

## **UK Food Strategy: Advocate. Sustain. Prosper**

### **Introduction:**

In 2021 both parts to an independent review of the UK food chain, referred to as the 'National Food Strategy' (NFS), were completed. Led by Henry Dimbleby, co-founder of Leon restaurants and non-executive director at Defra, a comprehensive plan was produced that aims to create a thriving agriculture and food sector - and crucially, deliver healthier, more sustainable, affordable and secure diets for everyone in the UK. The UK Government responded to this with a food strategy, underpinned by DEFRA (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), in 2022. Each of the devolved governments have their own food policies such as Wales's Community Food Strategy and Scotland's Good Food Policy. This campaign advocates for the development and implementation of a UK wide food strategy that takes a comprehensive approach to food policy. We want to ensure that policies and recommendations are embedded into legislation, industry and civil society so that everyone can access a healthy diet, regardless of their income or background. The strategy must also address the root causes of food inequalities and promote environmental sustainability. Successful implementation of a comprehensive UK wide food strategy will promise a healthier future for the public, and for the planet.

### **Why, the value to dietitians in this area:**

The NFS made fourteen recommendations in four broad areas: escape the junk food cycle, reduce diet-related inequality, make the best use of our land, and create a long-term shift in our food culture. Creating a healthier, more sustainable food system is goal that affects us all, and nutrition is your expertise, your business. A food strategy will ensure healthier diets are more accessible and more sustainable. Improving diets will mean a healthier society overall, leading to reduced demand on the health service and less pressure on services such as dietetics. This in turn will mean these services will have more capacity to focus on those patients who remain, improving their care. It will also mean a workforce which is less stretched, meaning better working conditions.

Dietitians also have a key role to play in the implementation of a UK Food Strategy. As dietetics professionals, the guidance you provide to policy makers and industry will be essential in ensuring access to the most important elements of good nutrition.

Achieving cultural change is also a key part of the NFS plan. The advice and education that dietitians can offer the general public, especially to young people, will be an essential part of achieving this goal. This campaign is endeavouring to give dietitians a seat not only at this but all future tables, where conversations around our food system are changed for the better.

### **STRATEGY: Advocate. Sustain. Improve**

#### **Advocate:**

The British Dietetic Association (BDA) is urging the UK and devolved governments to develop a food strategy covering the UK. The UK's food system post-Brexit is struggling

to adapt and we are seeing the cost of food increase and shortages on UK store shelves. Health campaigns and policies around food in different parts of the UK are often disparate from each other despite the existence of a highly integrated and inter-reliant UK wide food system.

The BDA believes that nobody should live in food poverty and that the UK, devolved and local governments must take urgent action to lift people out of food poverty and prevent others from falling into food poverty. This should include enshrining a “Right to Food” in UK law, with the consent of devolved legislatures.

### **Sustain:**

Too often, government procurement prioritises cost over quality and sustainability. This can mean the public not having the access to be able make the best choices, not just for their health but for the health of the planet. Our tactics highlight the most vital recommendations within the NFS plan for creating a prosperous, nature positive, affordable food system, for all and for always. We need to strike a balance between ensuring affordable healthy food for all and an increase of UK food production without leading to significant environmental damage through increased land cultivation, deforestation, over-use of agrochemicals and over-exploitation of land and marine ecosystems. The BDA advocate for sustainability in NHS food services, and recognises that considerations within healthcare environments will differ from those at the public health level.

### **How will we do this, our tactics:**

***Recommendation 1: Introduce a Sugar and Salt Reformulation Tax. Use some of the revenue to help get fresh fruit and vegetables to low-income families.***

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To prioritise health, we urge the Government to leverage the success of the Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL) for further fiscal measures to encourage the sale of healthier food and drinks. In order to do this, we recommend that as part of a food strategy the Government should introduce a £3/kg tax on sugar and a £6/kg tax on salt sold for use in processed foods or in restaurants and catering businesses. Major companies have said that they need this incentive to reduce the amount of sugar and salt used in food products so there can be a level playing field without reductions being undercut by competitors. Modelling undertaken as part the National Food Strategy (2021) found that the policy would reduce the UK’s average daily calorie intake, dramatically reducing, or even halting, population level weight gain.

