

Food, sustainability and alternative food networks

**Changing narratives:
debates about sustainability and security**

Dr Daniel Keech
Countryside and Community Research Institute
University of Gloucestershire, UK
dkeech@glos.ac.uk

Masaryk University, Brno, 9th-13th April 2018

Plenty, healthy, quality?

Some generalised key developments post 1945:

- Marshall Plan, 'Green revolution', Soviet collectivisation, self-sufficiency, surplus for trade and aid
- Oil dependency highlighted in oil crisis of early 1970s (*see Jones, A. (2001) Eating Oil. Sustain, London; and AEA (2005) The Validity of Food Miles as an indicator of Sustainability.*)
- CAP production subsidies until 2003 \Rightarrow surpluses, global dumping, falling food prices for consumers. Supermarket dominance and foreign direct investment (FDI) (*see Neil Wrigley*).
- CAP reform from 2003 \Rightarrow decoupling of subsidy from production and link to environmental stewardship, farming as a multifunctional activity

Plenty, healthy, quality? (2)

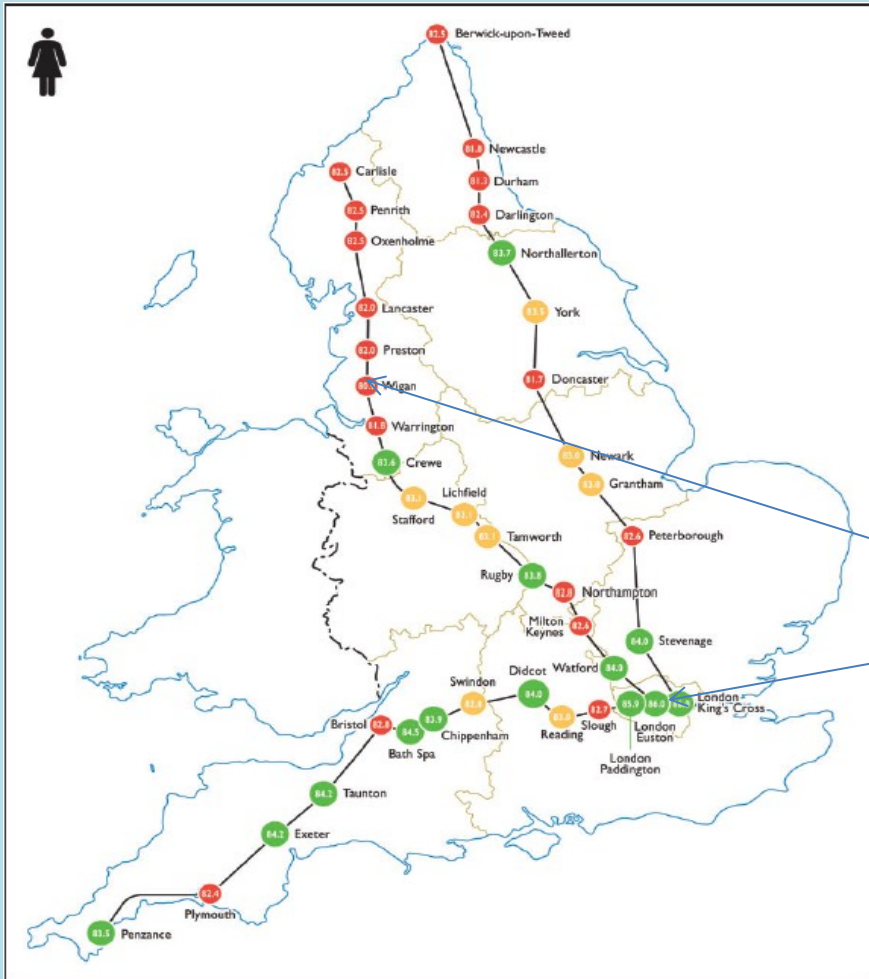
- More or less falling consumer prices until 2000s
- Environmental degradation (Carson 1966), food safety scares, growth of organic movement from 1990s (see Julie Guthman 2002 and Gill Seyfang 2006...)
- ‘Quality turn’ and shift from public to individualised concerns in 2000s – health, lifestyle, ‘alternative hedonism’ (Soper 2004)
- Obesity/famine paradox, food poverty - the rise of social food co-ops in the absence of policy (e.g. see work by Elizabeth Dowler and Martin Caraher et al. 2001 onwards)

Food in the public health arena

Public health concerns around dietary intake affected by structural and social changes:

- Fewer people work in industrial settings and other jobs which feed workers. Traditional family structures are changing. Post-modern cities and working arrangements. 'On the hoof' eating, convenience shopping.
- Move from 1980s (in UK) away from institutionalised public catering to consumer choice, lowest price tendering and de-skilling kitchen labour. School cooks \Rightarrow food assembly (Morgan and Sonnino 2008).
- State abrogates public health to the private domain.

