



Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty

Briefing

About the Commission

The Fabian Society, with the support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, will be undertaking a Commission into food and poverty in the UK. The focus of the inquiry will be the food system, not family incomes, so it will examine how poverty relates to other food policy issues, including price, access, nutrition, sustainability and employment practices.

In recent years a number of high profile issues have pointed to significant problems with Britain's food system - rising prices, the horsemeat scandal, excess waste, exploited workers, obesity and emergency food provision. But as yet there has been insufficient attention to exploring the interactions between them all and their collective impacts on low income households.

The panel of commissioners detailed below will be supported by a wider advisory network, as well as a cross-party political advisory network, and will gather evidence to make their recommendations through a series of evidence hearings, in-house desk research and an open call for evidence.

The Commission will make its final recommendations in Summer 2015. The Commission is non-party political.

The Commissioners

Chair - Geoff Tansey

Geoff is a Trustee of the Food Ethics Council and Joseph Rowntree Visionary for a Just and Peaceful World. Geoff is a widely published and well renowned freelance writer and consultant on food and agriculture.

Niall Cooper

Niall is National Coordinator of Church Action on Poverty. He previously 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.

Tara Garnett

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

Diana Holland

Diana is Assistant General Secretary of Unite, where she oversees the union's work representing food and agriculture workers in food farming, food manufacturing and in food retail. Prior to this Diana was national organiser for women, race and equalities at TGWU.

Andrew Kuyk

Andrew 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

John is Vice President of the UK's Faculty of Public Health. Prior to this he was Director for Public Health in Sandwell for more than 27 years and is an Honorary Reader in Public Health at Birmingham University.

Jeanette Orrey

Jeanette is co-founder of the Food for Life Partnership, working on food culture in UK schools. Prior to this Jeanette was a school dinner lady for over twenty years. In 2003, Jeanette won The Observer Food Award for 'Person who has done the most for the food and drink industry'.

The Commission's work

The Commission's work will be focused by five overlapping strands: money and affordability, context and access, health, the environment, and the supply chain and society.

1. Money and affordability

The first strand will look at the price and affordability of food from the consumer perspective. This takes in to account both food prices and the ability to pay. Within this the Commission will look at the rise of emergency food provision in the context of squeezed living standards, and at food prices and the myth of cheap food.

2. Context and access

This strand will look at the context in which food habits and norms are established. This includes physical access to nutritious food, the social context in which food consumption sits, and the social and cultural pressures that shape consumption. This will cover how marketing and education can shape consumer behaviour.

3. Health

The health strand will look at the links between the food system, levels of nutrition and public health, including education and food in schools. The Commission will look at the roles of government and the food industry in improving public health levels.

4. Environment

The environment strand will look at environmental concerns from both a consumer and industry perspective. This will include the impact of food production on biodiversity and the carbon intensity of the whole food system, including food waste at both individual and industrial levels. The Commission will ask what the real price of cheap food is for the environment.

5. The supply chain and society

The Commission's final strand will look closely at the food industry from an ethical perspective. This will cover impacts on UK food industry businesses and workers (from farms through to retail); interaction between food producers and consumers (especially in low income countries); and animal welfare.

These topics are interrelated and require an understanding reaching across the whole food sector and beyond. Yet when food is discussed in political and public policy circles, debate is often disjointed and superficial. While there has been much valuable work done by organisations who have a specific focus on food, this tends to be narrowly focused. Not since the *Food Matters* report published by the last government has anyone presented a clear vision for the future of food policy in Britain. Even then it was not backed up by legislation or significant funding. There is therefore a real need to build on existing work to bring much greater prominence and integration to all the issues related to food poverty.

How will the project happen?

The project will be serviced by existing Fabian Society employees. There will be a total of five evidence hearings, some of which will include a site visit. The Commission will consider evidence, conduct analysis and make recommendations.

Each hearing will be accompanied by a working paper providing an overview of the issues being discussed. Each hearing will feature two to three presentations from recognised experts in the relevant field.

The hearings will also be complemented by a call for evidence which will be administered and collated by Fabian Society staff for the Commissioners to review.

For more information on this project please contact Cameron Tait at the Fabian Society on Cameron.Tait@fabians.org.uk or 0207 227 4907.