households even further. Paul Johnson, director of the IFS, has said that the reform would cost “3 million families an average of £1,000 a year each” and that the announcement of a ‘national living wage’ will not “anywhere near compensate in cash terms” for these cuts to social security.<sup>55</sup> This is broadly supported by recent research from the Resolution Foundation, which shows that because of changes to tax credits, those earning the national living wage in the bottom income quintile lose an average of between £800 and £900 a year, even after their wage increase has been accounted for.<sup>56</sup>

The announcements made in the chancellor’s summer budget of 2015 mean that in the coming years, social security changes are likely to become a bigger driver of low-incomes, and therefore poverty and household food insecurity, than low wages.

FIGURE 2: Pay growth and inflation, 2003–2014

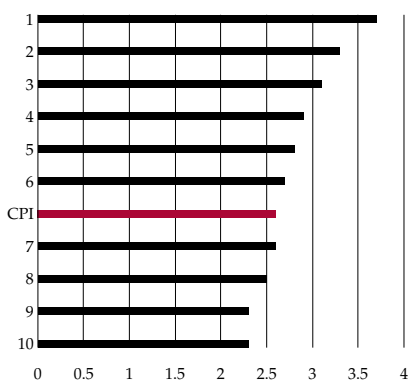


about pricing goods higher in their smaller stores.<sup>57</sup>

For the Panel, access to transport to reach the cheaper shops made a big difference – “if you shop around there’s quality, but it’s whether you’ve got the time or mobility to get around”, one member said. Different local area studies in Newcastle,<sup>58</sup> Leicester,<sup>59</sup> Preston<sup>60</sup> and the London Borough of Hackney<sup>61</sup> have highlighted that in some low-income areas there is a lack of availability of high-nutrition foods such as fresh meat, brown rice or high fibre pasta, as well as a lack of adequate and affordable public transport and higher prices in the smaller food stores.

People on low-incomes are also less likely to have the means to cook the food that they are able to access. The cost of buying, replacing, maintaining and powering cooking appliances puts up a barrier to low-income households having access to affordable, nutritious food. A member of the Commission’s Expert Panel summarised this issue by commenting “you could get a tin of value meatballs for 14 pence... but what if you’ve got no gas to cook food?”

**FIGURE 3: Annual average inflation rates by equivalised expenditure decile, (%), 2003–2013**



Source: ONS, *Variation in the inflation experience of UK households: 2003 – 2014* (15 December 2014, [www.ons.gov.uk/rel/elmr/variation-in-the-inflation-experience-of-uk-households/2003-2014/sty-variation-in-the-inflation-experience-of-uk-households.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/rel/elmr/variation-in-the-inflation-experience-of-uk-households/2003-2014/sty-variation-in-the-inflation-experience-of-uk-households.html))

Low-income households pay more for energy than the average household because they are more likely to be on a costly prepayment meter (which are often installed when a household has fallen into arrears on their energy bills).<sup>62</sup> Members of the Expert Panel explained that “you get charged daily for having no money on your meter” and outlined the absurd situation when those on low incomes “get charged for not being able to afford things.”

The combination of having less money and that money stretching less far is known as the poverty premium, and applies to many different goods and services.<sup>63</sup> For example, the cost of kitchen appliances is a barrier to low-income households having the means to prepare food of sufficient quality and quantity.

The poverty premium is borne out by the Commission’s analysis of how different households experience inflation. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI), the official measure of inflation, calculates inflation by measuring the price increases in a ‘cost of living’ basket of goods designed to be representative of the UK as a whole. This means that the CPI produces the average inflation experienced by all UK households. However, different households will be affected differently because of their different expenditures. For example, a report published by the ONS notes that ‘low expenditure’ households will be affected more by rises in the costs of utilities and food and drink, and less by changes to the price of education and package holidays. For this reason, those with less money to spend experience a rate of inflation higher than the average. For example, the chart to the left shows that in the decade until 2013 those in the bottom expenditure decile experienced an average inflation rate of 3.7 per cent, significantly higher than the average CPI rate of 2.6 per cent.

While low income is the biggest driver of household food insecurity, there also needs to be action taken to address physical inabilities to access nutritious, afford-

able food that this section of the report has outlined. Adequately addressing both will ensure everybody in the UK has adequate access to sufficient quantities and qualities of food.

### Food behaviour

The choices about food – whether that’s what food to buy or how to cook, serve or consume it – are all influenced by the environments in which those decisions are made. Instead of moral exhortations to people to eat better food, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the environment in which these choices are made, followed by action to change the environment.

### Cooking and purchasing skills

The issue of cooking and purchasing skills in low-income households in particular has recently polarised debate. On separate occasions, prominent public figures were reported to have said that “poor people don’t know how to cook” and that those in low-income households “never learn to cook, they never learn to manage and the moment they have got a bit of spare cash they are getting another tattoo.”<sup>64, 65</sup> On both occasions, these comments provoked outrage, with one MP labelling them “outrageous” and “out of touch” and the chairman of the Trussell Trust saying that they were “grossly unfair.”<sup>66</sup>

The reality is that there is no evidence to suggest that cooking and purchasing skills are worse in low-income households than in the rest of the population. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary. Market analyst Dr Clive Black told the Commission that low-income households are acting like “true economists” in the way in which they are managing their budgets: analysis of food spending over the recession has shown that low-income households tend to hunt out best value products and increasingly made use of promotions.<sup>67</sup> This trend is borne out by comments from members of the Commission’s Expert Panel. One member said: “I only buy the food that’s reduced at the end

of the day” and another recalled buying six boxes of cereal on one occasion when they were on offer. “When it gets reduced,” she said, “I buy loads.”

Cooking and purchasing skills are an issue right across the population. The time spent making the average meal has nearly halved over the last 20 years – from 60 minutes to 32 minutes.<sup>68</sup> According to a Change 4 Life poll, 71 per cent of respondents said that time pressures had meant they were more likely to consume convenience foods, rather than preparing from scratch.<sup>69</sup> The squeeze on time is partially caused by changes to the labour market – the average person is working more hours than in previous generations. In his evidence to the Commission, Professor Dale Southerton, director of the Sustainable Consumption Unit at the University of Manchester, also highlighted lifestyle changes which have decreased the regularity of the ‘family meal’, but these are trends which occur right across the income distribution.

Low levels of cooking skills cause low-income households to be at a greater risk of food insecurity than higher income households. This is because higher income households are able to use their purchasing power to buy a more nutritious diet even if their cooking skills are poor. For example, this might mean buying nutritious ready meals, using more expensive refined ingredients, or eating at restaurants serving high quality fresh food. Some low-income households are able to access a similar range of nutrients on a limited budget by having high levels of cooking skills and seeking out affordable, nutritious food. A great example of this is the work of Jack Monroe, who publishes recipes using basic household items on a tight budget on a hugely successful blog.<sup>70</sup> It is great to celebrate initiatives like this, but it is not realistic to expect large numbers of people in low-income households to change the way they acquire and cook food without a change to their environments.

### *The household*

Cultural influences within the family and household, habits and routines play a large role in diets and food choices. Choices regarding food cannot be completely explained by economic logic because food plays a wider role in society than simply a bundle of nutrients or a means to sustenance. In his evidence to the Commission, Professor Dale Southerton dismissed the idea of the “sovereign” logical, market-driven consumer, instead saying that consumption patterns are “socially patterned” as a result of habits, routines and company.

## **The squeeze on time is partially caused by changes to the labour market – the average person is working more hours than in previous generations**

The role of habits and routine has significance for low-income households. Dr Wendy Wills, reader in food and public health at the University of Hertfordshire, explained how households from different socio-economic backgrounds can have different food cultures because of their different financial circumstances. Lower income households are more likely to prioritise “getting fed” in meal preparation and food purchasing, whereas those with higher incomes prioritise family health, “presentation and self-preservation”. This correlates with the way in which households adjust their food budget during tough times – food becomes more about sustenance and survival, rather than a means of promoting good health, self-expression, aspiration, and participation in society.

### *Education*

School plays a significant role in shaping food behaviours, not just in terms of what children eat there, but also through the curriculum.

In the same way that breastfeeding has been proven to protect children from the health related effects of poverty in their early years, school meals can provide children from low-income households with a nutritious, hot meal that they may not get at home.<sup>71</sup> For this reason, universal school meals were provided between 1944 and 1980, from which point they were restricted to children from low-income families.<sup>72</sup> For most age-groups, free school meals are today provided only to children whose parents receive income support, jobseeker’s allowance and other social security benefits, though local authorities have the power to extend this in their area. However, in September 2014, the last government reintroduced universal free school meals for children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2.<sup>73</sup>

Nutrition standards in school meals have been the subject of a high profile campaign over the last decade. Following the publication of the Soil Association’s 2003 report *Food for Life: Healthy, local, organic school meals*, the Soil Association (including one of our commissioners, Jeanette Orrey MBE), leading public health figures and celebrity chef Jamie Oliver called for an improvement in the nutritional quality of school meals, and for schools to use more fresh ingredients and to teach children about where their food came from. This led to a number of initiatives focused on the nutritional quality of school meals, which arguably contributed to incidence of obesity in children beginning to fall in the late 2000s.<sup>74</sup>

More recently, there has been a focus on ensuring more schools become environments in which all children can learn more about food, and develop food skills and awareness. The Soil Association’s *Food for Life* initiative works with schools, as well as nurseries, hospitals, universities and care homes, to improve the sustainability and nutritional value of school meals, as well as teaching children about food provenance, seasonality, cultures, and developing



cooking skills.<sup>75</sup> These were key issues for schools identified by *The School Food Plan*, an independent report by the founders of the Leon chain of restaurants, Henry Dimbleby and John Vincent, commissioned by the education secretary in 2013.<sup>76</sup>

### *The local food environment*

The local food environment can influence food choices. In particular, an increase in the number of 'fast food' outlets in the UK has significantly augmented the availability of high calorie food with low nutritional value, with leading public health researchers calling some urban areas "fat swamps".<sup>77</sup> This food is often cheap, and the availability of it combined with its marketing (see below) can influence choices towards foods high in sugar, salt and fats and low in nutritional values.<sup>78</sup>

The growth in fast food outlets in the UK in recent years has been substantial. Research by Eva Maguire, Thomas Burgoigne and Pablo Monsivais at the University of Cambridge estimated that the number of fast food outlets rose by 45 per cent between 1990 and 2008.<sup>79</sup> This included small takeaways (including fish and chip shops which have declined in number over recent years)<sup>80</sup> and major food franchises like McDonalds and Burger King. More recent data shows that McDonalds – the biggest fast food company in terms of sales and second biggest in terms of outlets – has grown from 301 restaurants in the UK in 1990 to 1,246 in 2014: a rise of over 400 per cent.<sup>81</sup>

As the number of fast food outlets rises, so too does exposure to fats, salt, sugar and other ingredients linked to poor health outcomes. Research by Patrick Saunders, Annie Saunders and John Middleton in Sandwell, West Midlands has shown that 70 per cent of products sold at independent fast food outlets exceed the recommendation that a meal should contain less than 30 per cent of the guideline daily amounts (GDA) of fats, including trans-fatty acids, and salt.<sup>82</sup> The majority of meals in their

survey of independent takeaways contained more than 50 per cent of the GDA for those metrics. Chapter two looks at the effects of these ingredients on health, and the relationship between income, diet and health outcomes.

