

National Food Strategy

Launch of Part One

29th July 2020

What is the National Food Strategy?

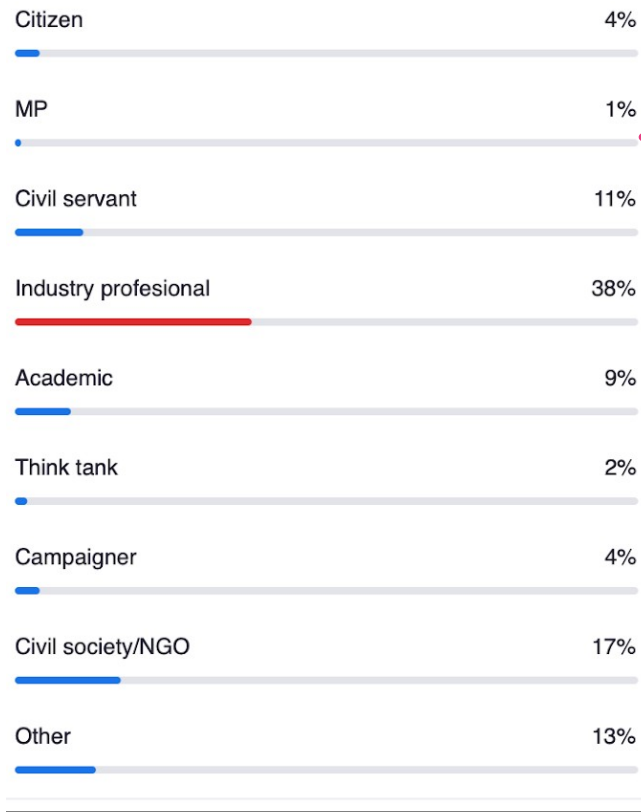
- The National Food Strategy is the first food strategy for England for 75 years.
- Commissioned by the Government in 2019, it is an independent review of the whole food system, from field to fork, led by Henry Dimbleby.
- When COVID-19 hit, the work of the National Food Strategy paused. In the aftermath of the immediate crisis, Henry took the decision to adjust the focus of Part One to be specifically about particular urgent topics which had been thrown into sharp relief.
- Part One was published on 29th July 2020. More than 1000 people tuned in for the virtual launch event, which featured an in depth discussion on the food system and the content of the report between Henry and Sarah Mukherjee.



Where are we starting from?

The event kicked off with a quick survey of who was in the virtual room.

1. In what capacity are you joining us today?



We were joined by 12 parliamentarians.

'Other' included horticulturalists, PR, journalists and clinicians.

This gave everyone a sense of how broad and far-reaching the interest in the National Food Strategy is. Next the video, which is available on the National Food Strategy [website](https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org), was played which placed the Part One launch in historical context.



What's in the report?

Henry began by giving an overview of Part One of the National Food Strategy. This part deals with some of the most urgent questions raised by COVID-19 and EU Exit, and contains a set of targeted recommendations, covering three main themes:

- **Health: a wake-up call.** The report argues that we can no longer ignore the damage our diets are doing to our health and wellbeing, and that COVID-19 is a teachable moment on diet-related diseases. It includes a number of recommendations to support people to make the healthy choice.
- **Support for our most disadvantaged children.** The report argues that eating well in childhood is the very foundation stone of equality of opportunity. It includes recommendations to ensure that our most disadvantaged children get the nutrition they need.
- **Sovereignty, standards and scrutiny.** The report argues that with the right mechanisms in place, we can ensure high food standards, protect the environment and be a champion of free trade.

Throughout the event, Sarah asked Henry a combination of participants' pre-submitted and live questions. Participants submitted questions when they registered, on the morning of the event, and during the event itself (via Zoom and Twitter). The next few slides show a snapshot of these.

Key numbers

- There have been **3.3 million** new claims for Universal Credit since 16th March.
- Obese people are **150%** more likely to be admitted to hospital with COVID-19.
- **64%** of the total food consumed in the UK is produced domestically.

Implications of COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted everything – the food system and the National Food Strategy are very much a part of that. The event discussion considered both recovery and change to the food system, and the political landscape in a post-COVID world.

Q: How do we sustain positive changes to the food system in the long term?

A: Henry observed that the food sector, especially supermarkets, responded very well to the potential crisis in food supply during lockdown. We have to solve the problem of food supply before climate change escalates further. Henry notes that the government and business' interventions showed they recognised the need for change and they will work together to bring about positive impact.