Spatial/social health inequality



In their 2016 paper, Bambra and Orton outline differences in regional life expectancy in England, mapped through the train network.

- Wigan 80.9 years
- London 86 years

Q: If we assume some of these differences could be linked to food, what might be the food-related causes of these differences?

The stores with an appetite for change

For just £2.50 a week, a food club near Stockport is helping to fill the shelves of people who cannot afford the weekly shop, finds **Patrick Butler**

Our two hours before the Birmingham Local Pantry opens, Christine arrives to take her seat at the head of the queue. She says she doesn't mind waiting in line for food. Friends and neighbours will join her there, it's quite much a social occasion, and anyway, it's worth getting in early to get the best choice. "The pantry is a lifeline for me. I don't have much money. If I didn't have this I would not have food on some days, there's many a time I would have gone without."

Christine is one of around 600 members of a food club set up by Stockport Homes, a project that provides heavily subsidised groceries to struggling low-income households. She has been a member for more than two years, and pays £2.50 a week to shop once a week at a small store in the Birmingham area's community centre. There she can choose from items from a menu that might include baked beans, meat, cakes, frozen ready meals, coffee, fruit, veg, and other products, such as tinned soups. The real value of her choices will be around £15. The odd bag of nuts or a jar of jam is a bonus. "I can get things I wouldn't normally be able to afford," she says. More than 8 million people in Britain live in households that struggle to put enough food on the table, and over half usually go a whole day without eating, according to the latest UN estimates.

Food insecurity is the new food bank. But while it shares the aim of helping people on low incomes, the approach is very different. It is not a supply of emergency food parcels like a food bank, instead it tries to offer longer-term support, based on the idea that even in the age of austerity and falling living standards, poverty and food insecurity are chronic or recurring, rather than a temporary blip.

Heal Cooper, the director of Church Action on Poverty (CAP), calls the pantry model a "step up" from food banks. Unlike most food banks, as it is a different, it is not a supply of emergency food parcels like a food bank, instead it tries to offer longer-term support, based on the idea that even in the age of austerity and falling living standards, poverty and food insecurity are chronic or recurring, rather than a temporary blip.

"There's dignity in paying, rather than being given to," says Cooper. "The food office is better in terms of quality, variety and freshness – and the information as what members are able to eat on a regular basis is huge. You have



Birmingham Pantry near Stockport, where people can buy 10 items for £2.50 a week. Photograph: Jon Super for the Guardian

choice, within constraints. It's not a normal shop, but it is close to a normal shop," Cooper is writing with Stockport Homes on plans to develop the pantry model across Greater Manchester.

Prospective members must live locally, but are simply asked if they ever struggle to pay bills, whether they have cut back on shopping in the last three months and whether they ever run out of money towards the end of the week. Members are signposted to energy, energy and debt advice if they need it. There are a few simple housekeeping rules, but there is no strict menu, no testing or conditionality – and no duty on the part of the pantry that members have to "fix their problem" and move on.

In fact, one of the most striking aspects of the pantry is that unlike other food club models like Community Shop, the pantry does not insist that members regard the club as a temporary solution. There is no "expiry" date, and members' continued access to subsidised food is usually based on practice. It seems there is a regular turnover and people move on, at their own pace. Cooper

minimises the idea that food insecurity is mitigated by employment. What if members are retired, or ill, he says. "The point is that sometimes people's circumstances do not change. If they end up going to the pantry for the next 10 years, that's fine. We don't regard that as a second-class option."

Stockport Homes started the project three years ago, after looking at ways to help increasing numbers of its tenants who were struggling in the wake of the then coalition government's first big welfare reform in 2013. They had worked with local food banks and found that emergency food handouts could not help everyone, with some even turning down assistance.

"We found people weren't using the food bank even though they got a referral, because of the stigma," says Heil Cooper, homelessness strategy development officer at Stockport Homes. "We wanted something that provided dignity and choice."

