

City Harvest – Written evidence (FPO0055)

Background on City Harvest

City Harvest helps put surplus food to good use in a sustainable way, by distributing to organisations that feed the hungry. To date, we have delivered 7 million meals. Food waste and food poverty are two of the biggest issues facing society. In the UK more than 8 million people live in households that struggle to put enough food on the table, with more than half regularly going a whole day without eating. At the same time, many food businesses waste surplus food that is often inevitable in operations. City Harvest has introduced high impact “last mile” food rescue to ensure that any unused fresh food from businesses is rapidly redistributed to those experiencing food poverty. We ensure any fresh surplus food is delivered safely, reliably and efficiently to organisations that nourish London’s vulnerable men, women and children. City Harvest is the largest London-based food redistribution charity delivering over 40 tonnes of food each week, free of charge, to 300 community food programmes that feed the homeless, individuals and families in transition, women in crises, refugees, children and the elderly. We have enabled our community partners that receive City Harvest deliveries to reduce their annual food budgets by more than £8 million to date, improve meal quality and attract additional guests. Without our current supply of nutritious food, many believe they would struggle or close. With City Harvest free food deliveries, they instead have available funding for other vital services. In the next 12 months, each of our partner charities will receive food valued at £19,000.

1. What are the key causes of food insecurity in the UK? Can you outline any significant trends in food insecurity in the UK? To what extent (and why) have these challenges persisted over a number of years?

- Minimum Wage Impact – with a switch to a Living Wage in place of a Minimum Wage, many companies would give their employees a degree of freedom in terms of budgeting which is necessary to limiting food insecurity. City Harvest as well as other London Living Wage employers have seen firsthand the benefits of paying the Living Wage to their employees, especially in a city like London with such a high cost of living. Many of the service users at the charity partners which we serve, can not pay their basic living expenses and also afford food and thus seek assistance at frontline charities.
- Cost of Living – the high cost of living has a profound effect on food insecurity. London, as one of the most expensive cities in the world, sees

lower income individuals devoting the majority of their wages to accommodation and associated costs. Many of the individuals who are experiencing food poverty and visit the frontline partners to which we deliver surplus food are employed but run out of funds for food after other vital expenses like housing and heating are paid.

- Ability to work/Right to work – those in vulnerable situations who are unable to work disproportionately suffer from food insecurity due to their limited income availability. Often the benefits these unemployed or underemployed individuals receive are barely enough to cover basic expenses (i.e. accommodation, utilities, taxes, transportation) let alone to enough to afford 3 healthful meals per day for them and their dependents.

2. What are some of the key ways in which diet (including food insecurity) impacts on public health? Has sufficient progress been made on tackling childhood obesity and, if not, why not?

London's children are more likely to grow up in poverty than contemporaries elsewhere in the UK. 37% of London's children (700,000) live in poverty after housing costs are taken into account. These children living in poverty will, on average, develop slower than contemporaries, do less well at school, have poorer physical and mental health, and will have fewer opportunities in their later lives than their peers.

City Harvest is proud to partner with more than 60 community organisations that play an integral role in improving the lives of London's most vulnerable children. We deliver more than 16,000 meals each month to programmes offering play-groups, homework clubs, sports activities, cookery courses, mentorship and other activities which provide children with opportunities to gain confidence and skills. In the last year, City Harvest has delivered over 200 tonnes of surplus food directly to organisations focused on bettering the lives of young Londoners enabling our partners to serve more than 400,000 meals.

The food City Harvest donates also helps our charity partners offer cooking clubs for children that have long term benefits for families. The children are given the opportunity to learn about where the food they are using comes from as well as practical cooking skills. Children return to their homes and often share their learnings about healthy eating with their families. *One child we spoke with said "We learn about how to make meals healthy. I always make food at home now."*

3. How accessible is healthy food? What factors or barriers affect people's ability to consume a healthy diet? Do these factors affect populations living in rural and urban areas differently?

