

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP  
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

18 May 2022

Dear Prime Minister, Dear George

### **Cost of food crisis**

Compassion in World Farming believes that urgent action by Government is needed to address the cost of food crisis and escalating food insecurity. As you know, the Director-General of the CBI has recently warned of the devastating impact of rising food prices.

It is unacceptable that some people are going hungry while others are having to choose between heating their homes or eating. We feel sure that the Government agrees with the need to give immediate help to people facing hardship, for example by ensuring that sufficient support with the cost of food is readily available under the *Household Support Fund*.

Looking beyond the need to rapidly address the current crisis, far-reaching measures are needed to help people move away from unhealthy diets. Poor diet is now the major contributor to disease in England and the second biggest risk factor for mortality in the UK after tobacco.<sup>1 2</sup> The Dimpleby report states "The cost of bad diet is astronomical, both in terms of human misery and actual money. If we don't get diet-related disease under control, we risk overwhelming the NHS."

Three of the Dimpleby report's strategic objectives relate to poor diet. These are:

- Escape the junk food cycle to protect the NHS
- Create a long-term shift in our food culture
- Reduce diet-related inequality.

The Faculty of Public Health states that "In the UK, the poorer people are, the worse their diet, and the more diet-related diseases they suffer from".<sup>3</sup> Policies are needed that ensure that everyone, including the most disadvantaged, can access affordable, nutritious food that enhances, rather than undermines, their health and well-being.

Government should promote and give financial support to measures designed to tackle poor diet, particularly in those on low incomes. Programmes that teach people, in both schools and the adult community, how to cook meals from fresh ingredients and how to grow food - for example in community farms and gardens - should be expanded. Fuel poverty must be addressed; people must be able to afford to cook food. Schools should be encouraged to adopt the *Food for Life* initiative (or similar programmes) which aims to "make it easy, normal and enjoyable to eat well".<sup>4</sup>

Support is needed for business models that link farmers much more directly to consumers, particularly those in the poorest areas, allowing consumers to buy fresh, local, humanely produced food at lower prices and farmers to receive a greater share of the income generated by their produce.

Some people live in 'food deserts' where they are too far from shops that stock fresh food such as fruit and vegetables. Government must devise innovative solutions to this problem; for example the *Daily Mail* reports that New York City offers tax breaks to stores in deprived areas that sell fresh food.<sup>5</sup>

Government and other public bodies must ensure that nutritious food produced to high animal welfare and environmental standards is the norm in the public sector. Improving the quality of public food does not need to increase costs. There are several examples of public bodies that, by carefully balancing the contents of meals, have been able to improve quality without increasing costs.<sup>6 7 8 9 10</sup> Public bodies' commitment to quality will help change our attitude to food.

In recent years healthy foods have been consistently more expensive than less healthy ones.<sup>11</sup> Steps are needed to address this problem as it is major cause of people on low incomes having much poorer health than the rest of society. One ambitious approach would be to create a *National Food Service*. This could provide healthy food – such as local, seasonal fruit and vegetables – free of charge to those on low incomes. Such food would be available at retailers who would receive the price for the food from the government. The cost of such a scheme would be partially recouped by reduced healthcare costs.

### **Health, climate and environmental benefits of reducing consumption of meat and dairy**

An important component of tackling poor dietary health is a reduction in the consumption of red and processed meat as high consumption levels of such meat contribute to heart disease, obesity, diabetes and certain cancers.<sup>12, 13, 14</sup> The UK *Health Alliance on Climate Change* includes ten Royal Colleges of medicine and nursing, the BMA and the Lancet. It has stressed the need to reduce meat consumption in order to tackle diet-related health problems and climate change.<sup>15</sup>

The 2020 report by the UK Committee on Climate Change states that policies are needed to “encourage a reduction in consumption of meat and dairy”. Their summary states that medium level targets are a “20% cut in meat and dairy by 2030, rising to 35% by 2050 for meat only” while a high level target is “50% less meat and dairy by 2050”. The Dimpleby report recommends a 30% reduction in meat consumption over ten years.

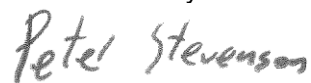
Just as consumers are under pressure from rising food prices, farmers are facing soaring prices for fertilisers and cereals used as animal feed. Calculations based on Defra figures show that 54% of UK cereals are used to feed farm animals. Lower meat and dairy consumption would reduce the volume of cereals needed as animal feed. It would also free up large amounts of land currently used to grow cereals for feed; this would enable the UK to switch to regenerative forms of farming which use only minimal amounts of costly fertilisers. Reducing the use of cereals as feed and minimising fertiliser use is vital in light of the surging price of wheat, maize and fertilisers.

Reduced meat and dairy production would also benefit animal welfare. Animals could be farmed extensively (indoors or outdoors) in high welfare, health-oriented systems which are much less vulnerable to zoonoses than industrial animal agriculture.

### **Conclusion**

Immediate measures are needed to tackle rising food prices to prevent people going hungry. In particular, those on low incomes must receive support to ensure they can access sufficient food. Looking beyond the need to rapidly address the current crisis, far-reaching measures are needed to help people, particularly those on low incomes, move away from unhealthy diets. As the Dimpleby report says, we need to break out of the *Junk Food Cycle* and create a long-term shift in our food culture. To do this will require a wide range of measures, some of which we have touched on in this letter.

Yours sincerely



Peter Stevenson OBE, Chief Policy Advisor

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- <sup>2</sup> Forouzanfar MH, Alexander L, Anderson HR, *et al*. Global, regional, and national comparative risk assessment of 79 behavioural, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks or clusters of risks in 188 countries, 1990–2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013. *Lancet* 2015;**386**:2287–323. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(15)00128-2
- <sup>3</sup> Faculty of Public Health. Food poverty and health [http://www.fph.org.uk/uploads/bs\\_food\\_poverty.pdf](http://www.fph.org.uk/uploads/bs_food_poverty.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.foodforlife.org.uk/about-us/transforming-food-culture> Accessed 21 January 2019
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-10797431/Children-living-half-mile-supermarkets-subsidized-sell-fresh-food-lose-weight.html>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.kbhmadhus.dk/english/ourstory> Accessed 30 January 2019
- <sup>7</sup> INNOCAT *Op. Cit.*
- <sup>8</sup> <https://international.kk.dk/nyheder/copenhagens-organic-food-revolution> Accessed 30 January 2019
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/jun/23/bay-area-hospital-food-healthy-grass-fed-organic> Accessed 27 January 2017
- <sup>10</sup> <http://sustainability.ucsf.edu/1.498> Accessed 27 January 2017
- <sup>11</sup> Jones *et al*, 2015. The Growing Price Gap between More and Less Healthy Foods: Analysis of a Novel Longitudinal UK Dataset. *PLoS ONE* 9(10): e109343. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0109343
- <sup>12</sup> Friel S., Dangour A.D., Garnett T., Lock K., Chalabi Z., Roberts I., Butler A., Butler C.D. Waage J., McMichael A.J. and Haines A., 2009. Health and Climate Change 4: Public health benefits of strategies to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions: food and agriculture. Published online November 25, 2009 DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(09)61753-0
- <sup>13</sup> Aston LM, Smith JN and Powles JW, 2012. Impact of a reduced red and processed meat dietary pattern on disease risks and greenhouse gas emissions in the UK: a modelling study. *BMJ Open* Vol 2, Issue 5 <http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/2/5/e001072.full.pdf+html>
- <sup>14</sup> Anand, S. *et al.*, 2015. Food Consumption and its Impact on Cardiovascular Disease: Importance of Solutions Focused on the Globalized Food System. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 66, no 14