

National Food Strategy Consultation - The Vegan Society response

We support a new 'field to fork' Food Strategy for England. There are proven ways to radically improve every part of our food system.

We agree with the Consultation in parts: Food is vital. We are now more likely to die from how we live, than from infections. Government shapes England's relationships with food, and must tackle pressing food issues now. How we use land moulds country life, disproportionately through high subsidises for large farms. Intensive farming is unsustainable, so our food production must improve, and meet the new challenges to food security.

But we disagree with many Consultation assumptions, too. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change affirms that diets higher in plant-based foods – vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds – and lower in animal-based foods, tend to be more sustainable and healthier.

The UK Committee on Climate Change have said: "Changes in people's diet, if this leads to reduced UK production of products such as beef, lamb and milk, could have a significant impact on emissions."

We challenge the Government to re-frame their vision to:

- Ensure safe, healthy food for all, that is affordable for everyone;
- Build a food system that is robust to future shocks;
- Restore and enhance the natural environment for everyone, including free-living non-human beings;
- Make the transition to resilient, sustainable and humane plant-based land management;
- Support all communities, enabling sustainable livelihoods for everyone involved in land management and food production, to empower them to innovate;
- Guarantee extensive support for people moving toward plant-based methods.

There is enough food: Researchers, including UN experts, confirm that we already produce enough nutritious and varied food for everyone.

People are prevented from eating well: Food distribution is key – people go hungry because we do not empower them to eat the existing food.

We have a global food destruction system: Around the world, over 1,500 farmed animals are slaughtered each second. Yet, someone dies of malnutrition every 10 seconds. About one in

ten adults and children are too impoverished to buy enough to eat. Our flawed global 'food production' system perpetuates death, hunger and injustice.

England's food system is broken: The UK is one of the hungriest countries in Europe. We need to know: Who does our food system currently harm? How will we hold ourselves to account, until everyone is well fed?

We have well over 75 years of evidence for plant-based solutions: What works in our homes, for sustainability, enjoyment and nutrition, is tasty, well-planned, plant-based, vegan-friendly food. Such food can support healthy living at every age and life-stage. Plants can provide all the essential amino acids we need for our protein intake. We aim to base most of our meals around legumes, such as refried bean burritos, lentil bolognese, chickpea curry, stir-fried soya alternatives to chicken.

We need a plant-based rural economy: Moving toward UK-grown protein crops, away from artificially breeding animals to farm, can make food production sustainable. We need to stop feeding South American soya to farmed animals, to help protect the Amazonian forests, free-living animals and Indigenous peoples. Also, animals don't create soil fertility in their bodies: they inefficiently 'compost' the nutrients from crops, including 'green manure' crops. We need to free up land from animal farming, for re-establishing England's natural habitats, for trees & other perennial plants, and for our free-living animals.

We need plant protein: Protein crops already grown commercially in the UK include split peas, fava beans, quinoa and hemp. Eating them 'first-hand' – as excellent favourites like burgers, split-pea cottage pie, or baked fava beans on toast – cuts our food carbon footprint compared to eating plants 'second-hand' via animals.

We need active Government support for improving land management: Empowering the transition to plant-based techniques will help farming, food businesses, and their communities, to thrive. We can also transition toward plant-based aquaculture, away from fishing.

We need to stop using animals: 'The highest standards of animal health and welfare' in plain speaking means: Not using animals at all. We need extensive protected habitats for free-living animals, and to end our animal farming. Formerly farmed animals can live out their natural lives in sanctuary habitats.

We need plant-based public procurement: England's public sector spends well over £1 billion yearly on food. These funds should be enabling sustainable public sector catering. Government accepts that we are increasingly eating vegan food, and that public sector catering needs to reflect this. Excellent plant-based public sector catering will 'scaffold' farmers, manufacturers, distributors, caterers, policy-makers and citizens to make our food system truly sustainable.

We need a Universal Basic Living Income (UBLI): People whose basic needs are met, are able to buy sustainable, healthy plant-based food from local businesses. A Universal Basic Living Income significantly increases access to, and affordability, of high-

quality food. Good public transport, UBLI, and land released by ending animal farming, will enable 'a flourishing countryside rich in wildlife'.

Our policy recommendations for sustainable, plant-based farming & vegan-friendly catering include:

1. Plant-based options on all public sector institution menus.
2. Public campaigns to help people adapt their eating.
3. Guaranteed access for all e.g. through subsidies.
4. All schools teaching every student how to prepare such dishes.
5. Free plant milks in primary, & local fruit & veg in all schools.
6. Reduce VAT on vegan restaurants, in or out of the EU.
7. Make such food the heart of healthy eating strategies.
8. No restrictions on plant product names e.g. burgers.
9. Support farmers who want to transition out of animal farming.
10. Climate change mitigation, public health & animal protection proportionately given 'public money for public goods'.
11. Advisory services for all food chain actors, especially on pulses.
12. Direct subsidies to protein crops, more than animal farming.
13. Funding for research to improve protein crops, identify priorities & improve collaboration.
14. Fund woodlands on land unsuitable for other crops.
15. Funding for people new to plant-based land management.

We need a plant-based revolution. A 'stock-free' farming and plant-based food revolution will make England lead innovators in food sustainability.