### *Marketing*

Food marketing has a big influence on choices and behaviours. This is significant because food marketing is not only successful at influencing brand-level choices, but also category-level choices.<sup>83</sup> For example, as well as influencing choices in favour of a certain brand of chocolate bar, marketing also influences choices in favour of any chocolate bar over other options, such as a piece of fruit.

Food marketing tends to promote foods that are low in nutrients and high in salt, fats and sugar. A 2009 systematic review of evidence into food marketing to children showed that contemporary food marketing 'predominantly promotes' foods which contain few micronutrients and are high in 'unhealthy' ingredients, such as salt, fats and sugar.<sup>84</sup> The study found that between 50 and 80 per cent of food and drink marketing is for low nutrition foods. The Commission's Expert Panel talked about how the relentless

advertising for "sugary cereals" and similar products led to pressures in the household from their children. One member recalled the "battles and battles [she] had" with her child while she was refusing to buy unhealthy foods.

Jon Alexander, a former advertising executive, told the Commission that brands aimed to "associate themselves at a fundamental human level with human needs and desires" and specifically target these adverts at "certain groups that are most likely to buy" their products. As we have established, low-income households are more likely to buy foods high in sugar, salt and fat than higher income households (for economic reasons, as well as others) and therefore are more at risk of being targeted. As Adam Oliver, reader in the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics, said to the Commission in his oral evidence, if "you make your packaging fancy and attractive, in their immediate moment people are more attracted to those products. You make them plain and there's evidence to show the demand goes down." In support of this analysis, studies have questioned the impact of current food marketing regulations on public health, and suggested that new ones could improve public health.<sup>85, 86</sup>



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## 2. THE DILEMMA: SUSTAINABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

**I**N ORDER TO improve access to food and eliminate household food insecurity, nutritious food needs to be more affordable. The current government has followed previous governments in highlighting the role of low food prices in achieving affordability. This chapter shows that targeting food prices, rather than boosting incomes, is the wrong approach because it is unsustainable and could reduce access to nutritious, affordable food in the long term.

This is because it will not be possible to keep food prices low while also combating climate change, improving diet-related health outcomes, and ending working poverty in the food workforce and supply chains. If these issues are not addressed they threaten to pose an even greater danger to low-income households in the long term.

Therefore, there must be a new focus on improving incomes and tackling barriers to affordable nutritious food rather than keeping prices artificially low at the expense of the environment, public health and working conditions in the food supply chain. Eliminating household food insecurity at the same time as fixing the food system's structural unsustainability will mean ensuring everybody has a sufficient income to be able to manage the higher food prices of the future.

### **The paradox of cheap food**

While the proportion of disposable income spent on food by low-income households has begun to rise, notably following the commodity price shocks of 2007/08 and 2010/11, the effects on consumers in general have been substantially mitigated

by intense competition between retailers in the UK. More recently, depressed global demand for food (from lower than expected economic growth in some emerging economies, combined with more efficient production systems increasing output, policy changes on agricultural production and trade, and the lower cost of oil) have resulted not only in the price of food falling in real terms, but also a situation where many farmers (in the UK and elsewhere) struggle to meet their own production costs, milk being a particularly acute current example.

**If these issues are not addressed they threaten to pose an even greater danger to low-income households in the long term**

The current government has identified low food prices as a good thing, because it makes food more affordable. In May 2015, the chancellor reportedly said that “we should welcome the positive effects that lower food and energy prices bring for households”.<sup>87</sup> This position was confirmed by a note in the summer budget of 2015 that stated “low inflation recently experienced in the UK, driven by lower fuel and food costs, has helped support real incomes and household budgets”.<sup>88</sup> A review of UK food price policy by Victoria Schoen and Tim Lang argues that this is not a new policy: keeping food prices low has been an aspect of UK government policy since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846.<sup>89</sup>

This historic prioritisation of low food

prices constitutes a real paradox – and one with significant consequences. Low prices and low margins for producers risk leading to a vicious circle of businesses chasing volume to maintain profit. This in turn perpetuates cost-cutting across supply chains, whether in terms of pay and conditions for workers or the environmental, ethical and other impacts of production. It also increases pressure to use cheaper (and potentially less healthy) ingredients to meet lower price points. It creates a situation in which cost and convenience may take precedence over environmental impact, nutritional benefit and provenance.

While this is not sustainable, interventions to regulate markets or influence consumer choice are politically very difficult, especially if their outcome is to deliberately raise prices. The need to protect those on lower incomes can therefore easily become an excuse for not addressing more fundamental food system failures.

However, some of the consequences of this neglect of environmental impact, nutritional benefit and working conditions – climate change, poor diet-related health outcomes, and low pay and bad terms in food supply chains – stand to disproportionately impact upon low-income households. This chapter sets out why this is the case in each of these instances, and discusses the tensions between action and inaction.

### **The pressures in the food system**

#### *1. Environmental damage*

The food system has a damaging impact on the environment that could lead to increased poverty internationally because of climate change and environmental degradation. The damage this could have on the future supply of food could push food prices up at home. This has led to growing pressure for changes to the food system to protect the environment. However, addressing environmental damage, from pollution to soil erosion to greenhouse gas

emissions, caused by the food system could also push food prices up too.

While at first it may seem counter-productive for food prices to rise, a long term perspective shows that low-income households potentially have the most to benefit from action to avoid further environmental damage.

Firstly, the food system is a key contributor to climate change and other forms of environmental damage, which in time risks wrecking livelihoods internationally and raising food prices and narrowing food choices at home. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that agriculture directly contributes around 10 to 12 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions, a figure that rises to up to 30 per cent when taking into account agriculturally induced deforestation (and other forms of land use change) and the environmental impact of the food system beyond agriculture.<sup>90, 91</sup>

The consequence of these emissions – damaging climate change – is likely to have a significant impact on the food system. Tim Benton, professor of population ecology at the University of Leeds and UK Champion for Global Food Security, told the Commission that if no action is taken, the planet is projected to be on average 4C warmer by 2100, but this average masks underlying spatial and temporal variation. Some parts of the world are projected to be on average 6–8C warmer than now (such as the US mid-west and Brazil), but in a hot period – such as a heatwave – this increase could be even higher. Such changes may profoundly affect the way the food system works, and we are already seeing the signature of climate change in terms of increasing incidence of extreme weather. Climate change is likely to have a more acute effect on developing countries, which have insufficient means to adapt, and where there are already major problems with household food insecurity.

Therefore, contributions from the food system to climate change could have a pernicious effect on the global poor. That

is, food produced using unsustainable environmental practices may make food more affordable for people in the UK in the short term, but it could also contribute to damaging the livelihoods of food producers in the developing world.

Secondly, as well as contributing to damaging livelihoods abroad, climate change will damage future food supply and could therefore lead to increased food prices and reduced choice in the UK. The UK currently imports around 40 per cent of its food from abroad.<sup>92</sup> Various studies, including those by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, predict that without action climate change will hit global food stocks, and reduce food availability and accessibility.<sup>93</sup> The consequence for UK food prices may be that as food stocks reduce or supplies become more variable, food prices will increase and choice will narrow.

The environmental damage caused by the food production system is very costly too. The government's Natural Capital Committee estimate that "greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution, air pollution, habitat destruction, soil erosion and flooding" costs the economy around £700 million per year.<sup>94</sup>

Climate change is a global issue and as such requires coordinated international action. The approaches that have been proposed to address food-related impacts so far include taxation and reform to the EU Common Agricultural Policy to introduce further environmental conditions for payments. In both of these cases, costs would be added to the food system that could lead to a rise in the final price of all foods.<sup>95, 96</sup> This, of course, could make food less affordable and increase risk of household food insecurity.

In his oral evidence to the Commission, Benton said that the "agri-food system is completely not fit for purpose going into the future, even though it has been relatively good to us over the last 20 or 30

years." Benton acknowledged that the intensive farming and willingness to extract value from the environment has delivered food to shopping baskets at cheaper prices. But he said that the "long-term risks are too great not to act."

There is also an environmental issue about waste being created within the food system. 15 million tonnes of food waste is produced annually in the UK, which usually ends up in landfill or is incinerated.<sup>97</sup> Just under half of this is from households (7.2 million tonnes) but much of it is wasted in production, manufacturing, retail and transport.<sup>98</sup> While the use of waste or surplus food is no more of a solution to food insecurity than the concept of food banks, the sheer volume of good food that goes uneaten in the UK represents a huge loss of the resources used in its production, as well as perpetuating cost and inefficiency throughout the value chain.

## 2. Health

While poor diet-related health outcomes are more common in low-income households, (see chapter one) poor diet-related health affects people right across the income distribution curve and treatment accounts for a significant proportion of the National Health Service budget. Pressure on public spending means there is rightly an increasing prioritisation of prevention over treatment. This is important, as it will help people to live richer, more active lives. However, methods to achieve this (principally regulation, bans and taxes) could see prices of some foods rise and food choice narrow. Given that low-income households are more likely to eat foods with high fat, salt and sugar contents, (see chapter one) they are more likely to be affected by such changes.