47m
The number of people in Britain who go a whole day without eating, according to UN figures

£750
Annual saving on food bills to each family using the pantry, according to Greater Manchester Foodshare

1,200
The number of households that have joined the 10 pantries set up by Stockport Homes and GMFS

produce from supermarkets and manufacturers and distributes it to charities for an annual volunteering fee. GMFS agreed to provide the pantries with a regular weekly supply of practically free food. Birmingham Foodshare lists up with free fruit and vegetables financed from the club's subscription revenue.

GMFS has supplied around 70 tonnes of food over the past three years. An estimated 1,200 households have benefited from membership, saving them each typically £600-750 a year on food bills. Collectively, members have saved an estimated £200,000 a year.

Cooper is proud of the local volunteers who run the pantries, a handful of whom have moved on to paid work, and she can quote positive social return-on-investment numbers to demonstrate that the project is cost-effective. But she seems most enthusiastic about the less measurable big wins: a financial breathing space for struggling families, putting healthy food into their shopping baskets and tackling social isolation. "Ultimately," she says, "food is a way of engaging people."

There is certainly growing interest in the idea. Stockport Homes has four pantries, and GMFS supplies about 15 pantries in Greater Manchester. Cooper expects that number to double over the next three years. Every week brings more requests. Pantries are relatively cheap to set up, at about £10,000, and a regular supply of surplus food can be sourced. Cooper says there is no reason to believe they couldn't expand.

On the face of it there is a plentiful supply of surplus food out there – about 10m tonnes are wasted by supermarkets and manufacturers every year. But Miranda Rasmussen of GMFS admits more suppliers are needed. "There's an art to managing a pantry in terms of supply," she says. There is competition, but charities and private retailers are also seeking cheap produce, with the aim of "helping struggling families".

Community Shop, which burst on to the scene in 2013 when it opened the UK's first social supermarket in South Yorkshire, is to open a new shop next month, in Grimsby, with the aid of a lottery grant of £60,000. "After three years we believe we have found a model which can deliver high impact at scale," says Gary Scott, head of Community Shop. But although the shop's 2015 impact report published this week suggests that its mix of cheap food and life coaching has helped many members, expansion has so far been difficult. Two years ago, it spoke openly of plans to open 20 stores. Grimsby will be just its fourth.

Martin Caraher, professor of health and food poverty at City University, says the food pantry model's roots in the local community and its emphasis on local volunteers are likely to stand it in good stead. But the difficulty for all such ventures is securing a constant and reliable food supply.

Cooper accepts that charity food is narrow-sided, in whatever form. But there is a life on low incomes. "The ultimate solution is that people have enough money to buy the same food as everyone else. But people's incomes aren't going up dramatically or even at all, so we need to find ways to make people's budgets go further."

Food and social exclusion

Remember Bamba & Orton: female life expectancy for London (86)? This masks health inequalities within London:

Jubilee line Westminster to Star Lane/ Canning Town – average life expectancy in Westminster is 83 or 75 in Star Lane. DIET IS A CONTRIBUTORY FACTOR.

This led in the early 2000s to the establishment of food distribution co-ops. Opens up debates about physical access, right to a healthy diet, the attractiveness of poor areas to supermarkets and the stigmatisation of food co-ops.

Concern (Oxfam 2013, CofE 2018) links food poverty and the rise of food donation projects (often church-led) to welfare reform. Rise in food banks/food clubs.

‘More than 8m people in Britain struggle to put enough food on the table... half regularly go a whole day without eating...’

Guardian newspaper 22nd March 2017

Food – a risky business?

- Agriculture in the 'global north' depends on fossil fuels and accounts for 40% of CO2 emissions, produces fewer calories than it consumes (for some foods) and depletes biodiversity.
- C. 1bn people are starving while another 1bn suffer from diet-related ill-health (acquired diabetes, CHD...) and obesity.
- Peak oil, gas, phosphorous, water (Garnett 2011, Ingram et al. 2013).
- Population increases and urbanisation/rural migration.
- Land grabs and financialisation: commodity futures and currency dynamics (£, CHF, \$). Social unrest linked to price increases... Price volatility is now normal.
- Price spikes and food riots – 2008 spikes distinguished because they range across ALL commodities (Jarosz 2009).
- Mobility – 75,000 summer horticultural workers; one-third of all food manufacturing workers in the UK from other EU countries.

