Written evidence from Paula Feehan (CCE0026)

House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee Call for Evidence
Mobilising action on climate change and environment: behaviour change
13th December 2021

My name is Paula Feehan and I am submitting this submission in a personal capacity as someone who has recently completed an MSc in food policy, with a focus on behaviour change in relation to climate and dietary change. I would be happy to give evidence to the Committee in person.

For the purpose of this submission, the definition of 'dietary change' specifically denotes a shift away from meat and dairy products towards plant-based food. This definition is adopted from the EAT-Lancet Commission report on healthy diets from sustainable food systems (2019) recommendations of what type of dietary change is required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This is broadly defined as a 'global shift to a primarily plant-based diet if we are to keep agricultural production within planetary limits'.

The Committee has highlighted its interest in behaviour change and in the wider conditions needed for people to make changes and the related policy measures. This submission will therefore outline necessary conditions and policy recommendations that are required for individual dietary change.

The premise of this submission is that without addressing emissions from the food system (specifically meat and dairy production) we will **not** achieve climate change targets. If the UK is committed to achieving significant reductions in emissions by 2030 and net zero by 2050, the UK Government will need to address the role of dietary change.

This submission answers questions A, B, F, L and W.

A. What are the areas where lifestyle changes may be most needed to reach the Government's long term climate change and environmental goals and commitments?

1. What we eat – our diets – is an important factor in both driving and potentially mitigating climate change. Changing diets, specifically reducing meat and dairy consumption – by far the biggest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in our collective diet – would have a big impact. Studies now conclude that even if targets to reduce fossil fuel emissions are achieved, current emissions from the global food system would make the climate targets difficult, if not impossible, to reach.

2. The message is clear: without drastic reduction in the production and consumption of meat and dairy, there is little chance of avoiding dangerous levels of climate change. Given the potential of reducing meat and dairy consumption over time to yield substantial GHG reductions (not to mention the co-benefits of moving towards plant-based diets for public health and biodiversity), all available policy levers, covering all sectors of the economy will be needed to achieve reductions at the scale and pace required. This includes policies to promote individual dietary change.

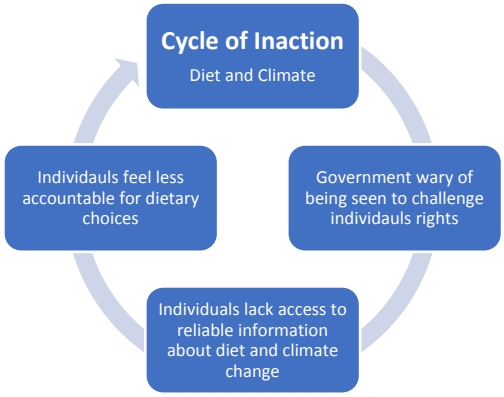
3. However, this submission argues that the Government is currently part of a 'vicious cycle' of inaction. There is an alliance of interests that prevents an open discussion of the role of dietary change in mitigating climate change. The UK Government seems to be wary of being seen to infringe peoples' rights to make their own diet and lifestyle choices and to challenge the farming sector. Without strong messaging from Government, individuals feel less accountable for climate change in their own choices and lack access to reliable information about the impacts of those choices and possible trade-offs.

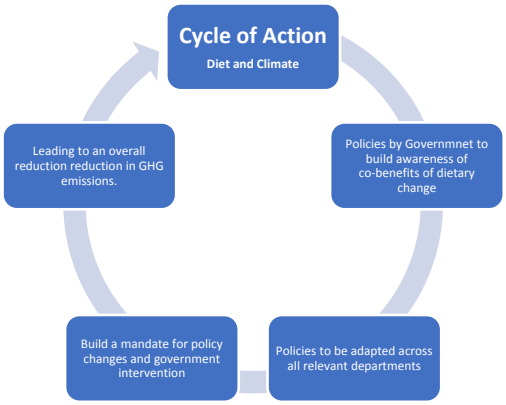
4. For this 'vicious cycle' to be replaced with a 'virtuous cycle' of action, the UK Government must break the cycle by adopting bold policy choices. Changing diet is challenging but not insurmountable and no more difficult than changing other behaviours needed to address the climate emergency. The UK Government must lead this behaviour change as it the only actor with the necessary resources (human and financial) to promote dietary change at the scale and pace required.

5. This must also work across Government departments. Dietary change needs a joined-up approach, as food consumption is relevant to a number of departments including the Department for Health and Social Care, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Department for Education and the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

6. The 'virtuous circle' of action enabling dietary change should involve: policies by the Government to build awareness of the impact of animal agriculture on the climate and also the co-benefits of dietary change, thus building a mandate for policy changes and Government intervention regarding individual diets, leading to an overall reduction in red meat and dairy consumption and reduction in GHG emissions.

7. Below is a diagrammatic representation of the current 'vicious cycle' of inaction and what is needed to move to a 'virtuous cycle' of action.





B. What is the UK's current level of concern regarding climate change and environment issue?

8. The amount of media attention a specific issue attracts has an important 'agenda setting' effect and awareness of an issue can be a prerequisite for the public to take action and change behaviour. Two separate studies provide insight into the lack of coverage and connection made between dietary change and climate change in the western media.

9. Firstly, a study was conducted between 2006 and 2018 and analysed UK (Daily Telegraph and The Guardian) and US (New York Times and Wall Street Journal) media attention to animal agriculture's impact on climate change. Kristiansen (2021) concluded that animal agriculture's contribution to GHG emissions did not feature strongly in articles and media coverage during this period, contributing to low public awareness of the link. They argue that this disproportionately low representation is an obstacle to more effective interventions to reduce meat consumption. The second study by Happer and Wellesley (2016) analysed meat consumption, behaviour and the media environment and agrue that the absence of the meat-climate connection in mainstream debates is often taken by the public as an indication of low level of importance.

