CONSULTATION PAPER 153

Food and Farming

Liberal Democrats

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Background

This consultation paper is presented as the first stage in the development of new Party policy in relation to Food and Farming. It does not represent agreed Party policy. It is designed to stimulate debate and discussion within the Party and outside; based on the response generated and on the deliberations of the working group a full policy paper will be drawn up and presented to Conference for debate.

The paper has been drawn up by a working group appointed by the Federal Policy Committee and chaired by Stuart Roberts. Members of the group are prepared to speak on the paper to outside bodies and to discussion meetings organised within the Party.

Comments on the paper, and requests for speakers, should be addressed to: Joseph Wright, Policy Unit, Liberal Democrats, 1 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PN. Email: policy.consultations@libdems.org.uk

Comments should reach us as soon as possible and no later than 27 March. Further copies of this paper can be found online at
https://www.libdems.org.uk/members/make-policy/policy-consultations

1 Introduction

1.1   The food system in the UK, and the world, is not delivering for people or producers. A world that includes starvation and hunger and obesity and waste simultaneously is an indicator of a major failing in the food system.

1.2   The global food system is the single biggest contributor to biodiversity loss, deforestation, drought, freshwater pollution and the collapse of aquatic wildlife. It is the second-biggest contributor to climate change, after the energy industry. The food system also damages the nation's health. The UK is now the third heaviest country in the G7, with almost three in ten of the adult population obese.

1.3   At the same time the food system is failing to deliver for farmers and food producers. Thanks to the hard Brexit chosen by the Conservative government, levels of support to farmers are falling, and some of the new free trade agreements, such as those with Australia and New Zealand, threaten to undercut them even further with lower welfare standards.

Objectives

1.4   Clearly, this situation is unsustainable. Without radical reform, the food system will continue to undermine the UK's environmental targets and lead to increasing strain on health standards and the NHS, while failing to support Britain's farmers.

1.5   We propose below a set of objectives for UK food and farming, but it should be recognised that there may be trade-offs between them; for example, if food production reflected its environmental costs in its prices,

and if farmers were able to earn a decent income, many foodstuffs would become unaffordable to some consumers. Government interventions, will always be necessary to achieve these aims:

- Consistency with net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

- Consistency with doubling nature by 2050.

- Minimising other environmental impacts, on water, air and soil.

- Minimising animal suffering in this country and abroad

- Delivering access to healthy diets for all the UK's people.

- Contributing to human health through other means, for example by continuing the world leading progress we are making on antibiotic reduction in agriculture.

- Delivering food security, which includes ensuring the affordability of a nutritious diet and putting in place the mechanisms to deliver resilient supply chains.

- Providing a decent livelihood for farmers, including in their role of delivering public goods which also recognises the role of farming plays in wider rural communities.

1.6   Since Farming, Fishing and Rural Affairs are devolved policies, this paper will be England only, except where otherwise stated.

Questions

1. Is this the right set of objectives?
2. Is there a hierarchy between them? – i.e. are some more important than others?

2   The Food System

Introduction

2.1   The Food System is responsible for almost everyone's wellbeing; without it we would still be hunter gatherers. In the UK's food system, there are several challenges and pinch points where improvements could be made, to improve the efficiency and fairness of the sector.

Technology

2.2   It is fair to say that often modern agriculture has embraced technology, genetic improvement, nutrition and training but it is also fair to say the adoption of these has often been slow and sporadic. Resource use efficiency, professional development and technology are all likely to play a role not only in producing the food we need but producing it in a manner that is in harmony with the environmental challenges faced by a modern society.

Food Supply Chains

2.3   Beyond the farm gate the food system has a significant role to play in both helping farmers and rural communities and helping consumers access healthy, nutritious and affordable food. In recent years we have seen examples of good and bad supply chain relationships. The lack of transparency and long term collaboration within the red meat supply chain for example has led to a lack of trust between farmers, processors and retailers.

2.4   At the other end of the spectrum we have seen some excellent work done on some integrated supply chains in certain dairy sectors. What

is clear to us is we need to see more collaboration up and down supply chains and the development of longer term relationships that benefit all parties between the farmer and the consumer. The Grocery Code Adjudicator must be strengthened and widened to cover all supply chain relations not just those directly with retailers. The GCA must be given more resources to fulfil this role.