Poor food and diets are a major cause of health problems across the UK. Deficiencies in micronutrients such as fibre, iron, zinc, folic acid and vitamin A can lead to health conditions such as anaemia, irritable bowel syndrome and bowel cancers, and

blindness in children.<sup>99</sup> Excessive intake of salt, sugar, certain fats and calories overall can cause obesity, heart disease and diabetes.<sup>100</sup> Poor diets cause 33,000 premature deaths every year<sup>101</sup> and they are linked to 30 per cent of life years lost in early death or disability.<sup>102</sup>

International research has shown that incidence of household food insecurity comes at a cost to health services. A study of the association between household food insecurity and annual health care costs in Ontario, Canada shows that health care costs were 16 per cent higher than average in households with marginal household food insecurity, 32 per cent higher in households with moderate household food insecurity, and 76 per cent higher in households with severe household food insecurity.<sup>103</sup> Until household food insecurity is measured in the UK, it will be impossible to be clear to what extent incidence of household food insecurity impacts upon the UK's health service.

However, there is UK research on the cost of diet-related illness. Research has shown that diseases directly caused by obesity and people being overweight cost

the NHS £6.3bn in 2015, and are set to cost £9.7bn a year in 2050.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, the wider costs of obesity and people being overweight are estimated to cost the British economy £27bn in 2015 because of identified lower productivity, higher rates of absenteeism and other issues, rising to £50bn in 2050.<sup>105</sup>

With further public spending reductions planned for at least the next five years, it is unlikely ministers will want to allow expenditure to grow at this rate. And while public spending may begin to increase after this period, finding the money to plug this significant funding gap will be difficult without tax rises. Therefore potential parties of government have a keen interest in putting a stop to the rising cost of poor diets.

In order to improve the health and wellbeing of the population and halt the growth in expenditure on treatment of diet-related conditions, action needs to be taken urgently. Today, one of the most commonly advocated policy devices to improve public health is tax or duty. Health-related food and drink taxes are used in Finland, France, Hungary and Mexico to improve public health,<sup>106</sup> and in

the UK various taxes have been called for by the British Medical Association,<sup>107</sup> the Faculty of Public Health,<sup>108</sup> the Food Ethics Council,<sup>109</sup> Sustain,<sup>110</sup> and the UK Health Forum.<sup>111</sup> Where food taxes have been introduced, they have targeted sugar, fat and salt levels, with some policies targeting specific products – for example, France has a tax on drinks containing added sugar.<sup>112</sup> These policy interventions have been made too recently for any comprehensive studies of their long-term effects to have been completed, but shorter-term studies have shown that consumption of the taxed goods has reduced.<sup>113</sup> A review of the evidence on the effectiveness of fiscal interventions published by the Food Climate Research Network and Chatham House found that, on the whole, tax changes do improve diets and potentially improve health outcomes.<sup>114</sup>

Studies have shown that taxes have led to a rise in prices of the taxed goods of between 3 and 10 per cent.<sup>115</sup> This raises a key tension in taking this policy route. Chapter one has already established that, because of affordability and a number of other issues, low-income households are more likely to eat food higher in salt, fat and sugar than the average household. The tension comes if low-income households either continue to eat these foods or rather than substituting these foods for more healthy foods, choose instead to buy cheaper versions of foods that are still high in salt, fat and sugar. This has been called the 'substitution effect'.<sup>116</sup> This means that where taxes and duties are introduced, they need to be carefully targeted to avoid unintended consequences.

### 3. Workforce

The third tension within the food system is growing pressure to ensure workers in all sectors of the food industry workforce, in the UK and abroad, achieve fair pay and working conditions. Certain sectors of the UK's food industry have a high incidence of low pay (which chapter one shows is a

TABLE 1: Low pay in the UK food workforce

Source	Total food related employees	Proportion paid below the Living Wage (%)	Number paid below Living Wage
Catering	1,590,000	69	1,097,100
Retailing and wholesaling	1,153,000	38	438,140
Agriculture and Fishing	430,000	29	124,700
Manufacturing	390,000	11	42,900
Total	3,563,000	48	1,702,840

Source: ONS, *Variation in the inflation experience of UK households: 2003–2014* (15 December 2014, [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/elmr/variation-in-the-inflation-experience-of-uk-households/2003-2014/sty-variation-in-the-inflation-experience-of-uk-households.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/elmr/variation-in-the-inflation-experience-of-uk-households/2003-2014/sty-variation-in-the-inflation-experience-of-uk-households.html))



key driver of poverty and household food insecurity) and international workers further down the supply chain are often paid a fraction of the UK's national minimum wage. There is, however, a debate on how much food prices would rise by ensuring everybody in the food supply chain has access to fair remuneration and conditions. The tension is that higher food prices could have an effect on food affordability for those with low wage jobs outside the food industry.

High demand for cheaper food has meant that a significant proportion of the food industry has reduced costs to a minimum in order to sell food and ingredients at lower prices. A major cost to food businesses is the cost of labour, and these pressures have an effect on wage rates and working conditions in the UK and abroad.

According to Defra, there are just over 3.5 million people employed in food-related catering, retailing, wholesaling, agriculture, and manufacturing.<sup>117</sup> If you assume that

the food subsectors of these industries have a similar incidence of low pay to the industries as a whole, then an estimated 1.7 million food industry employees are paid less than the level of the living wage, the rate of pay set according to a minimum level of income needed to maintain basic but socially acceptable living standards. This means that just under half (48 per cent) of employees working in the UK food industry are paid less than a living wage, over twice the proportion in the UK as a whole (22 per cent).<sup>118</sup>

However, low pay is not uniform across the food industry. While 69 per cent of catering employees are paid less than a living wage, just 11 per cent of those working in food manufacturing are paid below this level. The level of incidence of low pay in the food workforce as a whole is so high because catering, coupled with retail where 38 per cent of employees are paid less than a living wage, account for more than two thirds of the total food workforce.

As demonstrated in chapter one, low pay is an increasingly important contributor to poverty and low incomes. Indeed, the data available from charitable food providers shows that low-paid work is one of the top reasons for charitable food use.<sup>119</sup> As such, the incidence of low pay within food-related industries in the UK presents a troubling paradox: a significant number of people producing, manufacturing and selling food are likely to struggle to access an adequate quantity or quality of food.

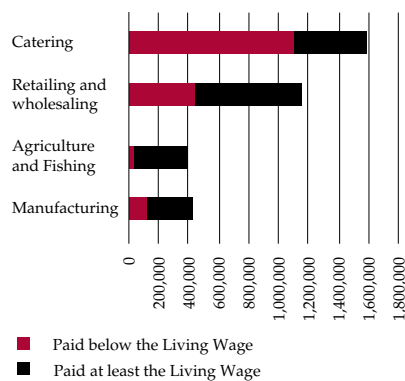
One member of the Expert Panel, employed as a carer on the minimum wage, described her own experience of this paradox, saying that the meals she prepared for the person she cared for were always "more healthy" than her own, and she had "more time to prepare food" for the person she cared for than she would do for her own meals. This situation evokes the slogan from a 1980s National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers campaign: 'We sow it, we reap it, we can't afford to eat it.'

Another issue affecting the food industry workforce is work insecurity and

uncertainty, largely due to the use of zero-hours contracts and underemployment. Statistics from the Office for National Statistics shows that as with low pay, incidence of zero-hours contracts tends to be higher in the food-related industries than elsewhere.<sup>120</sup> For example, 10 per cent of people employed in the 'Accommodation and Food' sector are employed on a zero-hours contract, making incidence in the sector over four times higher than the average in the economy as a whole, at 2.3 per cent. Research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, shows a substantial minority (27 per cent) of employees on zero-hours contracts feel that their employer treats them unfairly.<sup>121</sup> In the Commission's visit to Boston in Lincolnshire, a major food producing area, commissioners heard of the anxiety such contracts can cause as employees spend "hours waiting at home for a call" with an offer of work, uncertain as to whether they will get enough hours to pay their bills and living costs.<sup>122</sup> It is this group of employees, with very little capacity to save any money and therefore no buffer for bad times, who are most at risk from the unintended consequences of zero-hours contracts. For them, a sudden reduction in hours at work could lead them to experience poverty and household food insecurity more acutely.

The financialisation of the food system has also posed new challenges for work security for the food workforce. Research in the US has pointed out that firms in the food manufacturing and service sectors have been targeted for quick rates of return by investors, turning firms into a "bundle of assets to be deployed or redeployed depending on the short-run rates of returns that can be earned".<sup>123</sup> This "impatient capital" can increase volatility in the food industry, accelerating "layoffs, casualization and outsourcing".<sup>124</sup> This focus on short-term value extraction is thus causing increasing uncertainty and job insecurity in the workforce. It can also impact on farming systems by mining rather than sustain-

**FIGURE 4: UK food workforce by industry and hourly pay**



Sources: Calculations made by author. Figures for workforce by food subsector taken from *Food Statistics Pocketbook 2014*, based on the Annual Business Survey (ONS) and Agriculture in the United Kingdom (Defra). Figures for the proportion of employees paid below the Living Wage by industry are from *Work That Pays: the final report of the Living Wage Commission* (Living Wage Commission, 2014), based on the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2013 (ONS).

ing the environment, such as soils and water resources.

Working conditions and low pay are clearly not issues that only affect the UK's food workforce. Written evidence submitted to the Commission by Oxfam stated that cocoa farmers in Ghana earn \$0.84 a day, and \$0.54 a day in Cote D'Ivoire, well below the international poverty line of \$2 a day. Fiona Gooch, senior policy adviser at Traidcraft, said that in addition to a high incidence of low pay, there is also a focus on labour flexibility in the international food supply chain that usually means "long overtime at short notice" for employees who know refusal will put their job security at risk. Gooch said that this was the logical way for food companies to operate within the current system, saying that "anyone employing people at a labour-intensive stage of production is going to look for a flexible, cheap workforce." However, the evidence submitted by Oxfam notes that some "more ethically minded businesses are starting to implement improvements in wages for their own employees and support better wages in their supply chains".

A number of initiatives have made inroads into addressing the problems of low pay and poor working conditions in the food industry domestically and internationally.

