

Briefing paper - Food

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1. What is the current Greenhouse Gas output for this sector? Are there any expected changes?

The Greenhouse Gas output of the food production system is estimated to be 20%-25% of UK GHG emissions (NB this figure includes transport related to food and the agricultural industry, but excludes emissions from food imports).

DEFRA says farming contributes 7% of the UK's GHG emissions (mainly methane and nitrous oxide), although this is probably an underestimate because it excludes farm inputs and losses of soil carbon.

According to the Stern Review, emissions from crop production will rise 0.6% annually up to 2030 and slower thereafter. In the livestock sector, growth is likely to be 2% per annum to 2030 then at about 1% up to 2050.

2. What is the sector doing about climate change?

Agricultural inputs

There are targets for increasing the energy efficiency industries such as the fertiliser and agrochemical industries. The targets aren't legally binding, but sectors that reach their targets avoid paying the climate change levy.

Farming

There is no overall target for reduction of energy usage but there are sector-specific targets for egg poultry production and the dairy industry.

The National Farmers Union is promoting diversification into energy crops, despite the threat this poses to food security.

The general approach to climate change is to focus on adaptation (eg spraying crops at night to reduce evapo-transpiration) and mitigation (eg reducing methane emissions by experimenting with animal feed).

The expanding organic farming sector is twice as energy efficient as conventional agriculture. The Soil Association has launched the One Planet Agriculture initiative.

Food and drink processing

The food and drink industry also has a target for increasing energy efficiency.

Food distribution and retailing

The only government agreed targets relate to increasing energy efficiency at in-store bakeries and other food processing areas in supermarkets.

There are initiatives like improved refrigeration units, renewables pilots (wind power mainly), trialling rail freight and increased supplies of organic products.

Local food solutions (eg farm shops, box schemes) are working to increase their 12% share of the retail food sector.

3. Are there any upcoming “hooks” to campaign around?

Negative hooks

Monthly EU Agriculture & Fisheries Ministers’ meetings.

2008 NFU Centenary.

2008 Competition Commission report on the power of the supermarkets.

Positive hooks

Transition Towns network events.

Local food network events.

Food festivals.

4 Are there any interconnections with other sectors?

Plenty! Eg.

Transport (eg food miles).

Energy (eg move towards energy crops).

Planning (eg supermarkets).

Health (eg pesticide use).

5. How significant is the sector as a carbon emitter?

The whole sector - from farm to fork – responsible for 20 -25% of UK GHG emissions.

Agriculture (7%) is the UK’s second largest single source of GHG emissions, after domestic space heating at around 15%.

6. How strong is it as a political force?

The food sector has enjoyed considerable influence historically via representation in the House of Lords which has been reduced slightly by Parliamentary reform. Nevertheless, the National Farmers Union still wields significant power.

Organisations representing small-scale farming and the organic sector are increasingly influential.

Large agrochemical corporations (eg BASF, Monsanto), food processors (eg Nestle, Premier), and particularly the big four supermarkets, via their respective lobby groups, very powerful both within the sector and more generally.

Consumers have strength within the sector via their purchasing habits (10% of income is spent on food).

7. How does it get its finance?

You and me - consumers purchasing food.

State aid to farmers.

Private sector finance to big business through shareholders.

8. How does it do its greenwash?

Heavy investment, especially from supermarkets in the language of 'corporate social responsibility' to defend their environmentally unsustainable practices eg "Tesco in the Community".