Food Integrity

2.5   In recent years we have seen a plethora of issues in relation to food integrity. The most significant of these was the widespread issue of horsemeat but this is far from an isolated incident and these are happening regularly and often more frequently. We believe not only are these acts illegal, they are also doing serious damage to trust in relation to food, farming and the wider supply chain. We believe greater focus must be given to food fraud detection and prosecution

Public Sector Procurement

2.6   The public sector is an important source of demand for food and catering, for hospitals, schools, civil servants, prisons and the military. If public purchasers are required to follow minimum criteria, for example for sustainable production, organic or animal welfare standards, local sourcing, or meat-free options, the public sector can have a significant impact on the food and farming sectors. At present some elements of such a procurement policy are in place for central government and some local authorities and other public sector bodies, but there is no comprehensive approach, and monitoring and enforcement of the standards is largely lacking.

Questions

3. What factors do you think are slowing the progress of the uptake of training, technology and innovative approaches in farming?
4. What initiatives would you like to see in order to improve the cooperation within food supply chains?
5. Where there is inequity in power within a food supply chain, what role should Governments play to ensure greater transparency, fairness and equality? Should the Grocery Code Adjudicator provide this?
6. What measures would you put in place to protect farmers and consumers from the damage that can occur from food fraud?
7. What criteria should be included in public procurement policy for food and catering and what processes could be put in place for monitoring and enforcement?

3   Sustainable Food and Farming

Introduction

3.1   The Liberal Democrats have ambitious targets of reaching net zero emissions by 2045, and to double nature by 2050. Policy paper 139, *Tackling the Climate Emergency*, and upcoming policy paper *The Natural Environment*, set out how we will decarbonise farming and turnaround the decline in nature in the countryside respectively. We think there is a strong case for transitioning our food and farming system, which rewards farmers as well as encouraging healthier, sustainable diets.

Fruit and Vegetables

3.2   The National Food Strategy recommends that we increase consumption of fruit and vegetables by 30% by 2032 (compared to 2019). This equates to an average of 5 portions of fruit and veg per day, long standing medical advice. These changes are required to meet health, climate and nature commitments. We are a long way from 5 a day: the average for adults is 2.7. To achieve this target, we need a 30% increase in fruit and veg production and consumption. We believe we need to establish a comprehensive fruit and vegetable strategy to cover both production and consumption.

Sustainable Farming

3.3   As well as changes in consumption, we also want to see farming and food put on a sustainable footing on the production side. That means transitioning away from a system which currently causes environmental

harm and is a significant emitter of carbon, to a system which is positive for the environment and produces negative carbon emissions.

3.4   To achieve this, we will need to use resources more efficiently, particularly fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides and other chemical inputs. Sharp rises in prices following COVID and the Ukraine War have already begun this process as farmers seek to reduce costs, but they should be supported to achieve further sustainable reductions, such as through training schemes and technology.

3.5   We will also need more regenerative farming. This will not be a 'one size fits all' approach, but will vary from farm to farm and region to region. In some places, this could involve more organic farming, in others, greater use of trees and hedgerows or transitioning to different produce and methods of growing.

Land use

3.6   It will be impossible to meet the climate and nature targets mentioned above without significant changes in land use, and farmers have a central role to play as land managers. In particular, we have called for a major national programme of protecting and expanding natural carbon sinks, primarily forests and peatlands.

3.7   Central government needs to set the overall framework and provide regulatory and financial incentives, but implementation of real change must be led at a local level. We have proposed to transform Local Nature Partnerships into Zero-Carbon Nature Partnerships, working with farmers and land managers to audit and map natural capital and carbon sink provision in their area and identify priorities for investment. We also

need to reverse the weakening of the planning system, ensure planners have the skills and resources to support overall carbon reduction targets and place stronger duties on National Park Authorities to create and protect carbon sinks.

3.8   Restoring and expanding forests is the best option for carbon removal, as trees fix carbon in living biomass and forest soils for decades or centuries, and woodland also provides habitats for wildlife and plants. We have proposed a tree planting rate of at least 40,000 ha/year, equivalent to at least 60 million new trees a year. This can be met not only through major afforestation initiatives and urban trees but also through promoting agroforestry, planting trees on farms. This is an example of the kind of agro-ecological approach we believe will be necessary to meet the urgency of the climate and nature challenges.