Domestically, agricultural wages boards were longstanding collective bargaining initiatives to give security and improve working conditions to agricultural workers across the UK. However, the board for England and Wales was abolished in 2013. Boards remain in Scotland and Northern Ireland, though, and a new board has since been reinstated in Wales. With origins in the mid-1920s, the Agricultural Wages Act 1948 introduced a regulatory system which sought to equalise unequal relations between farm workers and their employers.<sup>125</sup> As well as providing a graded pay scale which rewarded increased skills, it also covered weekly hours and overtime rates, annual holiday entitlement, sick pay and conditions of flexible workers. However, its abolition in England

in 2013 led trade unions to warn that the absence of a regulatory framework could drive down already low wages of vulnerable and often low skilled rural workers.<sup>126</sup> This appears to be confirmed by an April 2014 survey conducted by Unite the Union with its rural and agricultural members in England. It found that 44 per cent had not received a pay rise since the abolition of the scheme the previous year.<sup>127</sup>

The Gangmasters Licensing Authority was introduced with the Gangmasters Licensing Act in 2004 to tackle the exploitation of food processing and agriculture workers following the Morecambe Bay tragedy, when over 20 cockle pickers drowned. It aims to prevent worker exploitation, protect vulnerable people and tackle unlicensed and criminal activities.<sup>128</sup>

### **There must be a new focus on improving incomes rather than keeping prices artificially low**

However, research shows it has struggled to stop exploitation in the food industry, with reports of bullying, racism, under payment of wages and wages paid below the minimum wage, and poor accommodation for workers.<sup>129</sup>

Internationally, the most well-established initiative is the Fairtrade movement, which highlights the key tension that lies around taking action to improve pay and conditions for the food workforce. The tension was summed up by a member of the Commission's Expert Panel, who said "we'd all like to pay that little bit extra for the Fairtrade food but it's not an option because of lack of money." Indeed, the Fairtrade model is underpinned by an acknowledgement that some people are willing to pay more for food and other goods that are produced responsibly.<sup>130</sup> This recognises that in order to improve working conditions and wages, the price of foods and other goods is likely to go up. Oxfam's written evidence

submission states that this premium need only be a "very small amount" as a fraction of the total cost of the food in the shops. However, this potential price rise could have an unintended consequence of more people on low incomes falling into household food insecurity because food is less affordable.

### **Being clear about the tensions between taking action and the effect on affordability**

The key dilemma in the food system is that changes to tackle climate change, improve health and address working poverty in the food workforce could push up food prices, reduce choice, and make it harder for people on low incomes to access affordable food. However, the cost of inaction on these issues is likely to be worse for low-income households over the long term: even higher food prices, even further reduction of choice, even worse health outcomes, and worse pay conditions for the food workforce.

There are no 'win-win' situations in which simple policy fixes can both solve the food system's unsustainability issues and keep food prices low. However, this should not be an excuse to shy away from the big changes that need to be made to make the food system more sustainable, improve health outcomes, and to ensure fair working conditions are provided to the food system workforce. The challenge is to ensure that the changes that need to be made do not disproportionately impact upon people on low incomes.

Therefore, as a Commission we believe there must be a new focus on improving incomes rather than keeping prices artificially low at the expense of the environment, public health and working conditions in the food supply chain. Eliminating household food insecurity at the same time as fixing the food system's structural unsustainability will mean ensuring everybody has a sufficient income to be able to manage the higher food prices of the future.

### 3. A FOOD SYSTEM THAT WORKS BETTER FOR PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES

ENDING HOUSEHOLD FOOD insecurity requires a change of approach from governments. The need for this change is amplified by the unsustainable pressures caused by the food system, detailed in chapter two.

This new approach means government taking responsibility for food and household food insecurity back from charities, businesses and individuals. To do this, the UK government should take a lead coordinating role to end household food insecurity, while working in partnership with devolved governments, local authorities, regulators, businesses and civil society.

Above all, a new approach must mean an end to treatment of the problems of household food insecurity, and a new focus on prevention. The Commission has set out five key principles for a sustainable food system that works better for people on low

incomes. From these five underpinning principles, the Commission has identified 14 action points for governments, local authorities, regulators, researchers, civil society and business to end household food insecurity in the UK, and create a fairer food system.

#### Principles for a sustainable food system that works better for people on low incomes

Chapter one gave a thorough account of the *problems* caused by poverty and household food insecurity. Chapter two set out the *tensions* surrounding action to address these problems. In order to now establish the *solutions* to these over-arching problems, we must start from first principles. That is, what do we mean by creating a fairer food system in the UK?

#### BOX 2: PRINCIPLES FOR A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM THAT WORKS BETTER FOR PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES

1. Everyone in the UK should have secure access to nutritious, sustainable food they can afford, and nobody should live in a state of household food insecurity.
2. Food banks and other forms of charitable food provision should become unnecessary by 2020.
3. Decent work is the best way of achieving sustainable food security

for most households, but the social security system also has an important role to play for many both in and out of work.

4. The links between low income and diet-related ill health should be broken.
5. People on low incomes should be protected from price rises and other potential negative consequences arising from the essential action needed to address the long-term environmental, health and workforce challenges of the food system.

The Commission's five principles for a sustainable food system that works better for people on low incomes should underpin any action taken.

#### 1. Everyone in the UK should have secure access to nutritious, sustainable food they can afford, and nobody should live in a state of household food insecurity

The UK is one of the richest countries in the world, with access to sufficient food to feed all its people adequately. It should be possible to ensure that everybody has the ability to acquire or consume an adequate quality and sufficient quantity of food in ways that do not exclude or stigmatise people.

The rise of charitable food use in recent years shows that some people are having to turn to help to avoid going hungry. But this is just the tip of the iceberg of household food insecurity, with many more people lacking access to an adequate quality and quantity of food. However, there is no official measurement of household food insecurity in the UK, so it is currently impossible to understand the true scale of the challenge to end household food insecurity in the UK and how different groups are affected.

Food is not only a basic human need, it is also a fundamental human right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 included a right 'to produce or acquire food in normal and customary ways' and what has become known as the 'right to food' was enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976. The Covenant was signed in the UK by James Callaghan's government later that year. International human rights treaties such as this one place obligations on governments and are subject to regular scrutiny, though the right to food is not a legally enforceable right for citizens.

Ensuring everybody has secure access to nutritious food they can afford means addressing the poverty premium, particularly in relation to food costs. The poverty premium is the additional amount of money

those on low incomes often have to pay for goods and services.

## *2. Food banks and other forms of charitable food provision should become unnecessary by 2020*

The emergence and subsequent rise in use of food banks and charitable food provision has been a response to the need for food from people suffering from acute household food insecurity. In this sense this use is a sign that the safety net that should be preventing household food insecurity is no longer working.

Many people find the idea of using a food bank socially unacceptable. People working in charitable food provision often feel that they should not have to be doing what they are doing and many people who are food insecure and going hungry do not visit charitable food providers because of embarrassment. The UK should have a social and economic structure that means people do not need to rely on charity to cater for themselves and their family.

Those working in food banks are responding to a need from hungry people. But to accept food banks as part of the solution to household food insecurity is to ignore the reasons why people are hungry. The aim should be a reduction in acute household food insecurity to such an extent that food banks cease to exist. It should be possible to do this by 2020.

## *3. Decent work is the best way of achieving sustainable food security for most households, but the social security system also has an important role to play for many both in and out of work*

The largest driver behind household food insecurity is low income. Therefore, it is essential that any strategy focuses on raising incomes of those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, food insecurity.

Work has traditionally been viewed as the best route out of poverty, but recent pay stagnation has meant that the majority of people in poverty in the UK are

now in a working household. In order to ensure that work can deliver household food security, there needs to be progress on wages to ensure everybody working full time meets a minimum standard of income sufficient for them to afford basic living costs and buy the food they need for a nutritious diet. This is what William Beveridge called a 'subsistence level' of income. A sectoral approach concentrating on the lowest paying sectors and a recognition of the positive role played by sectoral collective bargaining will be important to achieving this.

The social security system also plays an important role in tackling poverty and reducing risk of household food insecurity. People who are unable to work should also receive a level of income that meets this same minimum income standard. Government must take responsibility for ensuring that a combination of work and social security is sufficient to reach the minimum income standard for everyone, whatever their family circumstances. The UK has come close to achieving this for pensioners, but it is still far off for children and those of working age.<sup>131</sup>

It is time for a frank reckoning on food and poverty: household food insecurity cannot be completely eliminated if some people do not have sufficient levels of income to be able to acquire adequate quantities and sufficient qualities of food.

## *4. The link between low income and bad diet-related health outcomes should be broken*

People on low incomes are currently more likely to suffer from diet-related diseases such as diabetes, obesity and heart disease. As a result, people on low incomes are more likely to die earlier and suffer longer periods of ill-health, especially in later life.

Breaking this link will involve ensuring everybody meets a minimum standard of income in order to be able to buy food of adequate nutritional quality after core

living costs like housing and energy are taken care of. Young people need to be able to develop the food habits, skills and knowledge needed to eat well from childhood through adolescence into adulthood.

Action also needs to be taken to ensure people at risk of household food insecurity are physically able to access, cook and eat adequate quantities and qualities of food. This means ensuring adequate quantities and qualities of food are accessible locally and that low-income households have the ability to buy, maintain and replace cooking appliances.

## *5. People on low incomes should be protected from price rises and other potential negative consequences arising from the essential action needed to address the long-term environmental, health and workforce challenges of the food system*

There must be a new focus on improving incomes rather than keeping prices artificially low at the expense of the environment, public health and working conditions in the food supply chain. Eliminating household food insecurity at the same time as fixing the food system's structural unsustainability will mean ensuring everybody has a sufficient income to be able to manage the higher food prices of the future.

The risk of further rises in the price of food is likely to arise in the long term from the structural unsustainability of the food system, or in the short term from measures to address this unsustainability. This adds an urgency to addressing the drivers of household food insecurity now before more people are affected.

Therefore, in order to combat climate change, improve diet-related health outcomes and embed decent working conditions across the food workforce and supply chains, we must first tackle poverty. Ability to pay cannot hold back essential action to address the food system's structural unsustainability.



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## Action needed to achieve a sustainable food system that works better for people on low incomes

The Commission's five principles for a fairer food system are ambitious given the scale of the problems with the food system and access to food that are set out in the first two chapters. Achieving a food system and a level of food access that works in line with these principles will take time.