Different scales/aspects of food security (overlaps)

Global/international	National	Household
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trade – barriers/alliances?• Distribution – on what basis?• Environmental factors – eg drought, deforestation• Population rises• Migration patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-sufficiency• Brexit• Subsidy/tariffs• Land avail'ty/quality• Skills and labour• Distribution/retail structure (2002 crisis)• Fuel consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Income• Family structures• Nutrition• Eating (cultural) preferences• Access• Knowledge

What do we mean by sustainable food?

- Sustainable food is associated with well-being, environmental sustainability, social justice and resilience. (nef, 2007)
- In other words sustainable food is healthy, green, fair (Morgan 2010) and able to withstand shocks.
- Sustainability is becoming more delineated/complex:
 - Climate change: mitigation, adaptation, restoration
 - Urbanisation: importance of design
 - Land: ownership, governance, nationhood
 - Social justice: equality
 - Market and resilience: problem or answer?
 - Nature: humans as stewards, non-human agency

FREE INSIDE Collectors' Hobbit movie magazine



ON SUNDAY

THE MOST CHILLING CRIMINAL COINCIDENCE EVER?



I was 15-year-old victim of Savile's rapist driver ...AND key witness in Hotel Bristol murder

READ THE EXTRAORDINARY INTERVIEW ON PAGES 32-33

WELBY: STATE MUST BACK FOOD BANKS

Archbishop steps into austerity row with radical report

US tycoons pay £500k to dine with Wills and Kate

Second green revolution must for food security: PM

Ban on wheat exports lifted, says Pawar

■ Demand for foodgrain projected to touch 280 mt by 2020-21

New Delhi, July 16 (Thegleaner) — Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Saturday that the second green revolution must be initiated to meet the demand for food and nutritional security. He said the government will support the food grain production to 24 per cent, Singh said the security of the food stock is indicated by the fact that during the 15-year period from 1997-98 to 2011-12, the country's foodgrain production had grown at an average annual rate of only 1.5 per cent.

"We will look back proudly at our green revolution, which helped us overcome food shortages and banish the spectre of starvation, or living from hand to mouth. But, today we find that the same areas which witnessed the green revolution are suffering from problems of environmental degradation, soil erosion, water scarcity, and loss of biodiversity. The second green revolution that is more broad-based, more inclusive and more sustainable. We need to produce more without depleting our natural resources any further and we look towards our agricultural scientists for tailoring in this green revolution," Singh said.

"While tending cashew, long-term by agriculture water is scarce," Singh said. "Though we have achieved self-sufficiency in cereal production, we continue to depend on imports for pulses and edible oils. We continue to face the problem of under-nutrition, particularly among our children and women."

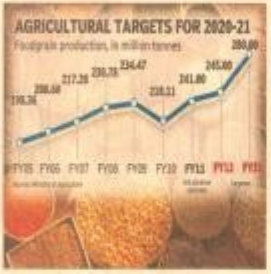
"On the UPA-II government's inclusive strategy of development, Singh anticipated that it would further increase demand for not only foodgrain but also fruits, vegetables and animal products.

"The total demand for foodgrain is projected to touch 280 million tonnes by year 2020-21," the Prime Minister commented.

Present, the country produces about 60 per cent of its agricultural GDP on agricultural research and development. "This needs to be enhanced at least by 20 times by 2020, since a substantial portion of our agricultural growth would come through the application of new technologies and new knowledge to production processes. But spending more on research is not enough unless it is supported by quality human resources in all areas of agriculture," he observed.

At present, the government subsidies have helped wheat stock of 17.8 million tonnes (MT) in view of a lean harvest.

Expressing doubts on viability of wheat exports,



Ban on wheat exports lifted, says Pawar

New Delhi, July 16 (Thegleaner) — Agriculture minister Shri Sharad Pawar said on Saturday that the government has decided to lift the over four-year-old ban on wheat exports, even as shipments of the grain to overseas markets are expected to begin.

"On Thursday, wheat exports resumed," agriculture minister Sharad Pawar told reporters on the sidelines of an IFAI meeting.

"The government has not assessed the quantity of wheat allowed for exports as global prices are very low," he said.

Recently, finance minister Pranab Mukherjee had expressed a group of ministers' concern that Pawar is also a member of the group of ministers who had given a principal approval to lift the ban on wheat exports in the wheat year 2011-12.