Local Food

3.9   Recent research has indicated that the UK could grow up to 40% of its own fruit and vegetables by using urban green spaces. This could improve many people's physical and mental health, and provide habitat for wildlife. Planning should include space for new allotments and encourage regenerating neglected ones. Alongside 'Grow Your Own' (GYO) we should be encouraging commercial and community-supported market gardening close to towns and cities.

3.10   Traditional orchards have declined by 81% since the 1900s. They are a valuable habitat for wildlife and can be combined with low-intensity grazing and hay cutting. We think there is a case for providing support for communities to run more orchards locally, as well as other local methods of growing food like allotments.

Food Waste

3.11   Food waste is a significant challenge for reducing the environmental impact of food - in the UK, food waste is estimated to be between 6 and 7% of our emissions. Pre-farm gate food waste is estimated to be around a third of food waste, with the majority of the rest occurring in households.

3.12   Removing 'use by' dates on food has been proposed as one way of reducing food waste - but this does run the risk of impacting on human health, as consumers may eat food that is no longer safe.

3.13   We also think that a new farm payments system should incentivise farmers to reduce pre-farm gate waste. Surplus food redistribution would involve pre-farm gate food being given to local charities and groups and distributed to those most in need - tackling food poverty as well as waste.

3.14   In supermarkets, a huge amount of food is also lost due to needlessly high aesthetic standards that are applied to fruit and veg. We think there is a case for relaxing these requirements in order to reduce food waste.

Questions

8.   Should we adopt the National Food Strategy recommendations to change diets by 2032 (compared to 2019)?
9.   What policies will help put farming on an environmentally sustainable footing?
10. How can farmers best play a role in managing land to meet ambitious climate and nature targets?

11. What suggestions do you have for encouraging, supporting and expanding local food systems that can give farmers and consumers greater access to each other?
12. Should "use by" dates be removed from food labels to reduce food waste?
13. Should we include surplus food redistribution into the new Farm Payments System?

4   Nutrition and Healthy Eating

Introduction

4.1   The UK has high and rising levels of obesity. Approximately 28% of adults across the UK were obese in 2019, rising from 23% in 2011. An additional 36% were overweight in 2019. Obesity related diseases cost the NHS in excess of £6bn per year and are calculated to cost wider society £27bn per year. Reducing obesity is the single biggest action that can safeguard the future of the NHS.

4.2   There are also increasing instances of malnutrition. Three million people in the UK either have or are at risk of malnutrition, disproportionately concentrated in lower-income regions and households, the elderly and those in institutional care. In England alone the costs arising from malnutrition have been estimated at £19.6 billion.

4.3   Further challenges include the cost of energy. Cooking from scratch is typically healthier and cheaper compared with ready meals. However, the energy cost of cooking means many people cannot afford the electricity or gas to cook homemade hot meals. 60% of food insecure households report using cooking appliances less. There is also a clear correlation between poverty and the density of fast-food outlets, with almost twice as many in the most deprived areas compared to the least.

Our Proposals

4.5   Our approach focuses on three main issues; education, advertising and incentives.

4.6   In education, we think there is a strong case for bringing back Food Tech classes and qualifications for all appropriate ages, with a special emphasis on healthy eating and nutrition.

4.7   We also think that free school meals, school fruit and veg schemes and breakfast clubs should be expanded, starting with the areas with the highest levels of deprivation and pupils whose parents receive Universal Credit.

4.8   In further and higher education, there should be a nutrition education module for medical students in the UK and as part of continuing professional development for qualified clinicians.

4.9   Currently, less than 2% of food and drink advertising spend goes on vegetables:it is not a fair playing field. As such, we think there is a strong case for tighter regulation of fast and processed food advertising. This could include restrictions on when and where foods high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS) can be advertised and educational messages and warnings, comparable to alcohol or tobacco.

4.10   We also want to put the right incentives in place so that people make healthier choices. Following the success of the soft drinks industry levy, a 20% tax on manufacturers of HFSS products could encourage reformulation. All money raised from such levies can be used to advertise and educate on healthy eating and subsidise fruit and vegetables.

4.11   Councils would also have to undertake analysis of the food environment, with targets in the planning system to encourage healthier options.