Despite the length of the journey needed to meet these principles, there are changes that can be made now and over the medium term that will allow the UK to start the journey towards the elimination of household food insecurity and to establish the building blocks for a fairer food system.

### First steps

A new approach from government is key to beginning this journey towards a country without household food insecurity, and where the future challenges posed by the food system are recognised.

The government should make its intentions clear by showing new leadership on household food insecurity, taking responsibility for its obligations under international human rights law. The government will need to get a grip on the scale of household food insecurity in the UK, and regulators and local authorities will need to play their role in eliminating barriers to accessible, nutritious, affordable food.

### 1. A new minister with responsibility for eliminating household food insecurity

*The prime minister should appoint a new cross-departmental minister with a responsibility for eliminating household food insecurity.*

A coordinated approach to tackling household food insecurity is needed in government. This approach needs clear leadership to bring together government action by the many different government departments with an interest in food and poverty. The minister should work in partnership with devolved governments, local authorities, regulators, businesses, trade

unions, civil society and those in poverty to end household food insecurity in the UK.

There is a successful tradition of new cross-departmental ministerial appointments in the UK. A minister for the Olympics was installed to ensure the success of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012. More recently, the new Conservative government has introduced the role of minister for local growth and the northern powerhouse to build up the economic power of the north of England,<sup>132</sup> and a minister for refugees to coordinate action across the Home Office, Department for Communities and Local Government, and the Department for International Development.<sup>133</sup>

The minister could follow these examples of cross-departmental ministers to take the necessary leadership to ensure action is joined up, focused and targeted on outcomes across government.

The minister could play a key convening role to ensure that best practice in dealing with food insecurity across the UK is shared. A number of local authorities across the UK, including Belfast, Edinburgh and Greater Manchester, have recently stated that despite the work they and local charities are doing to address household food insecurity, eliminating household food insecurity requires a shared effort with the UK government.<sup>134</sup> Scotland's first minister has also recently announced a package of measures to tackle household food insecurity in Scotland, but it was accompanied by an acknowledgement that they would not be able to eliminate it working alone.<sup>135</sup>

The minister could convene the different parts of government – UK, devolved, and local authorities – so that they could all play their part in the effort to end household food insecurity.

It is crucial that the minister ensures people with experience of poverty are involved in efforts to end household food insecurity. People with experience of poverty will be best-placed to know what will and will not work as decisions are made on addressing household food

insecurity. The Commission's work has benefited immensely from the involvement of the Expert Panel, who have not only provided lived experience of poverty and household food insecurity, but have steered the Commission's work to ensure it remains relevant to those it seeks to help. The Scottish government have recently taken this approach by including a Poverty Truth Commissioner with lived experience of poverty on their Scottish Food Commission. A similar approach would ensure the UK government had an approach that remained relevant with people in poverty and household food insecurity.

The minister's work could be guided by the principles set out in this report and would be able to take responsibility for coordinating the delivery of the rest of the Commission's action points.

### 2. Monitoring the right to food

*The new minister and devolved governments should take responsibility for their duties to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food, while civil society organisations should form an alliance to monitor the government's compliance.*

The right to food, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and to which the UK is a signatory, is about the right to feed oneself and one's family with dignity. This 'rights-based' approach to food places access to food within a social justice framework.<sup>136</sup> Guidance on the right to food published by the UN Committee on Economic, Social And Cultural Rights states that:

*The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement. The right to adequate food shall therefore not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with a minimum package of calories, proteins and other*

specific nutrients. The right to adequate food will have to be realized progressively. However, states have a core obligation to take the necessary action to mitigate and alleviate hunger as provided for in paragraph 2 of article 11, even in times of natural or other disasters.

Source: UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment No. 12: The Right to Adequate Food (Art. 11 of the Covenant), 12 May 1999

Despite being a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976), the UK has not yet given it legal status under domestic law.<sup>137</sup> The doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty means that state international law needs to be translated into domestic law if it is to be applicable.<sup>138</sup>

In England, the new minister should take responsibility for the government's commitment to protect, respect and fulfil the right to food. Welsh and Northern Irish devolved governments, who have responsibility for human rights in their jurisdictions, should take the same step. This will mean committing to ending household food insecurity – under the principles of 'progressive realisation' (which means working towards the objective at a pace at which resources allow).

In Scotland, where the right to food is already an established subject of debate within civil society, the cabinet secretary for social justice should consider enshrining the International Covenant into Scottish law, building on the human rights legislation in the Scotland Act 1998. With the right to food, Scotland has the opportunity to take the lead in the UK, working to chart the route to the elimination of household food insecurity that other nations are able to follow.

Meanwhile, civil society organisations across the UK should form an alliance to monitor the government's progress, as 'principal duty bearer', for its compliance with its obligations under the right to food.

This alliance should also work with those experiencing poverty and household food insecurity, as well as those looking for an outlet to push for more structural change in the UK food system to put pressure on the government to deliver on the right to food. A model for such an alliance could be the group of civil society organisations that supported the recent report *Square Meal: Why we need a new recipe for the future* (2014), which included the Food Ethics Council, Sustain and Friends of the Earth. Such an alliance should include organisations working with those in poverty, such as Church Action on Poverty, and people with direct experience of poverty, such as those on the Commission's Expert Panel.

This monitoring role should include bringing to public and political attention the five-year periodic reviews presented to the United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights by the UK government with regard to the progress undertaken in realising the right to food and achieving food security for all within the context of an adequate standard of living. This would require the setting of indicators (as noted in the next recommendation), benchmarks, targets and timelines as realisable goals.

### BOX 3: MEASURING HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY: AN EXAMPLE

The Voices of the Hungry project organised by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations uses the following survey to measure household food insecurity:

During the past 12 months, because of a lack of money or other resources, was there a time when...

1. You were worried you would run out of food?
2. You were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food?
3. You ate only a few kinds of foods?
4. You had to skip a meal?
5. You ate less than you thought you should?
6. Your household ran out of food?
7. You were hungry but did not eat?
8. You went without eating for a whole day?

**3. Measuring household food insecurity**  
*Robust measures of the extent of food insecurity in the UK should be introduced. These measures can then be used to monitor and track trends in the nature and extent of household food insecurity across the four UK jurisdictions over time, and also determine the impact that policy and other actions intended to mitigate and eliminate food insecurity are making.*

The evidence the Commission has received shows that those people using food banks and charitable food provision are the tip of the iceberg of everybody affected by household food insecurity. Not everybody suffering from household food insecurity is able to access a food bank or charitable food provider, many choose not to, and users of charitable food are usually suffering from acute food insecurity.

Therefore in order to address household food insecurity it is to be clear about the scale of the problem. Robust measures will provide this clarity.

The initial establishment of the measurement should include a comprehensive review of current and previous methodologies for measuring household food insecurity, such as those used in Canada and other international initiatives, such as

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

the Voices of the Hungry project organised by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (See box 3).<sup>139, 140</sup>

The developmental and conceptual work of what is included in the measurement should be led by a network of independent experts and academics and supported by research councils. From then on, measurements should be updated annually and collected and published by the Office for National Statistics. The data will allow policymakers, as well as civil society and food justice groups, to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of action being taken to address household food insecurity.

#### 4. 25 Year Plan for Food and Farming

*The secretary of state for the environment, food and rural affairs should broaden the focus of the 25 year plan for food and farming, working with the new minister to include strategies to reduce household food security.*

The current government has rightly pledged to take a long-term perspective on food and farming in the UK by starting work on a 25 year plan. However, there is a danger of this review being too narrow and not taking account of all of the different pressures of the food system and how they affect people. The work on the plan should be broadened to look at household food security.

The Conservative Party's manifesto from 2015 stated that:

*"We will set out a long-term vision for the future of British farming, working with industry to develop a 25 year plan to grow more, buy more and sell more British food."<sup>141</sup>*

Since the general election work has begun in partnership with industry to look at how the UK can "grow more, buy more and sell more British food".<sup>142</sup> But as currently constituted this process will ignore many aspects of UK food and farming, including household food insecurity. A plan to grow more, buy more and sell more British food is not broad enough to look at *how*

this food is grown and what impact is has on the environment; *who* will be buying more of it, the pay and conditions of the workforce; or *what* the nutritional value will be. Neither are these themes broad enough to include the impacts of the food system on those on low incomes, nor the reasons that people choose certain foods over others and the environments in which these choices are made in.

A broadening of the plan would allow it not only to look at the crucial issue of how to support food and farming businesses, but also to incorporate secure access to affordable, nutritious food. This could allow the work to include plans for the contribution UK food producers, manufacturers and retailers can make to ensuring more people in the UK have access to an adequate diet, and to look at how the environments in which food behaviours are shaped contribute to the purchasing and consuming habits of different parts of the population. Consumers seeking out a British brand will likely also have concerns over the wider provenance of their food – what its ingredients are, who made it, and what its effects on the environment are.

In order to broaden the plan to include people as well as business, the plan should add three more themes to the seven that currently exist:<sup>143</sup>

- Improving access to British food for those on low incomes.
- Ensuring everybody in the UK has access to the resources, skills and knowledge they need to enjoy the wide range of British food.
- Addressing the structural unsustainability of the UK food system by decreasing environmental damage, reducing food waste, improving diet-related health outcomes and improving pay and working conditions in the British food workforce and supply chains.

Broadening the plan for food and farming to include these issues will allow the plan to be a genuinely long-term vision that adequately reflects the challenges within the UK food system and how they relate to people, particularly those on low incomes.

#### 5. Reducing and removing the poverty premium

*The government, together with regulators, consumer bodies and people in poverty, should launch an inquiry into the poverty premium, and work with businesses to remove or reduce poverty premiums for key living costs including food as well as utilities, housing, household appliances, and transport.*

Many people on low incomes often pay more for basic goods and services than those on higher incomes, as detailed in chapter one. This paradox is known as the 'poverty premium' and it can contribute to household food insecurity, particularly when the cost of equipment and fuel needed to cook and prepare food is unaffordable.

In order to address this, the government, together with regulators, consumer bodies and people in poverty, should launch a joint inquiry into the poverty premium. The inquiry's aims should be to identify examples and different categories of poverty premium, to understand why they exist, and to establish ways of reducing or removing such premiums.