The Sugar and Salt Tax could raise £2.9bn– £3.4bn per year for the Treasury. We believe this should be revenue generated should fund programmes to support children’s health and access to nutritious food, such as school breakfast clubs, healthy start vouchers, and breastfeeding support. The National Food Strategy outlines four potential measures

which we support: expanding free school meals and extending the Holiday Activities and Food programme for the next three years (to support children during both term time and holidays); an expansion of the Healthy Start scheme (to support the diets of young children before they start school); and the trial of a “Community Eatwell” Programme.

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Recognising the multifaceted nature of health impacts, we are calling for a cross-government strategy which addresses complexities. Collaboration among government departments, including HM Treasury, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, is vital, particularly in supporting the Department for Health and Social Care.

The BDA emphasises the need for a concise and effective UK-wide food strategy, uniting efforts across agriculture, retail, and health sectors to improve access to nutritious food, promote environmental sustainability, and address the root causes of food inequalities.

***Recommendation 13: Strengthen Government procurement rules to ensure that taxpayer money is spent on healthy and sustainable food.***

The BDA is calling for both a guarantee and expansion of recommendation 13 to the procurement within the UK wide food system, not just government procured food. In addition, we are calling for a comprehensive implementation of the corresponding government food strategy point 1 ‘Food security and sustainable production’, which relates to procurement of food in the UK wide system. This tactic has two core objectives: a prosperous agri-food sector, and a sustainable, affordable and nature positive food system.

**Prosperous agri-food and seafood sector:** In an unpredictable world we need to ensure a secure and sustainable food supply, that sees the UK effectively deal with the effects of Brexit by successfully producing what we need on home soil, lowering import carbon emissions and creating a resilient and cheaper food supply. According to the UK Government food strategy (2022): ‘Domestically we produce 60% by value of all the food we need, rising to 74% of food which we can grow or rear in the UK’. Domestic production will also ensure that we can reduce imports from countries that do not have high animal welfare and environmental standards. These benefits of the food strategy would contribute to a more prosperous economy and producing more jobs, as well as a prosperous food sector.

**Sustainable, nature positive, affordable food system:** Food reliability and security are not the same things, but are both equally vital in creating fair food system for all. Providing choice and access to high-quality, nature positive products support healthier

diets, and in the long-term lowers the risks of diet-related diseases and improves our approach to how we treat our environment. The BDA is calling on the UK and devolved Governments to implement nature positive food strategies. For example, we encourage the promotion of point 1.3.2 of the UK Government food strategy (2022), which states that growth in commercial horticulture in a nature positive and sustainable way will “boost home-grown fruit and vegetable production, help to future-proof the sector in a warming climate, and create new skilled job opportunities across the country”. The addition of initiatives such as highly productive multi-acre glasshouses and vertical farming, this will create a positive and investable environment for our future food system, and the health of our public.

The UK Government food strategy (2022) goes further to state some of the benefits if this, or similar strategies, are implemented:

- “halt species decline in England by 2030”
- “treble woodland creation rates by the end of this Parliament“
- “restore 280,000 hectares of peatland in England by 2050“
- “protect 30% of our land and sea by 2030”
- “improve soil health”

#### Government Food Strategy (2022)

Nonetheless, these ideas are only impactful if they benefit everyone. Point 1.1.2 of the government food strategy highlights that “Self-sufficiency is not the same as food security. Being part of a global food system provides us with a diversity of supply sources and access to new products that cannot be produced domestically, contributing to our food security”. In short, our healthy, nature positive, sustainable food system, needs to be affordable for all! We can do this by improving home production and ensuring our primary food producers and the wider industry have the government and the BDA’s support to maintain an affordable, import tax free food supply. Despite global disruption, and post-Brexit challenges to the supply chain we can and we will endeavour to maintain affordable food supply for all.