4.12   We also think there is a case for mandatory fortification of various products, particularly with vitamin D, and for reviewing the risks of nitrates.

Questions

14. What are your thoughts on expanding the provision of free school meals as outlined above? Do you agree with expanding the school fruit and veg scheme?
15. What are your thoughts on improving the education of clinicians in nutrition? Should it be limited to GPs or for all doctors? What part can other professions such as nutritionists and dieticians play?
16. What are your thoughts on the advertising restrictions for HFSS food?
17. Should processed food adverts carry mandatory consumer education messages, like tobacco or alcohol?
18. What do you think about the 20% levy on HFSS foods? Should the money raised be used to promote healthier food?
19. What initiatives, tools and programmes do you think would most help with healthy eating and reducing obesity in the UK?

5   Farm Payments System

Introduction

5.1   The Conservatives have badly let our farmers down. The Conservatives promised a 'public money for public goods' system to reward environmental farming replacing the old Basic Payments Scheme, comprising three new schemes that aim to reward environmental management: Sustainable Farming Incentive, Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery. These are intended to support the 25 Year Environment Plan through agreements with farmers and other land managers.

5.2   The introduction of the new schemes is being rolled out over the next few years and it is far from clear what payments they will receive and when they will start. It is also clear that many of those payments are unlikely to cover the cost of delivering the 'public good' proscribed. This is causing great uncertainty and a reduction in the uptake of agri-environment schemes, not because of a lower appetite among farmers to do good environmental work, but because of weaknesses and uncertainty in the Conservatives policy. The Liberal Democrats want to provide farmers with the support and certainty that they need.

Accessibility, Fairness and Implementation

5.3   We want to see farmers fairly rewarded and supported by a payments system which works for them, the environment and the public. We believe that any farm payments system should be underpinned by four key principles, as well as being consistent with WTO trade rules. It must be:

- Accessible to all farmers
- A fair system
- One that rewards farmers for providing public goods
- Implemented at a reasonable pace

5.4   Any farm payments system should be accessible to all farmers, regardless of their size, produce type and land tenure type. Upland farmers, tenants, those in share farming or other tenure types should all be able to access the scheme, without onerous paperwork, or requiring excessive technical know-how.

5.5   The system must also be fair. It should not reward big landowners at the expense of smallholdings, tenant farmers and the less economically secure. A fair system should provide money to those who work the land, not just its owners, and should include provisions that ensure jobs are created and replaced.

5.6   The Common Agricultural Policy Basic Payments System meets the accessibility criteria although not the fairness and the public goods criteria; and offers very little in the way of public goods although it does appear that future reforms are heading in this direction.

5.7   The timing of implementing a new scheme is also critical. The government has insisted on rolling out its new system before it's ready for most farmers to access and before many of the rules and mechanisms are ready for delivery. We would phase in the new scheme at the same time as slowing down the current scheme, implementing it at a speed that means all farmers who wish to can easily take up the new system.

Other Public Goods

5.8   As well as environmental and climate goods and improvements outlined in the previous chapter, we think there is also a strong case for widening the scheme to include other public goods.

5.9   These could include maintaining public paths and guaranteeing access to open spaces for the public and educational programmes with local schools and colleges. It could also include investment in infrastructure, skills and technology which contribute towards wider rural development and prosperity.

Questions

20. How do we ensure the farm payments system is accessible to all farmers?
21. Should payments go to those who work the land, own it or both?
22. How do we ensure no jobs are lost in public goods programmes?
23. What timeline should we work towards for transitioning to the new system?
24. What other public goods should be included in a farm payments system?

6   Fishing and Seafood

Introduction

6.1   Fishing has been one of the UK's most enduring and valuable industries. As an island nation, we have a historic connection to the sea and our success depends upon healthy and vibrant oceans.

6.2   Coastal communities are frequently some of the most deprived and forgotten about by successive governments. They were let down by the Conservatives when we joined the EEC in the 1970s, and they have been let down again by this government failing to develop a coherent strategy for fishing and our coasts and with its botched EU trade deal.

A Fair Deal for Fishing Communities

6.3   As well as building a positive and co-operative relationship with Europe, so that our fishers can export and import with ease, we also want to build more resilient domestic markets for UK seafood. British people seem averse to buying British seafood - most of the seafood caught in our waters gets exported to Europe. We want to see British people buying more locally sourced seafood, reducing transport and supporting local industries.

