



DEFRA consultation on *Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment and a Green Brexit*

Submission from Feeding Britain (May 2018)

About Feeding Britain

Feeding Britain is a national charity established in 2015 by a cross-party group of MPs and peers, chaired by Frank Field MP. Our vision is a UK where no one goes hungry. We want to demonstrate how hunger and its underlying causes can be addressed, and use this learning to advocate for system level change to eliminate hunger in the UK.

We operate 12 local Feeding Britain pilots across the UK, which bring together local charities, community groups, local authorities and other stakeholders to deliver practical action to alleviate and prevent hunger in their communities. The pilots cover both rural and urban areas. Our work includes supporting people in immediate food crisis, through providing advice services in food banks and other emergency food projects, establishing fuel banks, community cafes and opening social supermarkets where vulnerable people can access low-cost food and support. We also work on policy changes that can be implemented at local and national government level to prevent people going hungry, and on initiatives that help to build longer term community resilience to hunger.

Consultation response

We welcome the development of a food and farming strategy, and the proposed Agriculture Bill. We feel it is critical for the UK to address food holistically, and see this as an opportunity to connect policies around food production with wider issues of access to food, food poverty and hunger. With this in mind, we feel there are several key issues that are currently missing from the strategy:

- **A holistic view of food:** it is important for the UK government to address food from a holistic perspective, recognising the issues that cut across traditional government departments. Access to and affordability of food are key issues that should be addressed within a food strategy. We suggest that this strategy should set out how the government plans to leverage the opportunity of once-in-a-generation agricultural reform to promote and enable access to good quality food for all in the UK. It is a significant gap that this strategy makes no mention of hunger, food poverty or food insecurity. We feel that it is important to recognise the issues and identify ways that the reform of agriculture can contribute to tackling them.
- **Food prices and household food insecurity:** In particular, while it is of course important to ensure fair prices for producers, we feel there should be a greater focus on monitoring food prices and taking action to mitigate the impacts of any food price rises on the most vulnerable members of society. Responsibility for tracking and reporting on food prices should be clearly assigned within government, with requirements for regular publication of

results. Similarly, the strategy should include proposals for the robust measurement of household food insecurity in the UK.

- **A broader definition of public good:** the definition of public money for public good could usefully be broadened to include social issues, recognising the important role that farming plays within a local community. Broader activities to support public good could include:
 - measures to incentivise and facilitate the redistribution of farm surplus for charitable purposes to tackle hunger, particularly around increasing the supply of fresh produce
 - measures to support healthy eating and food and nutrition education within the local community
 - initiatives to strengthen skills and employability among members of the community who need extra support to move into work
 - initiatives that support other social purposes such as community cohesion, mental health and wellbeing, and reducing social isolation

- **Tackling rural food poverty:** as a charity working on hunger and food poverty, we are concerned with the issue of rural food poverty facing farmers and wider rural communities. Despite high levels of need in rural areas, the issue is less prominent than urban food poverty, and can be more difficult to tackle given the large distances, and dispersed services. Tackling and preventing rural food poverty requires a different set of interventions, and significant innovation. A holistic food and farming strategy should include support for research and implementation of innovative solutions (by communities, charities, farmers, the wider agricultural industry and government) to tackle rural food poverty. These could include mobile community shops, home delivery services of low-cost food, community cafes and social eating spaces, and new models for rural meals on wheels services.

- **Redistribution of farm surplus:** The overall goal should be to reduce food waste, and we do not see food surplus as the long-term solution to hunger and food poverty in the UK. However, in the short to medium term, the redistribution of good quality surplus food has an important role to play in supporting initiatives to reduce hunger. Progress has been made on increasing the amount of good quality surplus food redistributed for charitable purposes from supermarkets and manufacturers, but less progress has been made on redistribution of farm surplus. The strategy could usefully address measures to incentivise and facilitate farmers to offer their surplus produce to social projects on a donated or low-cost basis. Equally it would be important to include measures that would support charities and social projects to accept more farm surplus and reduce some of the current barriers they currently face to doing so.