

Written evidence submitted by Dr Christian Reynolds (FSC0049)

Fairness in the food supply chain. Written Evidence – Dr Christian Reynolds. Submitted 28/7/2023

1.1 I am a Reader at the Center for Food Policy, City, University of London. My main research areas are food loss and waste, and affordable, healthy, sustainable diets. I have worked on these issues in Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, the UK, US, and Europe. I have co-authored over 70 peer reviewed publications, as well as multiple reports and book chapters. I have led and supported rapid reviews of evidence for the Food Standards Agency and Defra on topics including citizen science; sustainability in the UK food system; and the environmental impact of public procurement. I will be providing information on specific questions asked by the committee below

Structure and operation of the food supply chain

To what extent is the UK's food supply chain currently operating effectively and efficiently? The UK food supply chain is not currently effective or efficient at feeding its citizens.

2.2 The inability to affordably feed a quarter of the population shows this level of inefficiency (FSA 2023). Across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 25% of respondents were classified as food insecure (12% low, 12% very low), 44% of respondents aged 16-24 years were food insecure (20% low, 23% very low security). Overall 80% of respondents reported that they had made a change to their eating habits for financial reasons in the previous 12 months.

2.3 Food loss and waste is still occurring in the UK food system - despite concerns over the cost of living, and improved efficiency of processes and supply chains (WRAP 2022). 6 million tonnes of food is wasted on farm or in the supply chain, and a further 7 million tonnes is wasted in households (WRAP 2018, 2019). This level of loss and waste shows a lack of effectiveness and efficiency. Many of the drivers of food loss and waste in the UK food system are structural, related to fairness and power, and solvable.

Food prices, security and fairness

What is the relationship between food production costs, food prices and retail prices? How have recent movements in commodity prices and food-price inflation been reflected in retail prices?

And

What are the consequences of current relationships in the supply chain for: b. prices paid and profit margins of farmers, food manufacturers and other suppliers

3.1 Movements in commodity prices and food-price inflation have been reflected in retail prices in different ways, depending on the type of food and the level of processing involved. I highlight the work published by the Food Research Collaboration, which found that an average block of cheese or loaf of bread produces less than a penny for farmers. These reports also show that supermarkets have a large share of the profit from food sales, ranging from 10% to 40% depending on the product (see Jack 2021 and Jack and Hammans, 2022).

3.2 The gap between minimum priced items (value brands), and products in other pack/portion/sizes, and with other quality attributes have also been impacted. In many cases the lowest unit price is not the lowest price per 100g. This leads to inequalities of purchase power for consumers trying to save money.

3.3 My previous research (Reynolds 2016, 2018) found that milk had a minimum price of £0.05 per 100ml for 4 liters, compared to £0.08-0.10 per 100ml for 2 and 1 pint containers. This has been exacerbated today with the gap between pack types widening as shown in the table below:

	£ per pack	£ per 100ml	Percentage price increase to purchase smaller amount
1 pint	0.9	0.16	129%
2 pint	1.25	0.11	57%
3 litre	2.2	0.07	0%
4 pints	1.55	0.07	0%
Milk prices sourced from https://www.trolley.co.uk/ on 28/7/2023			

Affordable and healthy food

How successfully are supermarkets promoting affordable and healthy eating in the current high food inflation environment and what steps could they take to increase the take-up and affordability of healthy options? How are promotions, such as multi-buy offers, supporting healthy eating including for those on low incomes, and also affecting levels of food waste?

- 4.1 Overall direct supermarket interventions in citizen food waste and healthy eating have been not impactful in the long-term. The £1 million campaign “Waste less, Save more” resulted in only a 1-2% reduction in avoidable food waste (Hubbub 2018).
- 4.2 The £2 top up of Healthy Start vouchers by supermarkets led to 0.8 more portions of fruit and vegetables per day per household being purchased during the top up period (Thomas et al 2022).
- 4.3 My previous work for WRAP (<https://wrap.org.uk/resources/healthy-sustainable-eating-and-food-waste/sustainable-eating>) found that intensive workshops and engagement could lead to modest sustained improvements (73% increase in the number eating ‘five-a-day portions of fruit and vegetables. Overall the amount of food wasted reduced by 7%. (WRAP 2017).
- 4.4 My current research (Research Project Reference: NE/V010654/1 and Kandemir et al 2020) has found that not purchasing the correct amount at the correct time is leading to greater food waste and plastic waste. This waste is not factored into the cost of the item at purchase but results in less food consumed overall. (Linking to my arguments in 3.2 and 3.3), Pricing that charges more per 100g for buying smaller packs is driving waste and causing environmental damage. Likewise, my research shows that retailer price promotions, and in particular multi-unit deals can increase waste when households cannot eat the food before it expires. This is very important when considering the short shelf life and high cost of fruit and vegetables, dairy and animal products.
- 4.5 However, research from the Netherlands (van Lin et al 2023) has found that Retail price promotions, and in particular multi-unit deals such as “buy one, get one,” may not always lead to increased waste. They found in households that reported consuming and freezing more, the purchase of a multi-unit deal reported wasting less than households paying regular prices. In short: these households had the capacity to store and eat the on sale items.

What challenges do low-income households face, in both urban and rural areas, in terms of accessing affordable and healthy food from a choice of retailers?

- 5.1 Research by Nourish Scotland (2022) found clear differences in price and quality of foods depending on location (urban, rural) and store type. Most stark was a price difference of £3 for orange juice. Similar evidence from Nourish Scotland has been submitted to other committees (see COL0031 <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/121726/pdf/>).
- 5.2 The Centre for Food Policy Obesity research unit and the Family Food Experience Study have found a wide range of food environment barriers in London post-pandemic. (see Isaacs et al 2023 , Gallagher Squires et al 2023, Coleman et al 2023) and
- 5.3 Dr Sabine Parrish provided a summary of results in her recent talk “They eat biscuits so that they don't go hungry': intersecting inequalities and the place of health in family food practices in London”, on 24 July 2023 <https://youtu.be/GjNZPUoLov0> I encourage the committee to watch or listen to this additional evidence.

What measures could be taken by central and local government, and others, to enhance cooking skills to reduce reliance on processed food and improve access to self-grown food, in particular for lower income households? What challenges do such ambitions face given the pressures of modern living?

- 6.1 Cooking skills are not the primary need for lower income households. This is not the case of citizens simply being uneducated in cookery and domestic management.
- 6.2 There is lived experience insight into this question in the work of Isaacs et al 2023 , Gallagher Squires et al 2023, Coleman et al 2023.
- 6.3 My previous research on UK Food Hubs, and the wider alternative food movement highlights that these operations provide a space at the local level for food provision, skill development and community growing (Guzman and Reynolds 2019). Developing Food Hubs and the alternative food economy via central and local government policy will help improve community resilience and offer alternate avenues to supermarkets for food provision. Jack, & Hammans, (2022) also found that alternate food supply chains (via hubs) offered fairer prices for farmers and other parts of the supply chain.
- 6.4 Dr Megan Blake has developed the *food ladders* concept (<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research/features/food-ladders>) to highlight where interventions are needed to support communities.

7.1 I apologise for the fragmented nature of this evidence, I have just returned from paternity leave, and have not had time for a full edit of this document.

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