6.4   We also want to ensure that coastal towns have the proper infrastructure in place to develop their fishing economies. Too many fish are exported abroad for processing before coming back to the UK again - generating greater transport costs, emissions and a missed opportunity for creating jobs in this country.

Sustainable Fishing Practices

6.5   As well as supporting our fishing communities, we also want to ensure that fishing is put on an economically and environmentally sustainable footing. At the moment, 65% of fish species are overfished above scientific advice and many unsustainable methods, like bottom trawling, are also employed, causing huge environmental damage. Over time, this reduces catches and is not sustainable.

6.6   If the depleted UK fish stocks were recovered and managed sustainably, they could support significantly higher catches, create 14,000 jobs and add £2bn to UK GDP. We would ensure that adequate data is available for all species to ensure good management, and that no species is fished beyond scientific advice, with financial support and training for fishing communities to make the transition to a sustainable future.

6.7   As well as the quantity of the catch, we also want to improve the environmental quality and safety of our fishing industry. At the moment, slaughterhouses are required to have CCTV operational to ensure that animal welfare standards are being met. We think there is a case for expanding this to commercial fishing boats, which has been adopted in Denmark and is being proposed by the EU. It will help provide transparency around where seafood has been caught, ensure fishing companies are following proper safety practices, improve data, and reduce illegal dumping of fishing equipment and thrown back fish. We would also like to explore what else could be done to improve animal welfare at the time of killing at sea, where no laws or regulations currently apply.

Questions

25. How do we encourage UK consumers to eat more UK caught seafood?
26. Should CCTV be compulsory on fishing boats as in slaughterhouses?
27. How do we reduce overfishing without impacting on fisher communities livelihoods? Should fishers be compensated for fishing less in the short term whilst stocks recover?

7 Food Security and Food Poverty

Introduction

7.1   The 1996 United Nations World Food Summit stated *"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life"*

7.2   The main food security challenge in the UK is not at a national level - the UK is able to buy and produce more than enough food to feed itself, but at an individual level - with poorer households suffering from increasing rates of food poverty and insecurity.

National Food Security

7.3   The UK currently ranks 9th on the The Economist Intelligence Unit's Global Food Security Index, making us one of the most food secure nations in the world.

7.4   COVID and the war in Ukraine have shown that domestic food production is vital to food security. Singapore, which imports over 90% of its food, was ranked as the most food secure country in the world in 2019, but the experience of the past 3 years has shown that this is not a sustainable position and the Sinaporean government is now seeking to significantly increase domestic food production.

7.5   We think there is a case for transitioning the UK's food supply chains to more sustainable and reliable sources as well as encouraging sustainably produced food locally, the latter of which is addressed elsewhere in this paper.

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7.6   Investment and aid to overseas countries to encourage their own production, as well as responding to local shocks like wars and floods, is covered by the FPC's upcoming *International Security* paper.

Individual Food Security and Food Poverty

7.7   As well as ensuring that the nation has enough food, we also want to ensure that each individual enjoys food security - which means ending food poverty. The nation as a whole may have enough food, but if the poorest cannot afford sufficient food with the right nutrition, they are food insecure.

7.8   There are broadly two underlying causes of food poverty and insecurity; financial poverty and lack of access to healthy, nutritious food. The FPC's upcoming policy paper *Towards a Fairer Society* proposes a comprehensive set of measures to end deep poverty within a decade, this paper will only focus on the second issue.

7.9   The three main groups at risk of food insecurity are the less well off, the young and the elderly. We think introducing a 'Right to Food' in UK law will provide an effective framework for tackling food poverty, together with targeted measures for the most at risk groups.

7.10   Food vouchers, rather than cash benefits, have been proposed as one method for improving the nutrition of the less well off. They can be limited to only healthy foods and ensure that the money will only be spent on food. However, there is a debate around the efficacy of vouchers, as well as moral issues around how far the state should control what people can use their resources on.

7.11   For young people, education and school is a key area where the government can make a significant impact on food poverty and insecurity. It is currently Liberal Democrat policy to make Free School Meals available to all primary school children and during the pandemic we wanted this to be maintained outside of school term time.