"At present, the government subsidies have helped wheat stock of 17.8 million tonnes (MT) in view of a lean harvest. Expressing doubts on viability of wheat exports,



Sharad Pawar, agriculture minister

North Walsham, Aylsham and Stalham

NORTH NORFOLK NEWS

Voucher inside for FREE chips

Shropshire match Centre Road food truck

Hot-trick for boxers — back page

SHOCK OBESITY FINDINGS

SUNDAY EXPRESS

Valentine's Day Giveaway

FREE LOVE HEARTS

Plus! **FREE SEEDS** IN OUR BUMPER BEDDING COLLECTION

ALAN TITCHMARSH

£40

OBESE WILL BANKRUPT NHS

Queen is asked: 'May we dig up Henry VIII?'

The King's smooch

BBC NEWS CUMBRIA

Home World UK England N. Ireland Scotland Wales Business Politics Health Education Sci/Env

26 November 2012 Last updated at 15:56

On the headline: Food banks in Cumbria

A record number of people in the North West turned to food banks in the last six months because they cannot afford to feed themselves, a charity says.

The Trussell Trust said its network of food banks across Cumbria, Lancashire, Merseyside, and Greater Manchester fed more than 13,500 people since April. This compares to just 22 people in same period last year.



Thousands of people are turning to food banks for

DAILY Mirror Wednesday January 16, 2013

REAL NEWS... REAL ENTERTAINMENT 50p

Sail to France from £1

GIANT THRILLER Bolton knock out Premier League Sunderland on replay plus PLUS All the FA Cup action in 8-page pullout

The shark whisperer!

HORSE MEAT IS FOUND IN TESCO BURGERS

TESCO Everyday Value 8 beef burgers

Supermarkets clear shelves Inquiry at supply plants

CO2 vs. social justice

Special report The human cost of food

How 'modern day slavery' on the Costa del Sol puts the salad in your shopping



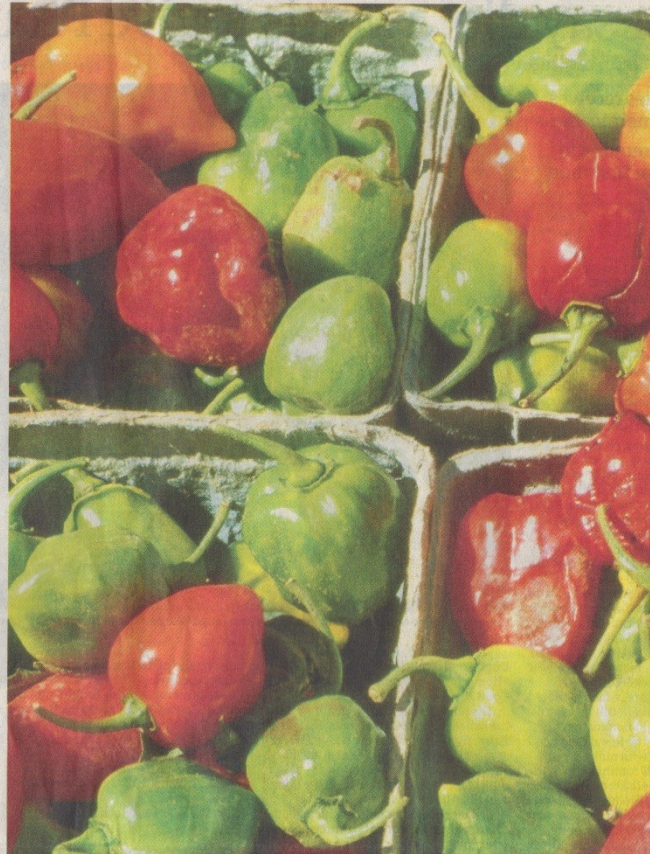
Felicity Lawrence reports on the exploited migrant workers, just out of sight of Spain's tourist beaches, who make possible a €2bn hothouse industry feeding Europe's supermarkets

with temperatures reaching 40-45C, is unattractive to the local population. So it has sucked in thousands of illegal workers, first from Morocco, then from eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa.

Estimates of the number working in the hothouses vary, but Juan Carlos Checa, researcher in social anthropology at the university, put the number of migrant workers in April 2010 at between 80,000 and 90,000.