- For many of the individuals in the community we serve, fruit and veg is inaccessible. These food categories are considered to be luxury items, not as filling as other cheaper options.
- Fruit and vegetables that is available on lower budgets has limited nutritional value due to transportation and growing processes

4. What role can local authorities play in promoting healthy eating in their local populations, especially among children and young people, and those on lower incomes? How effectively are local authorities able to fulfil their responsibilities to improve to improve the health of people living in their areas? Are you aware of any existing local authority or education initiatives that have been particularly successful (for example, schemes around holiday hunger, providing information on healthy eating, or supporting access to sport and exercise)?

- Walk to School Wednesdays and walking buses
- NHS Change4Life scheme
- Make sure council housing has sufficient and safe cooking equipment
- Breakfast and lunch school meals should be healthy
- Schemes around holiday hunger are vital but rarely translate into term-time healthy eating habits.
- Children are often well informed and educated but with working parents, time and financial constraints healthy options are still not being given at home
- In looking at the 2018 Ofsted report on "Obesity, healthy eating and physical activity in primary schools," some of the following policies may help with young children:
 - More compulsory teaching about healthy living which could have an impact on their behaviour outside of school. In this vein, there could be compulsory recording to parents about what children are actually eating and what they are learning about to allow for continuity and follow up at home.

5. What can be learnt from food banks and other charitable responses to hunger? What role should they play?

It is important to distinguish between the work City Harvest does, which is delivering fresh, high quality surplus fresh food, to that of foodbanks, which specialise in ambient, non-perishable food like pasta, rice and tins of food. We have a particular focus on nutrition, and deliver to soup kitchens,

homeless shelters, children's programs and other community programmes that are cooking nutritious meals with the ingredients.

Should people be getting nourished only by food bank food for significant periods, it would have adverse effects on their physical health. Most lack fresh food (fruit, veg, meat and fish) and focus on long-shelf life items with lower nutritional value. Combined with that, food banks often ignore the issues of 'energy poverty'. Many people in need of support from food banks have limited access to cooking equipment and if they do have limited funds for utilities. For that reason, City Harvest has found that 'community meals' are providing an invaluable service cooking healthful, hot food.

6. What impact do food production processes (including product formulation, portion size, packaging and labelling) have on consumers dietary choices and does this differ across income groups?

- Date labels – date labels are incredibly detrimental to the food system. The average consumer is not well-educated about the meanings behind these labels (i.e. 'Best Before', 'Use-by', 'Display until') and thus tonnes of food per month are wasted. By limiting the dates labels allowed on products it would reduce waste and reduce pressure on the food system.
- 'Display Until' and 'Best Before' should be removed from all products and date labelling should be restricted to 'Use-By'. The display until and best before are merely sales tools designed to pinpoint the moment when food quality peaks. There is little evidence to corroborate the idea that taste, quality, or nutritional value decreases after the 'Best Before' date.
- More research should be done into the accuracy of dating systems, especially 'Use-by' and consumers (especially young consumers) should be educated around food safety.
- Portion sizing also has a huge impact on the average consumer leading to obesity and excess waste. Around 70% of all food waste happens in the home and most of this is down to portion size and date labels.

7. What impact do food outlets (including supermarkets, delivery services, or fast food outlets) have on the average UK diet? How important are factors such as advertising, packaging, or product placement in influencing consumer choice, particularly for those in lower income groups?

- Supermarket discounts (i.e. 'two for one', 'half-off') usually are focused on low nutritional value items and entice consumers to over-consume. It also unequally targets low income communities looking for deals.

8. Do you have any comment to make on how the food industry might be encouraged to do more to support or promote healthy and sustainable diets? Is government regulation an effective driver of change in this respect?