7.12   Many elderly people, especially the least well off and those with physical and mental disabilities, are unable to prepare healthy and nutritious food for themselves. The FPC's upcoming *A Caring Society* policy paper proposed a comprehensive package of measures to ensure that all elderly people have their care needs met, but we think there is a case for additional measures and support for the elderly at risk of food poverty and insecurity.

Questions

28. How do we diversify the UK's food supply chains?
29. Should we give everyone a 'Right to Food' and how do we make this tangible?
30. Should we introduce food voucher schemes for the poorest or retain cash benefits?
31. Who should be eligible for Free School Meals?
32. How should we tackle food poverty and poor nutrition among the elderly?

8   Trade and Standards

Introduction

8.1   The Conservatives have signed several trade deals since Brexit, notably with Australia and New Zealand. Whilst described by the government as a great success, former DEFRA Secretary of State George Eustice has admitted that the Australia trade deal will be harmful for UK farmers and the deals have been passed with little scrutiny.

8.2   We want trade deals to be scrutinised, transparent as well as working in the interests of the UK's farmers, fishers, and consumers, and helping to promote high environmental, consumer and animal welfare standards.

European Trade

8.3   The EU continues to be the largest export market for the UK for agricultural goods, with the most important single country being Ireland. Although the UK has left the EU customs union and single market, the withdrawal agreement provides for a zero tariff and zero quota on UK product exports and imports from the EU. However, it does not eliminate border controls, which is why food exports to the EU have fallen by about 5% 2019-22.

8.4   The UK has extended import control exemptions from the EU to the end of 2023 but the reverse is not the case and exports to the EU are negatively affected by the lack of a veterinary agreement between the UK and EU. The current UK Government's moves to vary standards from those of the EU, almost for the sake of it, will also add further barriers to trade.

8.5   We believe that, as part of our wider efforts to rebuild a better relationship with Europe, the UK should sign a veterinary and sanitary and

phytosanitary (SPS) agreement with the EU as soon as possible. In the long run, the Liberal Democrats would eliminate all barriers to trade with the EU by joining the Single Market, the details of which are set out in policy paper 144, *Rebuilding Trade and Cooperation with Europe.*

Democratic Scrutiny, Trade Standards and Safety Checks

8.6   There isn't enough democratic scrutiny of trade deals under the Conservatives. The current new Agriculture and Trade Commission has a narrow mandate and only provides its findings to the Secretary of State for International Trade after the agreement has been negotiated. Questions it addresses do however include climate, environment and animal welfare. We believe that parliament should be involved in setting negotiation mandates before discussions begin, scrutinising deals which are brought back and having the final say in approving them, as well as post agreement scrutiny.

8.7   We also think that trade deals should include other objectives, rather than just tariff reductions. Both the Australian and New Zealand Trade Deals include chapters on animal welfare and on the environment, but they were heavily criticised for failing to meaningfully improve them in any way.

8.8   Finally, we need to ensure proper health and safety checks on imported food. At the moment, the Conservatives have exempted many imports from checks, since they failed to put in the necessary staffing or infrastructure following their unnecessarily disruptive Brexit deal. Although there haven't been any major scandals yet, it is likely that harmful food that doesn't meet the UK's safety standards will start appearing on the shelves, jeopardising human health. These checks will largely be unnecessary if we were to rejoin the Single Market, a longer term Liberal Democrat ambition.

Questions

33. How do we ensure scrutiny of trade deals before they are signed?
34. What other objectives should be included in trade deals?
35. Should we seek a blanket ban on some imports that fall below
36. British standards?
37. How do we ensure there are sufficient health and safety checks of imported food without increasing costs?

9 Food Labelling and Safety

Introduction

9.1   Food labelling and food safety are some of the most important issues for our diets and health. They allow consumers to make informed choices, ensure food is safe and consistent with consumers ethical beliefs.

9.2   We want a food regulatory and labelling regime that supports new startups and small businesses, helps consumers make informed and healthy choices and doesn't compromise on food safety.

Strengthening the Food Service Sector and Reducing Food Safety Risks

9.3   The food service sector (restaurants, cafes, pubs, take-away and home delivery services) were affected in two very different ways by the pandemic. Many premises were closed for prolonged periods of time, with staff laid off or furloughed. Although there were support schemes like "Eat out to help out" many businesses struggled to reopen or to recruit staff.