Q: There will be a lot of support for your strategy, but how easy will it be to deliver it if we have a second wave of the coronavirus?

A: Henry was optimistic that the recommendations could still be delivered as many of them were issues of funding or points of principle for future trade agreements. However, he also warned that it would be make problems related to poverty and hunger even more serious.

Q: Do you think the restaurant trade will ever get back to what it was pre-COVID-19?

A: Henry was confident that hospitality is an extremely resilient industry that will recover well. However he hopes we can keep struggling restaurants going to stop them falling away and having to completely rebuild.

Support for our most disadvantaged children

The discussion generated plenty of comments and questions. On increased support for children, particular themes included the impact of education in widening children's access to healthier food choices and balancing individual vs. government responsibilities to keep families well.

Q: If more children are eligible for free school meals, how do we ensure that schools provide healthy, tasty and nutritious food?

A: From experience working on the School Food Plan, Henry and others noticed that the most successful schools all had strong leadership that believed in the importance of healthy free school meals. Henry recommended a combination of sufficient funding, and making healthy food central to the school, its culture and purpose of society.

Q: Do you think we will be able to maintain the 'collective will' to reduce food poverty post-COVID?

A: Although Covid-19 has highlighted issues of food insecurity, Henry stressed that it is extremely important that we maintain the momentum beyond the pandemic. It has shown decision-makers who were not previously interested in actively tackling food poverty that it is a pressing matter. People are still struggling to access food and will continue to do so in the long term, and we must prioritise solving food poverty before climate change worsens. Henry was optimistic the government can be a force for good in this.

Health: A wake up call

Health and wellbeing was the next topic. Common themes in the questions included the roles of business, advertising and taxation in encouraging healthier lifestyles across the population.

Q: Would it be helpful to give guidance on what types of high fats are good for us, or do you advocate the ban on the sale of nuts, fish oils, avocado oils etc instead of mentioning the link between high carbohydrates, obesity and type 2 diabetes?

A: Henry thought that if we're going to take this seriously, we need to take the science behind food more seriously and invest more in understanding exactly what about certain foods is making us sick. However, he was also convinced that removing most of the advertising around processed foods is a powerful action that should be done.

Q: Does the current crisis for households represent an opportunity to change their diets, cooking and shopping habits?

A: Comparing the UK's current situation with successful national health initiatives in Finland, Henry remarked that the environmental and health crises we are currently facing may encourage people to switch from pessimism and apathy to positive action.

Sovereignty, standards, and scrutiny

The third theme considered was how wider events such as Brexit will impact our relationship with food in the future, particularly in relation to trade.

Q: Are the trade recommendations fit for purpose? There are real concerns about the dual tariff system's ability to safeguard the environment and nature friendly farming.

A: Henry was confident standards will be maintained because the UK as a country deeply cares about the quality of its food. However, as there are so many countries inside and outside the EU who farm to lower standards than the UK, Henry recommended creating a core set of standards for ourselves so we are able to define our own welfare and environmental principles without breaking ties with these countries.

Q: How do we sustain positive changes to the food system in the long term?

A: Henry observed that the food sector, especially supermarkets, responded well to the potential food supply crisis during lockdown. The government and business' interventions now demonstrate that they recognise the need for change and they will work together to bring about a positive impact.

Q: Is the next food crisis going to happen on 1 January 2021?

A: In Henry's opinion, the damage prevention measures put in place over the past few months for Covid-19 dwarf what would be needed for Brexit. While there will be some areas such as uphill farming which will struggle, Henry was confident the government will support them and is now much less worried about a no deal Brexit than he was previously.

Questions on next steps

Once we had discussed the main content of the report, we considered next steps and what is to come in Part 2.

Q: Who's going to be the government face generating action?

A: There are a few government ministers who have been very supportive, including George Eustice, Matt Hancock and Michael Gove. More information on structural government recommendations will be coming in Part 2 of the Strategy.

Q: How will this part of the Strategy be taken forward and what support can businesses and influential people watching give to make this a reality?

A: The government has committed to responding to the white paper in 6 months. Henry would be grateful for businesses signing up, writing in and becoming part of the solution. He encouraged everyone to spread the word, share the strategy with MPs and provide feedback, particularly on the trade and poverty sections of the Strategy.