The inquiry should look specifically at poverty premiums on the following goods and services:

- Food
- Utilities
- Household appliances
- Transport

This inquiry should be conducted under the advice of an Expert Panel of people with experience of poverty from around the UK. In a similar vein to this Commission's own Expert Panel, the Expert Panel should support the inquiry in shaping its design and findings, as well as ensuring the inquiry is

familiar with the lived experience of the poverty premium.

As well as people with experience of poverty, the inquiry should be run jointly by:

- Relevant UK government departments and devolved government departments, including the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Department for Transport, the Department for Communities and Local Government, Transport Scotland, and the Welsh Assembly government.
- Regulators, including Ofcom, Ofgem, Ofwat, the Utility Regulator in Northern Ireland and the Water Industry Commissioner for Scotland.
- Consumer bodies, including Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Scotland, and Which?

After the initial research on the poverty premium, this new inquiry should work with businesses to remove such premiums. This could, for example, involve changing pricing structures or introducing new social tariffs. The inquiry should specifically include a stream of work on high-interest financing schemes targeted at low-income households for every day goods needed to maintain household food security, such as fridges and ovens.

## **6. Working age social security payments that rise with living costs**

*The UK government should index working-age social security benefit upratings to the inflation experience of low-income households.*

The price of the goods and services bought by low-income households has tended to rise faster than those bought by the population as a whole in recent years. This means that low-income households experience a higher rate of inflation than that prescribed by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI), the government's main measure of inflation. This puts increasing strain on

low-income household budgets, which can lead to food insecurity.

The need to acknowledge the different inflation experiences of those on low incomes is amplified by potential changes to the price of food resulting from action to make the food system sustainable. One of the principles for a sustainable food system that works better for people on low incomes is to ensure that low-income households are protected from the negative outcomes associated with this action (meaning food price rises above all). Given that low-income households tend to spend a larger proportion of their budget on food and drink, these price rises could push the inflationary experience of low-income households further away from the CPI rate.

In order to acknowledge the different inflationary experience of low-income households and protect low-income households from any rise in the price of food resulting from action to make the food system sustainable, the UK government should legislate to index working-age social security benefit upratings to the inflationary experience of low-income households.

Most working-age social security benefits are usually annually uprated by the rate of inflation. However, current cost-cutting has meant that working-age social security benefits have been limited to a 1 per cent increase since 2012. Despite very low inflation in recent months, continuing this policy into future years risks seeing increasing numbers of low-income households struggling to keep up with rising living costs as costs outstrip income.

We estimate that this new level of indexation will cost approximately £1.1bn extra in the first year, rising to £1.5bn in 2018/19 and £2.7bn in 2020/21. This is the additional expenditure on social security benefits and tax credits from increasing them by CPI plus 1.1 per cent (the assumed additional rate of inflation experienced by those in the lowest expenditure decile based on the ONS data presented above). This calculation takes account of the

government's own projections for CPI over future years, as well their projected spending plans. It would also create a clear incentive for reducing and removing the poverty premium (recommendation 5) as achieving a reduction in this would reduce the inflationary experience for low-income households, and therefore reduce the rate at which working-age social security benefits would rise.

This is a recommendation with a price tag, but one which will ensure those on low incomes are more likely to be protected from likely future rises in the price of food. In considering how to fund this recommendation, the government may wish to consider the potential savings a better functioning food system can create. For example, chapter two details the public cost of diet-related health conditions, the cost of environmental damage produced by the UK's food system, and the crucial in-work social security payments made to top up low wages in the food workforce. Establishing a better functioning food system means freeing up billions of pounds to invest in other areas. Ensuring those on low incomes have access to nutritious, affordable food should be a key spending priority for this redistribution of funds.

## **7. Restoring the safety net**

*The Department for Work and Pensions should expedite action to reduce acute household food insecurity caused by social security benefit sanctions, delays and errors.*

The rise in use of charitable food and documented experience of acute household food insecurity (including by members of the Commission's Expert Panel) shows that this universal safety net which insures everybody against falling into destitution is no longer there for all vulnerable populations.

Members of the Commission's Expert Panel recalled sanctions and delays in social security payments which led to hunger, household food insecurity, and for one member, homelessness. Studies on the use



of charitable food have highlighted these social security failings, as well as others including problems with disability benefits where claimants are wrongly found fit for work.<sup>144</sup> This has also been a key feature for government-commissioned and parliamentary inquiries.<sup>145, 146</sup>

In order to stop instances where recipients have their main or only income streams delayed or stopped, there needs to be a renewed commitment to reinstating the safety net.

This means tackling the sanctions, delays and errors in the social security system that have led the safety net to fall away from some households.

Following the report from the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the UK, the government has made some progress in addressing these issues. The DWP has begun testing improvements to speed up the time taken to process new benefit claims, and are piloting new approaches to sanctions that aim to avoid financial penalties.<sup>147</sup> At the same time, they have taken action to improve awareness and take-up of

the short term benefit advance to give respite when the system has not worked properly, a key recommendation of the Child Poverty Action Group, Church of England, Oxfam and Trussell Trust study.<sup>148,149</sup>

However, recent reports from local emergency food providers are finding that many people are still finding themselves without any income following social security benefit, delays and sanctions.<sup>150,151</sup> Therefore, urgent action needs to be taken to rapidly evaluate the pilot initiatives to speed up new benefit claims and to roll it out across the country. Similarly, the pilot sanctions program that avoids financial penalties should be adopted into standard practice as soon as possible. Finally, the government needs to urgently review errors in which people have been wrongly found fit for work to improve the assessment process.

Further progress made in reducing instances of destitution from social security sanctions, errors and delays will reduce incidence of acute household food insecurity, and will therefore reduce need

for charitable food provision for those facing acute crises. Work on this can start immediately and results can be realized in the short term.

## 8. Improving local access to food

*Local authorities should establish food access plans that will identify any physical barriers to affordable, sustainable, nutritious food in their area and develop an action plan to overcome them.*

Physical access to affordable, nutritious food is not universal. The Commission's Expert Panel and submissions of evidence have identified a number of problems with physical access to affordable, nutritious food, a problem particularly linked with those on low incomes.

There are some instances where, without a car, nutritious and affordable food is inaccessible or high public transport costs inhibit access. For example, we heard how on one estate in Skelmersdale, Lancashire the only food available within walking distance is in a chip shop or in the freezer of the local newsagent.<sup>152</sup>

TABLE 2: Projected expenditure on working-age benefits under current plans and taking into account the recommended uprating, 2015/16–2020/21

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total expenditure (2012/13 prices) (£bn)	93	93.9	96.2	98.6	101.4	103.5
CPI projection (%)		1	1.4	1.8	1.9	1.9
Low-income inflation (%)		2.1	2.5	2.9	3	3
Expenditure after uprating (£bn)		95.0	97.3	100.1	103.2	106.2
Difference (£bn)		1.1	1.1	1.5	1.8	2.7

Sources and methodology: Total expenditure includes projections for all working-age benefits from Department for Work & Pensions, *Long term projections of social security expenditure in the United Kingdom, including Scotland* (April 2014). The CPI projections are from Office for Budget Responsibility, *Economic and fiscal outlook* (July 2015). The figure for low-income inflation is calculated by adding 1.1%, the average difference between the CPI and inflationary experience of households from the lowest expenditure decile in ONS, *Variation in the inflation experience of UK households: 2003 – 2014* (15 December 2014). This is then applied to the previous year's expenditure (or for 2016/17, the total expenditure for 2015/16) to calculate the new expenditure after uprating.



Given that low-income households are less likely to be able to afford to purchase and maintain a car, and squeezed budgets can make public transport inaccessible, people on low incomes are often least able to physically access nutritious food. Disability and living in a rural area can compound this risk of household food insecurity.<sup>153</sup>

However, local action is taking place to address food access across the UK. Glasgow and Edinburgh city councils have pledged to work with local stakeholders to ensure that “all citizens have access to sustainable, nutritious food as a matter of course, not as a result of charity.”<sup>154</sup> Glasgow and Edinburgh are members of the Sustainable Food Cities Network, which links local authorities with local organisations to build and deliver strategies for more sustainable food systems.

Different areas of the country will differ in the availability of affordable, nutritious food and therefore it is right that local solutions are identified to solve food access problems. Building on the good work of the Sustainable Food Cities Network, local authorities should introduce food access plans that will identify any physical barriers to affordable, nutritious food in the local area and then set out an action plan to overcome them.

A strong example of where such a plan is already happening with success is in West Cheshire, where the West Cheshire Foodbank has linked up with the local council and local university to look at why people are using the foodbank and how the local authority and others can take action to ensure more people have access to affordable, nutritious food.

Such a plan should be designed, and

delivered, in collaboration with those with experience of poverty and civil society groups, as well as with businesses and transport companies. Subject to the needs of the community, plans might suggest new transport routes from isolated areas, make changes to planning arrangements in order to promote more nutritious, affordable options, or establish new social enterprises to fill gaps in the offer of nutritious, affordable food that could be delivered in non-stigmatising contexts and settings.

So that local authorities do not have to ‘reinvent the wheel’ and duplicate complex work in scoping how a plan will be developed, the UK government and each of the devolved administrations should initially support ten pilot local authorities across the UK to develop plans in their own areas. Following these pilots, a joint review should take place with the aim of issuing guidance to all remaining local authorities on developing a plan for their local area.

Because of the links between low income areas and poor physical access to food, plans should be piloted in the 10 local authorities with the highest incidence of household food insecurity. In the absence of comprehensive data on household food insecurity, the 10 local authorities should be identified by the next best sets of data that includes comparable statistics for local authorities in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, which are the indices of multiple deprivation, published separately by each administration.<sup>155</sup> Commissioners have identified the most deprived local authorities in the UK across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in which pilots should take place.<sup>156</sup> These ten local authorities are:

England:

- Liverpool
- Middlesbrough
- Manchester
- Knowsley<sup>157</sup>

Scotland:

- Glasgow City
- North Lanarkshire
- Fife<sup>158</sup>

Wales:

- Blenau Gwent
- Merthyr Tydfil<sup>159</sup>

Northern Ireland:

- Belfast<sup>160</sup>

This work should become a priority for local public health budgets. The ring-fencing of these budgets should mean these allocations are under less strain than other local authority budget lines, and the clear links between food and health would make this a valuable investment.