9.4   Conversely the pandemic also saw a massive increase in micro-businesses particularly in the home delivery sector as people turned to cooking and delivering meals to supplement their income either from existing food premises such as pubs or residential premises.

9.5   This has led to a huge number of new and innovative businesses starting up, and creating a large number of jobs in SMEs. But it has in many cases led to a weakening of consumer protection and dilution of the right to safe food because of the disruption to existing businesses training and quality programmes, a proliferation of inexperienced business

owners/managers and the huge growth of the largely unregulated home delivery sector.

Food Labelling

9.6   As liberals, we do not want to tell people what they can and can't eat - everyone must have the freedom to choose for themselves. However, those choices should be well informed and not come at a cost to wider society. Food labelling is essential to helping consumers make good, healthy choices.

9.7   Different approaches and information we are considering include:

- Simplified labels which are easier to understand, with only the key nutritional information
- Removal of 'use by' dates to reduce food waste
- Food hygiene rankings displayed on food, business premises, websites and 3rd party ordering systems
- Environmental labelling
- Consistent method of production labelling for animal-based produce
- Provenance - so people can choose locally produced food.

Questions

38. How do we balance the need for safe food and encourage micro-businesses and start-ups?
39. What information should be provided on food labels?
40. What rules should there be on country of origin labelling and branding?

10 Alternative Foods and Methods of Production

Introduction

10.1   Alternative foods and methods of production have proliferated extensively over the last few years. For their supporters, alternative meats and foods are the future of eating, improving health, the environment and reducing animal suffering in the food system. For their critics, they are "Frankenstein foods" or artificial foods that place company profits ahead of nutrition and are little more than a gimmick.

10.2   New methods of producing food are also emerging, with a growing number of alternative ways of growing food on sea and land that could minimise the impact farming has on the environment.

Alternative Meats and Foods

10.3   On British supermarket shelves, the most common alternative meats are based on pea, soya and wheat proteins. There are also foods which are made of vegetables, frequently mycoprotein, and then moulded and shaped into familiar meat shapes. Dairy free alternatives have also been introduced.

10.4   There are also lab grown meats. These are typically cells of animals that are cultivated in a bioreactor. At the moment, only Singapore has legislated for the consumption of lab grown meats. At the moment, this takes a huge amount of energy to produce foods in this way - whilst manufacturers believe that they will eventually reduce energy and resource usage, they currently have high levels of inputs.

Alternative Methods of Production

10.5   There are alternative land and sea based methods of producing food that are currently under-utilised.

10.6   Britain has tremendous potential for oceanic farming, with its lengthy coastlines. The global seaweed farming sector is estimated to be worth $5bn annually. Presently, it is a labour intensive industry, which could potentially create thousands of jobs in coastal communities, particularly in Devon, Cornwall and Wales, as well as absorbing carbon and cleaning the oceans much as trees do on land.

10.7   On land, vertical farming has been proposed as a solution to the need for more land for agriculture . There is significant disagreement about the viability of vertical farms. Vertical farming requires high energy inputs to provide artificial lighting and heating. However, it also can free up land from intensive farming, which can then be rewilded or used for other societal benefits, which could offset this.

Questions

41. Should alternative meats be labelled differently? If so, how?
42. Should lab grown meat be encouraged? If so, how?
43. How can we expand production and consumption of UK-produced sea-farmed foods?
44. Is vertical farming viable in England or elsewhere?
45. How might we support British start-ups and innovation in these areas?

11   Animal Welfare

Introduction

11.1   The Liberal Democrats, like Britons in general, care deeply about the welfare of non-human animals. Britain has some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world, however, this Conservative government has dragged its heels on improving domestic standards, while also undermining British farmers in pursuit of rushed trade deals.

11.2   It is vital that agricultural policy simultaneously addresses environmental protection, food security, and animal welfare. Animal agriculture can result in conflict between efficiency, welfare and environmental impacts. Farm animal health also matters for public health, and legislation to tackle zoonotic disease spread, food safety and food hygiene should be maintained.

Raising minimum standards for living conditions

11.3   Existing Liberal Democrat policy would bring in a ban on caged hens. However, more policy development is needed on whether the use of cages for other species should also be ended, and how rapidly these changes should happen. The EU is drawing up plans to 'end the cage age'. These plans will be released in 2023 and are likely to include bans on 'farrowing crates' for pigs and individual calf pens.