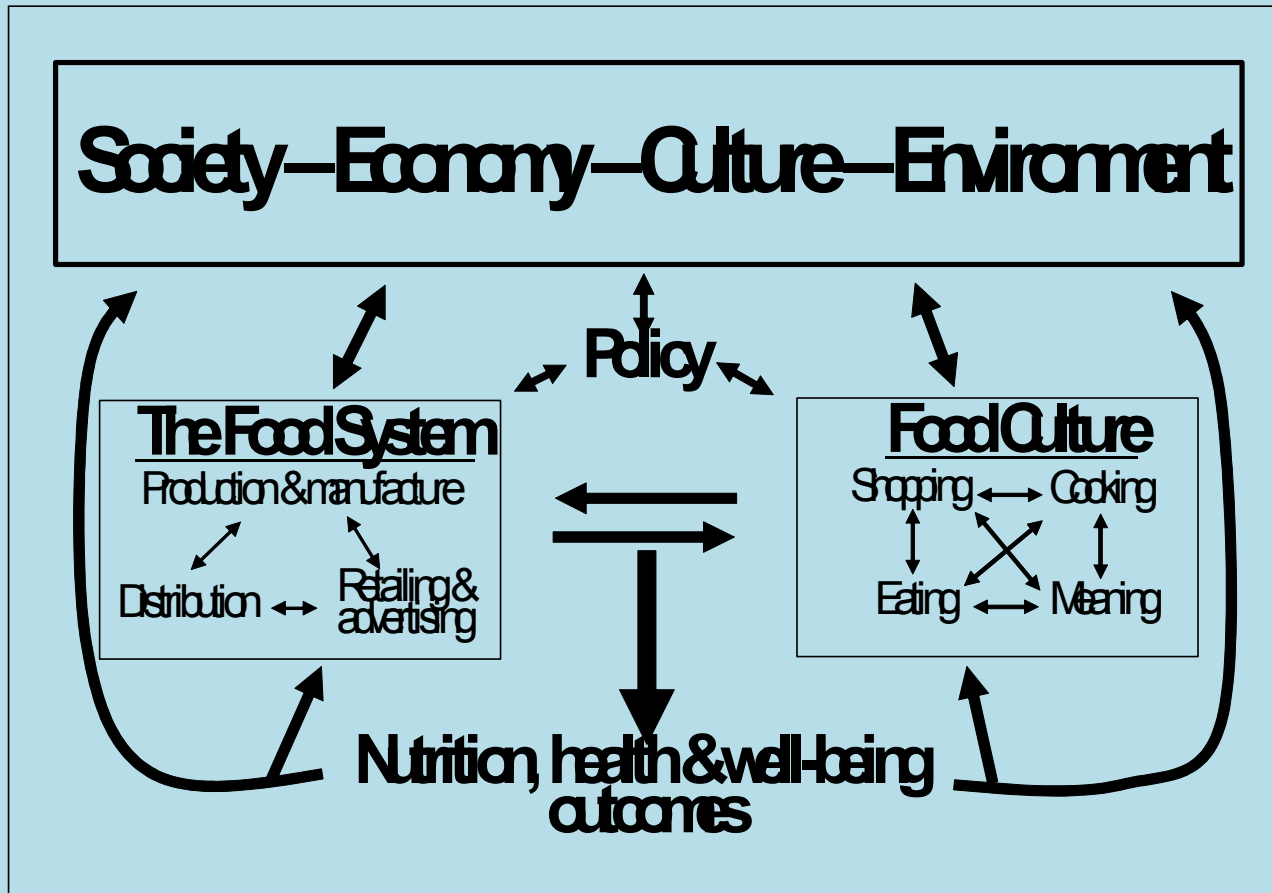
Spitou Mendy, who was an illegal migrant from Senegal until he gained his papers in an amnesty, now helps run Sindicato de Obreros del Campo (SOC), a small union for migrants. He thinks the numbers have swollen to more than 100,000 due to the recession.

The Spanish government allows those who can prove they have worked for more



Source: *The Guardian* 8th Feb '11

The interdependence of food system and food culture



Food system issues

Sustainable Food

Well-being

Social justice

Environ. Sust.

Resilience

Production	Impact of pesticides on nearby residents	Poor labour conditions Dependence on gang-masters	Degradation (soil, water, over-fishing) Habitat destruct'n	Highly energy intensive Dependence on migrant labour
Processing & manufacture	More processing = harder to control salt fat sugar consumption			Dependence on global trade
Distribution	Road intensive = noise, pollution, traffic	Power balance against producers	Carbon intensive	Fuel cost
Advertising & marketing	Junk food adverts target children	Power balance against small or indep. shops		Consolidation of retail sector
Disposal			High levels of waste & packing	

Food culture issues

Sustainable Food

Well-being

Social justice

Environ. Sust.

