

City academic calls on UK government to fix 'broken food system'

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Professor of Food Policy at City University London, Tim Lang, has joined with leading UK food, farming and wildlife organisations to produce a new report released today.

The report: 'Square Meal: why we need a new recipe for farming, wildlife, food and public health', aims to start collaborative discussion in the run up to next year's general election and to influence future government policies on these issues.

Professor Lang, working as part of the Food Research Collaboration (FRC), joins the RSPB, Friends of the Earth, the National Trust, the Food Ethics Council, Sustain, the Wildlife Trusts, the Soil Association, Eating Better and Compassion in World Farming to highlight the evidence that demonstrates the need for major changes to national food

and farming policy.

Professor Lang says: "The evidence of food's impact on health is overwhelming, but too few questions are being asked about whether UK food and farming industries are part of this problem. It's often put down to consumer choice. But is it? Half of UK cereals are fed to animals. We grow ridiculously small amounts of fruit and vegetables when our shops and markets ought to have mountains of good fresh produce. Square Meal raises big questions: what would the UK food system look like if it was designed around health and eco-systems, not just economics? The answer is surely: well, it wouldn't look like it does now."



The Square Meal Report focuses on four key connected areas: health, food, farming and nature. Some of the facts the report calls for action on include:

- Improving Health: Getting a grip on a growing crisis. 33% of under 18's in the UK are overweight or obese. There are soaring costs to the NHS due to diet-related ill-health. More must be done to tackle health inequalities, promote healthier sustainable diets, ensure food and water safety and enable people to

reconnect with nature and understand where their food comes from.

- **Good food for all:** Food prices have risen by 12% over the past six years, and more rises are expected. On 913,138 occasions in the year to the end of March 2014, people in crisis across the UK were provided with three days emergency food by the Trussell Trust alone. Tackling poverty and inequality must be a priority - alongside ensuring transparency, traceability and fairness in supply chains - so that we all see the benefits, from field to fork.
- **Sustainable Farming:** 75% of the protein fed to our livestock in the EU is imported. 25% of all UK farmers live in poverty. Investing in a resilient farming system is crucial to securing our food supply in the face of the shocks to the system likely from climate change, rising populations and dwindling resources.
- **Enhancing Nature:** In less than 50 years we have lost over 44 million pairs of breeding birds. We need to bring back strong ecological systems to the countryside by protecting the soil upon which we all depend, bringing back colour to the landscape and championing effective regulation and rural and urban planning policies.

Dan Crossley, executive director of the Food Ethics Council, says: "It is a scandal that in a world where we produce more food than we need, hundreds of millions of people are going to bed hungry at night, and even more are suffering from diet-related diseases like obesity and type 2 diabetes that give the lie to 'cheap' food. Ensuring transparent, traceable and fair supply chains, investing in environmental sustainability and taking a long-term view are all crucial steps to achieving sustainable food and farming systems. Acknowledging the links between poverty, inequality, the environment and poor nutrition is another crucial step in providing good food for all."

Helen Browning, Chief Executive of the Soil Association says: "The

future of our farming industry depends on meeting consumers' expectations for healthy food, a thriving, beautiful, and wildlife friendly countryside, while cutting pollution, resource use and greenhouse gases. Quite a challenge! This report sets out some of the solutions, and aims to start a debate on how we achieve them."

Abi Bunker, Head of Agricultural Policy at the RSPB says: "We know how deeply people care about nature. The ongoing disappearance of iconic and much-loved wildlife from our countryside, set out so clearly in the recent State of Nature report, needs to stop. We hope this report stimulates a wider conversation that will help us devise better [food](#) and farming policies to get what we all want and need in the future."

More information: The report is available online:
foodresearch.org.uk/square-meal/

Provided by City University London

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