11.4   Meat chickens are the most commonly farmed land animal in the UK, with 3 million slaughtered every day, and their welfare could be improved. Very rapid growth as a result of selective breeding - with broilers

slaughtered at around 35 days old - is accompanied by lameness and heart problems for example.

11.5   There are also many other ways of improving standards and existing policy commits to updating farm animal welfare codes. Practices such as tail docking of pigs, and beak trimming of chickens should be absolutely minimised; and the prevalence of poor health monitored.

11.6   The UK's remarkable progress in reducing farm antibiotic use should be continued, as well as minimising pollution related to animal health such as antiparasitics. As with environmental regulations, there is also a need for greater enforcement of existing animal welfare laws.

11.7   Consideration should be given to animal welfare being considered a public good, such as through the subsidy of shifts to higher welfare methods in Defra's Animal Health and Welfare Pathway - working alongside regulatory changes.

Transport, Excess Animals and Slaughter

11.8   Transporting livestock can risk many welfare problems. But the government has seemingly abandoned the Kept Animals Bill, which included a ban on the export of live animals for slaughter and fattening. The closure of small abattoirs has also led to animals having to be transported further.

11.9   Certain sectors, in particular the dairy and egg sectors, produce large numbers of unwanted male offspring, which have little commercial value. These animals are often slaughtered shortly after birth, including around 29 million chicks per year in the UK. Germany and France have

banned the culling of male chicks. Technological solutions such as the use of sexed semen in the dairy sector and in-ovo sexing in the poultry sector should be used to minimise the number of unwanted male animals. Research should be undertaken to establish commercially viable options to do the same in other sectors.

11.10   The law requires that animals on land are not subjected to avoidable excitement, pain or suffering before or during slaughter. Animals must be stunned before slaughter so that they are unconscious and cannot feel pain, except in the case of religious slaughter and domestic animals.

11.11   Our current policy is to require the Animal Protection Commission to carry out an investigation into all aspects of slaughter, including financial incentives for fast throughputs of animals, whether sufficient electrical currents are being used and whether different species should be stunned by different methods such as inert gas.

Questions

46. What species or practices should be policy priorities for improving animal welfare?
47. How can diseases such as avian influenza be better managed or avoided?
48. Should the live export of animals for slaughter or fattening be banned?
49. In many cases, raising welfare requirements for animal-based food may increase resource use (e.g. slower-growing chickens) and increase costs. Is "less but better" - i.e. lower consumption alongside higher standards - an acceptable trade-off?
50. What do you think of our current policy on non-stun slaughter?

Remit

The remit of this group is to review the party's policies on Food and Farming, and make updated proposals which communicate our values of liberty, equality, democracy, community, internationalism and environmentalism in a way which helps secure the election of as many Liberal Democrats as possible, at local, regional and national level, in order to promote our vision of society and remove from power a Conservative government that is failing the country.

The group will be expected to build on existing policy proposals as set out in the 2019 Election Manifesto, Policy Paper 129 A Rural Future: Time to Act and the emerging policy paper on the Natural Environment. The group is expected to consider and address Liberal Democrat principles on diversity and equalities in developing their proposals.

This group will as a top priority:

- Develop up to three headline policies on Food and Farming which the party can communicate widely to win votes.

The working group will develop policies on:

- How we can improve the food security for the UK
- How the agriculture and food sector can positively contribute to net zero, biodiversity improvement and ecological sustainability
- How we can ensure farmers and those in rural and fishing areas can have prosperous and sustainable communities
- How we can promote animal welfare at home and abroad
- How we can promote healthier diets

- How we can eliminate the challenge of food poverty in the UK and ensure access to affordable nutritious food for all

The group will also consider the need for institutional change at central, regional and local government levels to embed these approaches firmly in policy.

The group will take evidence and consult widely both within and outside the party. This evidence should inform the group's proposals, which will be presented alongside an analysis of costs and an Equalities Impact Assessment.

A policy paper of no longer than 10,000 words should be produced for debate at Autumn Conference 2023. Prior to that a consultative session should be held at Spring Conference 2023, and a draft policy paper should be presented to the Federal Policy Committee by June 2023.

YORK'23