Resilience

Shopping		Poor avail. of healthy food in disadvantaged areas Low income = inadequate for healthy diet	Expectation of year-round avail. of all products	
Cooking	Time poverty = more consumption of prepared foods			Falling levels of food 'literacy'
Eating	Loss of eating together			Fuel cost
Meaning	Disconnection to rural and farming issues			Homogenisation of food & places

Changing narrative: trade → resilience → trade?



Has resilience had its day?
Top-down, neo-liberal, conservative (!!!)
(MacKinnon & Derickson 2012)

Defra narrative 2004:

‘National self-sufficiency is neither necessary **nor desirable.**’

(Ministerial letter to Sustain AGM)

Defra narrative 2010:

‘Our food system needs to be prepared for **shocks and to be able to manage risk.**’

(Food 2030: How we get there, Defra 2010.)

Brexit 2016?:

UK agriculture would do ‘far better’ outside the EU.’

(Food Minister George Eustace, speaking at NFU conference 24th Feb 2016.)

Key beliefs in local and sustainable food

- It is better (healthier) to eat a more rather than a less diversified diet
- It is better (healthier) to eat fresh food rather than preserved/prepared food
- It is better (less environ. damaging, & food chain more transparent) to eat food produced closer to rather than further from the point of consumption
- It is better (healthier, and less environmentally damaging) to eat food produced with a minimum of pesticides
- It is better (less environmentally damaging) to eat food produced with a minimum of inorganic fertilisers
- It is better (more socially just) to eat food produced, processed and/or marketed by smaller-local rather than larger-international operations

(Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming, London.)

NGO and market innovations in the UK

- Farmers' markets
- Hyperbolic organic sales (mainstreaming) (until 2008)
- Box schemes
- CSA and buying groups (growth since 2008: MLFW/LFF)
- Food Links UK/Alimenterra
- Public food procurement (FFL, SFT, free school meals)
- Food access co-ops

NGOs as civil society agitators → under-paid market innovators?

Changing narratives

- Policy: Self-sufficiency \Rightarrow surplus \Rightarrow food security
- Politics: Sufficiency/price \Rightarrow environmentalism/common concerns \Rightarrow quality/personal concerns (e.g. health and taste)
- Retail power: Supermarkets as progressive \Rightarrow oppressive \Rightarrow appropriators
- Third sector: Oppositional \Rightarrow entrepreneurial \Rightarrow technical specialists
- Consumers: new expectations \Rightarrow public health \Rightarrow choice \Rightarrow public health again?

Dominant themes

- Nutritional transition:
 - Rising demand for diets higher in meat
 - Obesity AND under-nutrition
 - Nutritional composition of foods (salt/fat/sugar)
- Food security:
 - Financialisation, 'land grabs', price volatility
 - Technological innovation can produce more
 - Oppositional alternatives/collaborative stakeholder approaches
- Environment
 - GHG emissions
 - Meat consumption
 - Biodiversity/habitat loss
 - Embedded resource/water use and food waste

AFN questions emerging

How can the ethical motivations of the alternative food movement underpin the development of a greener, fairer and healthier system/culture? Who decides? Role of consumers? (Evans et al. 2017)

How can the sustainability claims made for local food be substantiated? What implications have they got for a serious move to carbon-reduced and 'cellular economy' (Hardin Tibbs, BRASS 2011)? Is hybridity/trade-off the best we can hope for?

What (infra-)structures are needed to make sustainable food viable? (distribution, finance, governance...). AFNs have limited access.

Can the demand for ethical food be the basis for global solidarity, rather than nationalism, protectionism and stale local vs. global arguments?

Is food activism really about food? (Or articulating citizenship, fear of future scarcity, wanting to 'do'?)

<http://nadjaon.blogspot.co.uk>



In summary...

Food is complex – farming, nutrition, education, consumption, industry, diet, culture, shopping, politics, income, planning, waste, political activism...

"...the concept of a base-line sustainability standard is non-sense, as sustainability is an aspirational open-ended agenda involving trade-offs and a range of potentially conflicting priorities..." Smith, B.

(2008) *Developing Sustainable Food Supply Chains*. Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society for Biological Sciences. 363, pp. 849-861.

Organic, fresh, seasonal, local, fair-trade, affordable, safe...

How do we choose?



Questions?