### *Recognising the role of environments in shaping outcomes*

The choices that individuals make about the food that they buy, the time and methods used to prepare and cook that food, and how and what people eat are all informed by the environments in which those decisions are made. Instead of moral exhortations to people to eat better food, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the environment in which these choices are made – such as education, marketing and availability – and action to change that environment.

## **9. Protection for public health schemes**

*The government should rule out future cuts to existing public health schemes and budgets, including local authority public health allocations, and should commit to protecting existing public health spending.*

Public health initiatives are often investments which save money in the long term. The initiatives funded by these allocations often prevent the need for costly treatment further down the line.

The present government has consulted on the possibility of cutting local authority public health allocations.<sup>161</sup> But this

is likely to be counter-productive as it could lead to treatment costs increasing for poor diet-related health outcomes. For example, schemes aimed at 6–12 year olds to promote healthy diets in schools have contributed to halving obesity rates, and have doubled the likelihood of fruit and vegetables being eaten at lunch by children from low-income households.<sup>162</sup> Over the long-term, these changes are reducing pressure on health budgets. Ending these schemes would lead to short-term savings to one line in the budget, but it would simply move the costs from prevention to treatment, which is likely to be more expensive in the long term.

Another public health scheme which is now at risk is the Healthy Start scheme, which provides supplemental nutrition to pregnant teenagers, low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women and their young children. Evaluations of the initiative have shown it to be a valuable public health scheme that can ensure babies born into poverty in the UK are protected from poor diet related health outcomes in the crucial early months of development.<sup>163, 164</sup> Ending this scheme could also contribute to higher costs in the long term.

While these schemes on their own cannot ensure everybody has access to an adequate diet, they are important in adjusting the environment in which food choices are made in order to ensure everybody has access to the knowledge and skills (as well as the food itself) needed to acquire and consume a nutritious diet.

Public health initiatives are generally good value for money, and the UK government should acknowledge this by committing to protect existing funding.

## **10. A review of marketing to children**

*The Department of Health should launch a review of both broadcast and non-broadcast advertising codes with the aim of protecting children from the marketing of unhealthy food and drink products, as defined by the current FSA/Ofcom nutrient profiling model.*

Food marketing can have a damaging influence on the environment in which the food preferences of children are shaped.<sup>165, 166</sup> Research (presented in more detail in chapter one) has shown that food marketing can successfully change children's preferences, not only towards certain brands, but towards categories of food too.<sup>167</sup> Food marketing is also much more likely to feature unhealthy foods, high in salt, fats and sugar than healthy food, rich in nutrients.<sup>168</sup> This means that exposure to food marketing can skew food preferences in children towards unhealthy options at a crucial point in their development.

The coalition government did little to recognise the role of marketing in shaping food habits. While efforts to curb the impact of food marketing in children were made by the previous Labour government, with the introduction of a ban on the advertising of 'unhealthy food and beverages' to children during child-specific television programmes in the UK in 2009, the coalition government took little action to update this regulation. Indeed, at the time of publication, the links to the Committee of Advertising Practice codes for both non-broadcast media and broadcast media on Gov.uk, the official UK government website, were broken, directing website users to an old version of the page.<sup>169</sup> Instead, the coalition government's public health approach focused on moral exhortations to individuals and industry-led action (see chapter one).

The lack of meaningful updates to regulation on food marketing means that marketing for unhealthy food products is still bombarding children. Studies into the effects of the 2009 ban have shown that advertisers are getting around the regulation by advertising unhealthy food products during family programmes, which have high numbers of children viewing, and using the internet to target children directly.<sup>170</sup> In his oral evidence to the Commission, Jon Alexander, former advertising executive, described the rise

of 'advergames' in particular, which are online games targeted directly at children marketing unhealthy foods that would be restricted from adverts during child-specific television programmes.<sup>171</sup>

These six-year-old regulations need to be updated to fit with modern marketing techniques. A review of both broadcasting and non-broadcasting advertising codes will give the government the opportunity to make an evidence-based assessment of how unhealthy food marketing is reaching children and influencing their behaviour, and how a modern regulation system can limit this influence.

This review should be led by the Department of Health in partnership with the new minister with responsibility for eliminating household food insecurity, with the view that a successful regulatory framework will prevent the need for costly treatment of diet-related health outcomes by the health service in future years. The Food Standards Agency's nutrient profiling model, which is used by Ofcom to enforce compliance in television advertising, provides a ready-made tool for defining 'unhealthy food', and can be used to identify where marketing for these foods is reaching children.<sup>172</sup>

The review should look to update existing regulations to ensure they are fit for purpose, with the aim of improving diet related health outcomes. Governments cannot rely on voluntary codes of conduct to achieve policy goals they expect – especially when reaching those goals may mean companies having to forgo potential sales or advantages. Neither is it fair on those who follow such codes that others undercut them by failing to do so. Such codes need to be linked to an enforcement strategy that forms part of a responsive regulatory framework to address compliance problems. Such responses need to be built into the regulatory framework with enforcement mechanisms included to deal with situations where self-regulation fails.<sup>173</sup>

## The lack of meaningful updates to regulation on food marketing means that marketing for unhealthy food products is still bombarding children

### 11. A sugary drinks duty

*The Department of Health, Treasury and devolved governments should consider piloting a sugary drinks duty to allow policy makers to make informed decisions as to whether further taxes should be introduced in order to improve diets and health outcomes.*

Studies have shown that where governments have introduced properly targeted taxation of food and drink, it is likely that they have improved diets and public health outcomes.<sup>174, 175</sup> However, because governments internationally have only recently begun to use food-related fiscal instruments designed to improve diets and health outcomes, there is not yet a comprehensive assessment of all of the different consequences of food and drink taxation. Therefore it will be important to introduce taxation of food and drink gradually while the consequences are carefully monitored.

Chapter one included a quote from a member of the Commission's Expert Panel who said "I always look at the value of something, how much you get for your pound". The emerging evidence from Finland, France, Mexico and other countries where taxes and duties on food and drink have recently been introduced shows that this is a common view. The evidence shows that overall demand for the taxed food and drink decreased after the duties were introduced.<sup>176</sup> This also appears to be true specifically for low-income households with studies showing that lower income households are less likely to buy the taxed food and drinks than those higher up the income distribution.<sup>177,178</sup> This is in line with the Commission's finding that low-income

households are more likely to eat food higher in salt, fat and sugar because these foods tend to be cheaper in terms of calories.

However, there is still a lack of evidence on the detail of which foods are being substituted for the taxed foods.<sup>179</sup> This is important in view of the Commission's finding that households have tended to react to income shocks by 'trading down': prioritising calories over nutrients. For example, it may be that the substituted food is no more healthy than the taxed food, or as Garnett, Mathewson, Angelides and Borthwick point out, that people may ringfence their consumption of less healthy foods and instead cut back on more healthy food to balance the budget. This is an issue that needs to be carefully considered in the design and monitoring of taxes and duties on food and drink because it is an issue which could disproportionately affect low-income households.

Therefore the Department of Health, Treasury and devolved governments should consider piloting a sugary drinks duty. This is the most common duty internationally, having been implemented by countries like Hungary, France and Mexico, and so it would be an appropriate first step for UK governments to take. The benefit of the sugary drinks duty is that it is relatively simple to measure, as where it has been implemented, it has been set at a specific amount per volume of liquid. Implementation has ranged between a rate of between 4p per litre in Mexico and 17p per litre in Finland.<sup>180</sup> A prudent initial rate for the UK would be to match the rate of France, currently set at around 6p per litre of sugary drinks.

The duty and the consequent changes to consumption should be carefully monitored in order to identify any unintended consequences, and to quantify the public health benefits of the approach. This would allow policymakers to make informed decisions as to whether further duties and taxes should be introduced in order to improve diets and health outcomes.



The Department of Health and equivalent departments in devolved governments should play key roles in ensuring this duty is seen primarily as a tool to improve public health outcomes, rather than solely being used as a source of revenue. However, UK governments may wish to look at where similar policies have been implemented with a hypothecation of the money raised towards public health initiatives. For example, Algeria uses the money raised from its sugary drinks tax to fund cancer prevention initiatives, France invests the money from its own version of the tax into national health insurance and agriculture, and Hungary uses it to fund obesity prevention programmes.<sup>181</sup>

*Over the longer term: a minimum standard of income to eliminate household food insecurity*

Sustainably addressing household food insecurity requires a long-term approach. The changes that need to be made in order to ensure everybody has the ability and certainty of being able to acquire or consume an adequate quality and sufficient quantity of food in ways that do not socially exclude are substantial.

In particular, eliminating household food insecurity sustainably will mean ensuring everybody has a sufficient income to be able to pay for basic living costs and afford an adequate diet. This report is by no means the first to call for everybody to have a minimum socially acceptable standard of income, and it will not be the last. But the approaches and benchmarks it outlines below show how, with political will, it can be achieved.

## 12. Minimum Income Standard

*In addition to an existing commitment to target full employment, the UK governments should set long-term goals of bringing everybody up to a minimum socially acceptable level of income.*

This report has shown why low income is by far the largest driver of household food insecurity. Boosting incomes of those

most at risk of household food insecurity will allow those people to meet key living costs and afford an adequate diet for them and their family. Crucially, in the long term, boosting the incomes of those on low incomes will allow them to manage possible price rises in the future. The government needs to recognise the key role income plays in eliminating household food insecurity by introducing a goal for everybody in the UK to have a socially acceptable level of income.

Long-term goals can be very useful in policymaking. In March 2014 the chancellor outlined an explicit “commitment to fight for full employment in Britain.”<sup>182</sup> This goal, the chancellor said, would be a “central goal of our economic plan.” The chancellor has referred to this goal numerous times since its announcement, giving the government a measure on which progress can be based. The government should add a second ‘central goal’ to its economic plan – a goal for everybody to have a minimum socially acceptable level of income.

The principle of a minimum acceptable level of income (all be it under different definitions) has a rich history in UK policymaking. The Beveridge report, that led to the establishment of the modern social security system called for a “subsistence level, as of right”, under which nobody should have to fall.<sup>183</sup> More recently Sir Michael Marmot’s Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England called for a “minimum income for healthy living”, the level of income needed “for adequate nutrition, physical activity, housing, social interactions, transport, medical care and hygiene.” Both Beveridge and Marmot outlined a strong role for government in ensuring that people receive this minimum acceptable level of income.