The BDA is calling for the UK Government to take action to implement this strategy post-election. Whilst the strategy does outline a comprehensive plan to improve the food system at large, there are no specific targets or timelines stated. We implore the incoming government to rectify this and create a deadline that matches global net-zero ambitions. They should work together with supermarkets and food suppliers to highlight foods that are healthy and environmentally sustainable, such as higher welfare meat, assured and sustainably sourced fish, bringing down their prices and increasing their visibility. Furthermore, we want them to educate their customers on in season fruit and vegetables to ensure home-grown agriculture is the most healthy, affordable option. We also call on the governments of the devolved nations to implement similar strategies, working with the food sector and utilising clear targets. Together we can create a food system which puts the health of its people and its planet first now and always.

## **Improve:**

In 2022/23 7.2 million households were food insecure in the UK. A ‘Right to Food’ Bill, developed in collaboration with the devolved governments, should be enshrined in UK law. This rights-based approach will improve the implementation of a comprehensive UK wide Food Strategy, as the approach considers both the social and environmental implications of the food system. The recommendations outlined here will improve the wider health of the population and the planet for the public of now and the future. Improving the agri-food system will decrease the prevalence of ‘food deserts’ in urban areas and increase affordable, healthy food access. The BDA does not want an incoming UK Government to put this strategy at the mercy of further policy development and legislative processes.

The benefits of implementing a comprehensive UK-Wide food strategy include:

**Improved Public Health:** By ensuring that government procured food and the food system at large is healthy, we can improve the diet of not just the 7.2million plus households facing food insecurity but the diet and health of the public as a whole, consequently reducing the incidence of diet-related diseases.

**Improved Environmental Sustainability:** Prioritising sustainability in our food system can reduce the negative impact we have on our environment. This will contribute to a net-zero society where the welfare of, and our interaction with, nature is positive and improved for the future.

**Improved Economic Efficiency:** While creating a healthier, more sustainable food system can sometimes be expensive in its formation, the long-term savings in importing and global trade costs, and the long-term savings in healthcare costs due to diet-related illness, can justify the expense of establishing this food strategy. Leaving these costs to grow is an expense that we can ill afford.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The NFS Plan is a blueprint for the future of the food sector. It guarantees to economically boost the sector, ensure food security, reduce diet-related illnesses and create a nature positive food system. Strengthening the rules around procurement, enshrining a ‘Right to Food’ Bill into UK law and implementing a sugar and salt tax are powerful tools for promoting the BDA’s ambitions. This strategy is a significant step towards creating a food system that offers access to healthy, environmentally sustainable and affordable food for all. It’s time for the government to take action, for a prosperous and healthy food system for now, for the future, for always.

## **CALL TO ACTION: What can you do?**

We know that UK Wide Food Strategy is important to our members, especially those with a keen interest in reducing health inequalities and improving sustainable diets. There are several ways in which you can interact and support our campaign.

- **Stay informed:** You can keep up-to-date with our campaign on our website here, and through our monthly e-zines. Our campaign will highlight the latest developments and have updates from government departments relevant to the UK Wide Food Strategy such as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).
- **Partnerships:** We always want to foster strong partnerships between industry, government and the BDA. You can do this through talking to our Partnerships team and Public Affairs team. There will always be initiatives where we and our partners are looking for our members engagement.
- **Support our Recommendations:** The National and Government Food Strategy have made several recommendations, we have chosen to pick out those closest to the heart of the BDA. You can support these at a local level by writing to your elected representative expressing your support for a comprehensive food strategy.
- **Stay Social:** Share information about the campaign on social media to raise awareness. Talk to friends, family, and colleagues about the importance of the Strategy and the importance of good nutrition.
- **Data Transparency Partnership:** The British Nutrition Foundation welcomes the launch of [Food Data Transparency Partnership](#). A multi-sector approach brings together the UK Government, devolved governments, and representatives from across the food supply chain and society to develop a robust data collection and reporting framework. Allowing transparency in this partnership will be invaluable in highlighting gaps where we need to improve.

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By Lindsey Marston (England Policy and Campaigns Officer) and Fergus Turtle (Wales Policy and Campaigns Officer)