

## **Submission to the National Food strategy**

There is only one environmentally benign diet.

It isn't a vegan diet.

It isn't a vegetarian diet.

It isn't a flexitarian diet.

It is a local diet.

Government must close its ears to the current noise regarding meat/non meat, and instead focus on one issue: re-localization of the food supply chain.

We are in the mess we are in (and presumably we are in a mess, otherwise why the need for a food strategy to 'transform the food system'?) not because of the type of food we eat, but because of the structure of the food chain that supplies that food.

The link to this consultation states that it comes under the 'agri-food-chain directorate'.

Yet in the 8 bullet points you list above as areas for consideration, there is no mention of 'the food chain'.

It has to be understood that this is where the problem lies, most notably in the globalization of the food supply chain and the concentration of market share in food retailing.

Re-localize food, and you see all of the issues highlighted in your 8 bullet points above move in the right direction. Allow the current trend to continue - ever greater concentration of market share, ever greater globalization of the food supply chain - and you can throw as much time and money at other issues as you want, you will get nowhere.

How to re-localize the food system?

Market share is the root of all evil. Forget everything else, just focus on the need for an urgent and drastic reversal in the concentration of market share in food retailing. This will be achieved through simultaneous action at two levels; micro and macro.

Micro:

Action by the individual, achieved through education. Government should provide support to the many NGO's throughout the UK working to educate the public on food, farming and the environment.

Macro:

It needs to be understood that the oligopoly that exists today in food retailing can be broken up without the general public revolting.

People like doing all of their weekly shop under one roof/ on one website. That is not the problem. The problem is that all of these roofs/ delivery vans throughout the UK are owned by a handful of businesses.

Only once this is understood - that we can reverse the concentration of market share without a vote being lost - will the legislation to achieve such a reversal be seen as politically acceptable.

The measures to achieve this reversal will include (but not be limited to) the below:

- Legislation at the earliest opportunity to break up the current oligopoly, by stating that no single business may be responsible for more than 10% of UK food retailing.
- A statement of intent, that it is the medium-term aim of Government for no single business to be responsible for more than 1% of UK food retailing.
- Complete overhaul of business rates, to the benefit of small retailers and their supply chain (abattoirs, bakers, packers, processors...) and to the detriment of the multiples.
- Planning rules to ensure every local authority area sees an increase in independent food retailers.
- Packaging legislation - such as deposits on returnable bottles - which in itself leads to localization of supply chains.
- The scrapping of section 106 agreements whereby supermarkets openly bribe communities to get planning consent.
- Local authorities to have the power to turn down planning applications and for that decision to be final, as opposed to the current position where they know that they are wasting their time because it will just go to appeal and be granted by central government.

The above is by no means an exhaustive list of the ways in which the concentration of market share will be reversed. There are many NGO's working in this field who will have excellent ideas, and a full consultation should take place with them on this specific issue.

For anyone reading this who does not consider market share to be an issue, ask yourself this:

Would you have any concerns about one company being responsible for 90% of UK food retailing? What would those concerns be? Would they centre around the environmental impact of food miles, or the availability and price of healthy food, or the impact on communities, or the income of farmers, or all of these?

All of those concerns are equally valid now. All of those negative impacts are being felt every day through the current situation regarding market share.

The illusion created by the supermarkets - of choice, of environmental protection, of fairness to producers, of value for money - it is exactly that, an illusion.

Tackle market share in your food strategy, or you achieve nothing.