10. If the connection between animal agriculture and climate is not well understood within the public sphere, coupled with little media attention, this could be interpreted by the public as it not being that important and could therefore have consequences for behaviour change initiatives.

F. What are the pros and cons and limitations of different frameworks and methods for promoting behavioural change?

11. The UK Government has so far shied away from decisive polices to reduce meat and dairy consumption and has adopted a 'nudge' approach such as positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions as ways to influence the behaviour and decision making of individuals. Considering the urgency of the climate emergency, decisive polices will be required to support dietary improvements at such a scale. Behavioural science suggests targeted dietary changes are unlikely to be achievable without comprehensive measures, including fiscal incentives and mandates.

L. Where could the focus of Government efforts on behaviour change add the most value?

12. To reduce the harm caused to our climate by the current food system, UK citizens need to eat less meat and dairy. Government plays a critical role in this behaviour change. The UK Government needs to stop being passive and have the courage to talk directly about individuals' consumption. If governments reframe the issue and convey the climate, environmental and public health benefits arising from dietary change, this will create political consensus to support government interventions.

13. Reducing meat and dairy consumption will require government departments to work together to ensure policy coherence across health, agriculture, education and environment. The next section provides a suite of recommendations to successfully set this agenda and navigate these challenges. The recommendations focus on policy levers to change diets and divert production towards climate friendly food.

Recommendation one: *public education campaigns*

14. Dietary change requires education. Public education is a necessary first step in any wider strategy to reduce meat and dairy consumption. There is currently a gap between public understanding of the links between red meat and dairy about climate change. Public education messages need to be simple, meaningful and impactful about the need for dietary change. They need to focus not only on environmental impact but also on the co-benefits on health and nutrition of reducing red meat.

15. Advice and guidance on the benefits of plant-based proteins (as opposed to animal proteins) will need to be tailored to regional contexts. The media, as outlined above, also play an important role in increasing coverage of the impact of meat and dairy production on climate and public health. Awareness raising alone is only part of the solution, but it will be crucial for creating the conditions for effective policy.

Actors to deploy recommendations: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Department for Education, Department for Health and Social Care.

Recommendation two: *National Food Strategy*

16. The National Food Strategy, released in July 2021, clearly outlined the negative impact animal agriculture is having on the environment as well as our health. The strategy recommended that meat consumption be reduced by 30% by 2030. It however proposed the 30% target is met by "nudges" to behaviour and replacement of meat by plant-based alternatives. It has ruled out a meat tax.

17. The Government is due to respond to the National Food Strategy with a white paper in January 2022. Decisive policies to support dietary change will be needed to include the changes needed at scale. To achieve the necessary reduction in meat, the white paper should include a meat tax.

18. Taxing red meat would help to incorporate the cost of environmental and health externalities. Government already taxes harmful food products such as sugar, alcohol and tobacco, which has been an effective and proven way of changing consumer behaviour. A red meat tax would provide increased revenue to fund public health. Taxing red meat would prevent disease, improve public health and increase public revenue.

    Actors to deploy recommendations: HM Treasury, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Department for Education, Department for Health and Social Care, Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Recommendation three: *label red meat and dairy to reflect environmental impact*

19. Mandatory labels on red meat and dairy should make explicit its environmental impact. Consumers require information to make informed choices at point of sale. Currently there is information on food products regarding sugar, salt and fat, which consumers use for guidance. However, information about the impact of red meat and dairy is minimal. Information on the environmental impact of food could underpin more sustainable policy choices regarding how much to tax and what to subsidise. For consumers, this would enable them to make informed choices based on cost savings as well as environmental efficiency.

    Actors to deploy recommendations: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Department for Business, Energy and Industrial

Strategy, Department for Education, Department for Health and Social Care.

Recommendation four: *dietary guidelines to reflect scientific evidence and government targets*

20. National dietary guidelines have been identified as a powerful policy tool in changing production decisions and consumption behaviours, and must reflect nutrition, health and environmental targets. National guidelines must integrate current scientific evidence relating to meat and dairy's environmental and health impact and cohere and align with nutritional goals and internationally agreed climate change targets.

21. Guidelines must include limits on red meat and dairy consumption and provide examples of alternative, sustainable plant-based options. Guidelines provided by international institutions such as WHO, FAO and IPCC could also be used to benchmark and assess consumption patterns globally.

    Actors to deploy recommendations: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Department for Health, Department for Education

Recommendation five: *reduce demand for meat and dairy through public procurement choices*

22. The Government should use its purchasing power and reach, via procurement choices within public services (schools, hospitals, prisons) to reduce demand and change dietary choices. It should facilitate sustainable and healthy eating within the public realm by increasing provision of plant-based protein.

23. There should be targeted public health promotion programmes and educational advice on the benefits of reducing meat and healthy eating campaigns. The public would then become more familiar with alternatives to meat and dairy, prompting new food habits at home for themselves and their families.

    Actors to deploy recommendations: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Department for Health and Social Care, Department for Education.

W. For behaviour change efforts, how effective is the co-ordination between government departments and the split of Ministerial and

departmental responsibilities, and are sufficient resources in place (staff and budgets)?

24. As outlined above, dietary change will require government departments to work together to ensure policy coherence across health, agriculture, education and environment. Changes will be needed across the political and economic spectrum – therefore an 'all of government' approach to climate action will need to be taken. Every minister will need to be a climate minister.

25. With these above measures to actively promote behaviour change relating to this neglected are of climate mitigation – our diet, the UK Government would be increasing the possibility of achieving its goal of significant reduction in emissions by 2030 and its net zero target by 2050.