What people thought

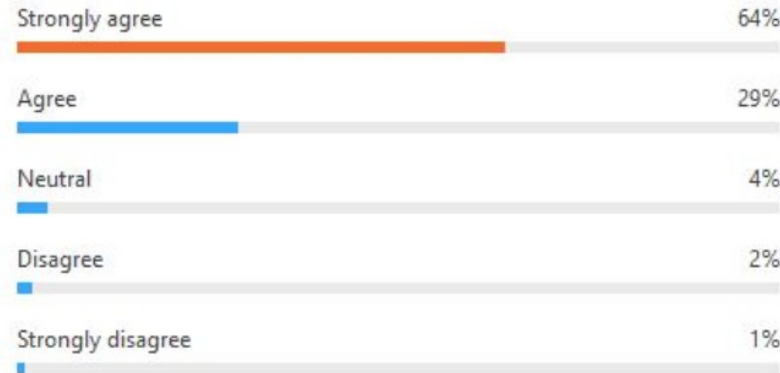
Viewers of the event were polled at key moments throughout.

The vast majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that “it is my responsibility to eat a healthy diet”.

1. It is my responsibility to eat a healthy diet.



1. The UK should maintain high food standards even if it means we sign fewer trade deals.



The vast majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that “the UK should maintain high food standards even if it means we sign fewer trade deals”.

There were mixed opinions on whether the food system will build back better in the long term after the shock of COVID-19.

1. The food system has experienced a shock with Covid. I am confident it will build back better.



What people thought



Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall  @HughFW · Jul 29

This is a great piece of work by Henry Dimbleby and his team. Government needs to act now to address food inequality made worse by Covid. And it needs a decades long plan to give the UK more biodiverse farming and long term food security.



Dr Beth Mead @bethanmead · 29 Jul

[#FoodStrategy](#) [@HenryDimbleby](#) says original ideas needed for Part 2. [@RurbanRev](#), up-scaling urban greening and food growing as a food systems solution is very relevant here.



Deborah David @DJDInTouch · Jul 29

Listening intently to this much needed [@food_strategy](#) [#foodstrategy](#) Particularly need for properly scrutinised trade deal by Parliament to ensure highest food standards for UK



VegCities @VegCities · 29 Jul

Listening to [@HenryDimbleby](#) talk about [@food_strategy](#). Here's an idea: expand school fruit & veg scheme to all children in primary school and more high standard British produce. This would level off inequalities in access to fruit & veg and boost British produce. [#foodstrategy](#)



Hannah Popple @HPopple1 · 29 Jul

I agree with [@HenryDimbleby](#) that GP's and healthcare workers need more training in nutrition. But also, qualified nutritionists and dieticians' knowledge and experience needs to be utilised more effectively! [#foodstrategy](#)



Sarah Hickey @me_sarahhelena · 29 Jul

[@HenryDimbleby](#) : 'COVID has created a collective sense of purpose from government and industry to improve the food system for our children.' So agree, and we need to focus on getting going and keeping going on practical actions to build on this momentum [#foodstrategy](#)

Final thoughts

As we came to a close we heard some final reflections from Henry and Sarah, as well as participants (via Chat and Twitter).



Food Active @food_active · Jul 29

"Equality of opportunity is to have a healthy and nutritious diet for everyone"

Fantastic to hear more about the [@food_strategy](#) from [@HenryDimbleby](#). We support both recommendations made today in Part 1 of the strategy - especially the need to protect vulnerable children.



Shaun Spiers @ShaunSpiers1 · Jul 29

Congratulations to [@HenryDimbleby](#) & his team (including [@TamsinCCooper](#) & [@dustin_benton](#)) on [#nationalfoodstrategy](#) pt. 1. Lots of good stuff on nutrition, food poverty & standards - & more to come on climate & nature.



Becka Sunter @BeckaSunter · 29 Jul

Great launch event for part 1 of the new national [#foodstrategy](#) today with [@HenryDimbleby](#) outlining his vision for change for our food system. It's exciting, timely & necessary - we need a food system which works for us all. Nutritious, quality food needs to be easily accessible!

Henry encouraged participants to maintain their involvement with the Strategy by sharing feedback with his team and having discussions with their own contacts. He warned that creating a level playing field and reducing the pressure on the individual is only part of it. The way to make change is by working with citizens from the bottom up.

Finally, Henry urged anyone who has thoughts and ideas on how to improve our food system to write in and let him know. No one has the answer yet, but maybe you do.

Join the National Food Strategy [mailing list](#) to stay part of the conversation.