- Front of pack nutrition labelling
- Government regulation can be an effective driver of change, but people need to think they are making their own decisions. Phrasing like "healthy choice" and "healthy option".
- In a similar vein, there should be multiple options of healthy food, e.g. for different dietary requirements like kosher, vegetarian, vegan, halal. Somewhere this could be implemented would be school meals.
- People usually make decisions relative to what they are used to, not necessarily objectively. Therefore, it might be useful to have comparisons and "swaps" to make it seem more manageable and less different from what they're used to.
- Supermarket discounts (i.e. 'two for one', 'half-off') usually are focused on low nutritional value items and entice consumers to over-consume. It also unequally targets low income communities looking for deals
- The government needs to take a more serious role in tracking hunger and food insecurity. The first step to encourage and promote healthy and sustainable diets is in understanding the foodscape. Currently the government does not track food insecurity.

9. To what extent is it possible for the UK to be self-sufficient in producing healthy, affordable food that supports good population health, in a way that is also environmentally sustainable?

- According to the March 2019 "Sustainable Food Systems for a Healthier UK: A discussion paper", by the Faculty of Public Health and The Soil Association, crucially sustainability is about being able to provide for both now and in the future. This includes a dependence on the quality of the air, water and soil required to produce this food, which is currently badly affected by food production.¹
- The focus should be to maintain a healthful, affordable, and sustainable food system for everyone.
- Companies and groups who are fighting waste and promoting circular economies should be supported.
- We are aware that only a very limited amount of food waste generated by businesses in the UK is actually re-distributed to charity. Policy which supports redistribution is imperative.
- Switching to a seasonal diet and tax goods that are not in season to promote seasonal diets.

¹ For examples, refer to table 2. Bash, Kristin and Donnelly, Amanda, 'Sustainable Food Systems for a Healthier UK: A discussion paper,' Faculty of Public Health and The Soil Association, March 2019. 5-7.

10. Can efforts to improve food production sustainability simultaneously offer solutions to improving food insecurity and dietary health in the UK?

- Yes. Improving the food systems sustainability will inevitably increase consumer awareness about food insecurity and dietary health.
- Idea: Encouraging the use of frozen fruit and veg
- According to the March 2019 "Sustainable Food Systems for a Healthier UK: A discussion paper" by the Faculty of Public Health and The Soil Association
 - 'The food system, environmental sustainability and population health overlap in three key areas: climate change; wider environmental damage (air pollution, water pollution, reduction in soil health, loss of biodiversity, land use/deforestation); and antimicrobial resistance (AMR).'
 - Actions associated with prevention of climate change, environmental damage and AMR can be identified that also improve environmental sustainability and improve population health. They list the following 10 examples.
 - 1. Promote diets that prioritise plant-based proteins and a 'less and better' approach to animal-based foods
 - 2. Advocate for British agriculture policy that accounts for human health;
 - 3. Advocate for all agricultural trade agreements to support public health and environmental sustainability, particularly in the post-Brexit environment;
 - 4. Advocate for reduction in antibiotic use in the livestock sector;
 - 5. Take a global view on food systems and align public health policies with key international agreements;
 - 6. Support regulation for labelling related to food production methods;
 - 7. Stimulate demand for sustainable food including British and local vegetables, pulses and fruits through public procurement, for example, implement DEFRA's Balanced Scorecard across public health sector catering and procurement and support the respecification of the School Fruit and Veg Scheme to support sustainability;
 - 8. Commission food programmes that support sustainable food systems;
 - 9. Promote and support community-based agriculture schemes that bring farming and green spaces into the urban and peri-urban environments and provide open access and exposure to these green spaces for members of the local community.

- 10. Develop and support local policies and contracts that aim to reduce wasted food within public sector food provision and wider large-scale catering.

11. How effective are any current measures operated or assisted by Government, local authorities or others to minimise food waste? What further action is required to minimise food waste?

