

UK government renegeing on food policy plans, say experts

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The U.K. government has abandoned promises to transform the national food system after just a year, and will struggle to meet its own targets on health, climate and nature, food system experts have said.

Writing in [Nature Food](#), academics from the Universities of York, Sheffield, Reading and Cambridge argue that the Government's U-turns and lack of ambition on food policy leave the nation increasingly vulnerable to rising [food prices](#), diet-related health conditions, and a decline in biodiversity.

The academics call on the government to develop a more coherent, coordinated and collaborative approach to [food policy](#). They propose a new five-point plan to support the U.K. to transition towards a more sustainable, healthier food system. Grounded in recommendations from the Dimpleby Review, as well as evidence from several U.K. Government funded policy research programs, the five-point plan proposes:

- Setting up a cross-government commission that joins up population and planetary health to make [policy decisions](#) about future systems,
- A full economic analysis of the recommendations evidenced in Dimpleby's review,
- Free school meals made available to all [primary school children](#) in England, revolutionizing catering in schools,
- Integrating mandatory health and environmental metrics into the Food Data Transparency Partnership. This partnership promotes the use of data when making decisions about the production and sale of healthier and more [sustainable food](#) and drink.
- A comprehensive framework for how land should be used for food production, which would help to reverse the U.K.'s status as the worst-performing G7 country in terms of species depletion.

The Government's wide-ranging 2022 Food Strategy focused on long-term measures to support a resilient, healthier, more affordable and sustainable food supply. It was a response to the recommendations set out in the previous year's National Food Strategy Independent Review,

authored by Henry Dimbleby.

Professor Carol Wagstaff, Professor of Crop Quality for Health, said, "The Dimbleby Review paved the way for the Government to devise and enact a Food Strategy that would at last underpin a food systems that could provide healthy and sustainable diets that were accessible to all U.K. citizens. Sadly, this opportunity has been missed and instead we have seen an increase in food poverty and a shortening of life expectancy due to the prevalence of diet-related diseases.

"Global events associated with conflict, [climate change](#) and the cost of living crisis have exposed the vulnerabilities in our present food system. This has resulted in farmers being unable to afford the costs of production so that the quantity of food being produced in the U.K. has declined, and conversely an increase in the number of people who cannot afford to eat and who are becoming more and more dependent on food aid.

"Rescuing the U.K. food system by implementing our key recommendations would improve the lives of citizens, boost the economy through supporting the agri-food sector, and would make a significant contribution to preserving the health of our planet."

In their commentary, the academics note that there has been a series of shelved [government policies](#) and reversed decisions since the 2022 Food Strategy was published, despite what they see as a collective will for change across the U.K. agri-food sector.

Lead author Professor Bob Doherty, University of York, said, "Although the Government's 2022 Food Strategy was not as robust as the Dimbleby Review, it was a critical step in the right direction. Just one year later, Government have reneged on their responsibility to implement change across the whole agri-food sector. We are now seeing a gradual decline

in food security, diet, soil health and biodiversity.

"To prevent the U.K. falling further behind other G7 nations, we need action to tackle diet-related health, improve school meals for the 800,000 children in poverty, increase the consumption of fiber, fruit and vegetables, and to better measure the environmental impacts of food production so the UN goals on Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions can be met.

"Rather than stalling and making U-turns, if the U.K. Government implemented their own food strategy it would boost our agri-food sector and save the country a lot of money in terms of GDP, as well as improving the health of soil, and make a valuable and long-term contribution to human and planetary health."

More information: Bob Doherty et al, The UK government's 2022 food strategy a year later, *Nature Food* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s43016-023-00859-x](https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-023-00859-x)

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