A newer, robust measurement of a minimum acceptable level of income that leaves UK households with enough money to afford an adequate diet is the minimum income standard (MIS). The MIS research

is funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and conducted by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University in partnership with the Family Budget Unit at the University of York.<sup>184</sup> The measurement is based on the cost of a basket of goods (including housing, energy and other living costs as well as food) for different household types (a single person, a couple with two children, etc) that representative samples of the public feel meets the most basic standard of social acceptability. According to the MIS, in addition to the social security payments they received, a working couple with two children would each need to earn £20,000 in 2015 to reach the MIS. A single person would need to earn £17,100.

Clearly work will play an important role in bringing more people up to this MIS. Here, the chancellor’s goal of full employment is important. But so too will be sufficient wages and an opportunity for progression, which are described in the next recommendation. The social security system – the modern form of which emerged following Beveridge’s call for a “subsistence level” of income – also plays a key role, both in terms of providing a minimum standard of income to people unable to work, and to ensure that where earned income is insufficient to meet a MIS, that the support is there to ensure it can be met. Achieving socially acceptable minimum incomes for all will eliminate by far the largest barrier to household food security in the UK.

## 13. Sufficient pay

*The UK government should proceed with raising the national living wage up to 60 per cent of median wages over future years, while taking an active approach to building coverage of the voluntary living wage.*

Chapter one sets out why low wages are a key driver of household food insecurity. Poverty in the UK is increasingly occurring in working households because of low pay and few hours of work. Therefore it is right

that the UK government has pledged action on this by introducing a 'national living wage' of £7.20 an hour in April 2016, rising to £9 by 2020. This will mean around 6 million people receive a payrise, and chapter two shows that many of these people will be working in food-related industries.<sup>185</sup>

However, the national living wage will not be enough on its own to ensure that everyone in work is no longer at risk of household food insecurity. This is because the national living wage does not take account the amount of hours worked or number of dependents. Neither does it take into account the cost of living, nor any measure of what most people feel is socially acceptable, plus it only applies to those aged 25 and over.

The national living wage is set to rise to 60 per cent of median earnings by 2020, which makes it a relative measure rather than a subsistence level measure.<sup>186</sup> In this sense it is different from the measure of pay from which the national living wage has taken its name, the living wage. The living wage as originally conceived is calculated from the MIS data (see the previous recommendation) and set at the level which will bring the household up to a MIS, and is therefore higher than the national living wage (£7.85 in 2015, rising to £9.15 in London).<sup>187</sup> The key difference between the two rates is that the lower rate is a wage floor which it is illegal to pay below, and therefore has to take account of trade-offs with any potential unemployment effects. The higher living wage is a voluntary scheme promoting fair and responsible employment practice.

Of course the rates of pay sitting behind both do not address situations where workers in low-income households cannot find the hours of work that they need. It is therefore important there is a strong in-work social security system that ensure people are still able to have security in being able to afford a nutritious diet. Equally important is that the government focuses on increasing demand for labour, which

will lead to more hours and more jobs becoming available in the UK economy. In this sense it is critical that the government's setting of the wage floor continues to take employment trade-offs firmly into account.

### **The national living wage on its own will not be enough to ensure that everyone in work is no longer at risk of household food insecurity**

Therefore, the UK government's policy to raise the national living wage is very welcome, and it should keep the rate rising as fast and as far as possible without endangering employment. Alongside this, all governments in the UK should ensure all directly and indirectly employed public sector workers are paid at least the level of the living wage, and they should champion the voluntary living wage rates in the private sector, looking to significantly build coverage in those sectors where firms are more likely to be able to afford it.

In conjunction with this move, the UK government should work with businesses and trade unions in the low paying industries, such as the retail, hospitality and social care industries, to address sector-specific barriers to raising minimum wage levels, such as productivity levels, business costs and funding problems.

#### **14. Re-establishing the subsistence level of social security**

*The government should re-establish the link between social security and a subsistence level by linking universal credit to the minimum income standard.*

Social security plays a fundamental role in bringing everybody in the UK up to a socially acceptable standard of living. This happens in two key ways: firstly, it provides an income to those unable to work, and secondly it brings people with an insuf-

ficient amount of earned income up to a sufficient level.

While immediate action is necessary to deal with issues caused by problems with the administration of social security, more long term action is needed to ensure that more chronic incidence of household food insecurity is reduced.

Universal credit should be used to re-establish the link to a subsistence level, using the Minimum Income Standard. The current aims of universal credit are to encourage more people into work, smooth the transition into work, simplify support, and tackle poverty.<sup>188</sup> In order to meaningfully reinstate Beveridge's commitment to a minimum subsistence level over the long term, the fourth aim – to tackle poverty – should make an explicit commitment to eliminating household food insecurity.

In practice, there is a significant gap between many working-age social security benefits and the minimum income standard. For example, 2015 figures show an out of work single person only receives 40 per cent of the MIS and a couple with children both earning the national minimum wage earn 85 per cent of the MIS.<sup>189</sup> This means this recommendation could only be implemented over many years, because it would cost many billions of pounds to implement.

This is where there needs to be a frank reckoning: it is not possible to tackle household food insecurity while incomes remain insufficient. Reinstating the social security net is the single most important solution to household food insecurity, but it will be expensive.

The Commission understands this cannot happen overnight, but giving universal credit this new role will allow government to take incremental steps towards eliminating household food insecurity in the UK.

## APPENDIX 1: DEFINITIONS

THROUGHOUT THE EVIDENCE presented to the Commission, a number of different terms were used to describe the state in which a person has inadequate access to sufficient qualities and quantities of food, together with the anxiety associated with it.

This reflects the fact that there is not yet one common or official way through which a person having inadequate access to sufficient qualities or quantities of food, together with the anxiety associated with it, is measured.

The most common terms used to describe inadequate access to sufficient qualities and quantities of food, together with the anxiety associated with it are 'food poverty' and 'household food insecurity'.<sup>190</sup> A review of different definitions by Professor Elizabeth Dowler and Hannah Lambie-Mumford has shown that UK charities,

academics and policymakers often use the two terms interchangeably.<sup>191</sup>

The lack of a common definition exists because of the complexities of access to food in the UK. The affordability of food is the largest barrier, but not the only barrier to access. Other barriers include physical disabilities to access or cook food. Nonetheless, to be clear about access to food and its relationship to poverty, we must be clear about what we mean when we talk about the inability to access adequate food.

This report uses the term 'household food insecurity' to mean:

*'the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.'*

This particular definition was first published in *Poverty Bites* (Dowler, 2001) and was referred to in multiple evidence submissions to the Commission, including by Professor Graham Riches and Hannah Lambie-Mumford. It was also the definition used in the Commission's interim report, *A Recipe for Inequality* (Fabian Society, 2015)

This definition is used because it captures the wider issues of inadequate access to adequate food that go beyond the affordability of it, and includes the fear of going hungry and mental stress.<sup>192</sup> For the same reasons, the term 'household food insecurity' is used in order to highlight this anxiety and insecurity, together with the inability to acquire or consume adequate quantities and qualities of food.

The notion of 'food security' is often discussed in relation to the security of supply of food often at a national and global level.<sup>193</sup> However, 'household food insecurity' is a more granular definition that also takes security of access to food into account.



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## APPENDIX 2: THE HEARINGS

THE COMMISSION HELD six public evidence hearings to gather evidence from experts. Recordings of all the hearings are available on the Commission's website, [foodandpoverty.org.uk](http://foodandpoverty.org.uk).

- Hearing one: 'Money and Affordability' was held in the House of Commons in November 2014. Commissioners heard from Elizabeth Dowler (professor of food and social policy, University of Warwick), Dr Clive Black (head of research, Shore Capital), and Dr Martin O'Connell (senior research economist, Institute for Fiscal Studies) on food prices and affordability, long-term trends in the food industry, and how household food habits are affected by income.
- Hearing two: 'Context and Access' was held in the House of Commons in December 2014. Commissioners heard from Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford (research fellow, Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute), Dr Wendy Wills (reader in Food and Public Health, University of Hertfordshire), and Jon Alexander (director, New Citizenship Project) on access to food, the social context of food, and the social and cultural pressures that affect food habits.
- Hearing three: 'Health' was held in Friends House, London in January 2015. Commissioners heard from Martin Caraher (professor of food and health policy, City University London), Dr Angela Donkin (deputy director, Institute of Health Equity), and Dr Adam Oliver (associate professor, London School of Economics) on the links between food, diet and health, and the roles of government and industry in improving diet related health outcomes.

- Hearing four: 'Environment' was held at the University of Sheffield in January 2015. Commissioners heard from Tim Benton (UK champion for global food security and professor of population ecology, University of Leeds), Dale Southerton (director, Sustainable Consumption Unit), and Hilary Hamer (director, Food4Hull) on how the impact the food system has on the environment and how this relates to people on low incomes in the UK and internationally.
- Hearing five: 'Supply Chain and Society' was held in the Len Medlock Centre, Boston, Lincolnshire in February 2015. Commissioners heard from Dr Michael Heasman (senior lecturer in food policy

and management, Harper Adams University) and Fiona Gooch (senior policy adviser, Traidcraft) on food industry workforce pay and conditions, and how the UK food industry impacts on its global supply chains. At this session, commissioners were also joined by representatives from the Local authority and local community groups.

- Final hearing: A special hearing to hear about food and poverty initiatives in Scotland was held in the Renfield Centre, Glasgow in March 2015. Commissioners heard from Pete Ritchie (director, Nourish Scotland), Mary Anne Macleod (research officer, Poverty Alliance) and Martin Johnstone (secretary, Church and Society Council, Church of Scotland) on charitable food usage in Scotland, community food initiatives, and the Scottish government's approach to food and poverty.



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  - *Increasing procurement of British produce including in schools and hospitals.*
  - *Attracting investment into the industry.*
  - *Boosting skills and apprenticeships to ensure the industry has the confidence and capacity to meet the growing demand for British produce.*
  - *Increasing productivity through innovation, research and development and sharing data.*
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