- Strong Policy or legislation needs to be put in place to encourage and reward zero-waste or minimal waste businesses. At the moment there are few to no incentives for businesses to donate their surplus. In fact, due to subsidies around Anaerobic Digestions, much of the edible surplus food is going to A.D. and businesses are getting credit for conducting 'green' operations.
- Government and local authorities should renew commitment to following the 'Food Rescue Hierarchy' which prioritise the redistribution of edible surplus directly to consumers.
- Every council should have home composting bins

12. A Public Health England report has concluded that "considerable and largely unprecedented" dietary shifts are required to meet Government guidance on healthy diets. What policy approaches (for example, fiscal or regulatory measures, voluntary guidelines, or attempts to change individual or population behaviour through information and education) would most effectively enable this? What role could public procurement play in improving dietary behaviours?

- Government guidance posters in supermarkets helping people to understand how to buy

13. Has sufficient research been conducted to provide a robust analysis of the links between poverty, food insecurity, health inequalities and the sustainability of food production? How well is existing research on the impact of existing food policy used to inform decision making?

- One paper found is the March 2019 "Sustainable Food Systems for a Healthier UK: A discussion paper" by the Faculty of Public Health and The Soil Association
- One paper claims that studies linking obesity to climate change are over simplistic and do not take into account other factors such as increased exercise which would change the "energy out" part of the equation.²
- There is a lack of concise research given out to smaller actors further down the chain which makes decision making at different levels difficult.

² Garnett, Tara, "What is a sustainable healthy diet? A discussion paper," April 2014: 28.

14. What can the UK learn from food policy in other countries? Are there examples of strategies which have improved access and affordability of healthy, sustainable food across income groups?

- From World Cancer Research Fund International - Food Policy highlights from around the world.

<https://www.wcrf.org/sites/default/files/PPAFoodPolicyHighlights.pdf>.

- **South Korea's** food advertising restriction for children (2008) Bans TV advertising for specific food categories during children's prime time viewing
- **Mexico's** sugary drinks tax (2013) Increases price of sugary drinks by about 10% n Application at point of production simplifies its implementation
- **New York City's** Health Bucks programme (2005) Provides direct incentive for low-income people to allocate spending to fruits and vegetables n Shows potential for scaling up
- **Slovenia's school nutrition law** (2013) Bans vending machines selling food and drink on school property. The ban complements standards and subsidies for school meals, cross-curriculum nutrition education, and a school fruit programme
- **Argentina's salt law** (2013) Sets maximum salt-levels for widely consumed foods, including restaurant dishes, with clear penalties for infringement. Includes complementary actions to raise awareness.
- **South Africa's** mandatory salt-reduction targets (2013) Sets specific targets for salt reduction for 13 food categories. Regulation enforced by government.
- **Denmark's** trans-fat law (2003). Bans the sale of products containing trans fats. Complete ban facilitates monitoring.
- **Austria's** trans-fat regulation (2009) Sets clear limits on trans fats for different food items. Targets producers and retailers.
- **Ghana's** fat content standards (1990s). Limits fat levels in meat (domestic and imported). Reduces availability of high-fat meats, enforced by meat testing.
- **Singapore's** Healthier Hawker Programme (2011) n Engages food supply chain (e.g. oil manufacturers) to increase availability of healthier vegetable oils to street vendors at lower prices. Street vendors using healthier oils can display a 'Healthier Choice' symbol.
- **Western Australia's** Go for 2&5® fruit and vegetable campaign (2002–2005). A sustained multi-strategy social marketing campaign. Clearly communicated, solutions-based, delivered by credible source.
- **France's** National Nutrition & Health Programme: Manger Bouger (2001–present). Widespread, comprehensive and sustained. Applies

across settings, including mandatory health messages for all television advertising for processed foods and drinks.

15. Are there any additional changes at a national policy level that would help to ensure efforts to improve food insecurity and poor diet, and its impact on public health and the environment, are effectively coordinated, implemented and monitored?

- Supermarkets to be obligated to publish food-waste statistics, how much was wasted, what was wasted, why etc.
- Only have 'use by' not 'best before' as mentioned in question _
- "Healthy" food advertising should not necessarily be targeted to losing weight, it should be about the general necessity to have a healthy lifestyle
- Use of apps and data such as Giki

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