



Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs: Consultation on the future for food, farming and the environment

Response by the Wellcome Trust

8 May 2018

Introduction

1. Wellcome is the UK's largest charitable foundation. Last year we invested £1.1 billion into biomedical research and the medical humanities to improve health. We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Government's consultation paper – Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit.¹
2. Recognising the direct link between the environment and health, Wellcome have established a dedicated team – Our Planet, Our Health – to explore this relationship and use this knowledge to improve global health.² Food production represents a key component of this challenge, and the UK's departure from EU agricultural programmes represents an opportunity for ambitious change.
3. As a declaration of interest, it should be noted that Wellcome is the sole owner of Farmcare, a major UK farming and land management business.³ Income from this investment supports our charitable activities. However, this submission reflects solely our perspective as a charitable funder, and not as an investor.

Recommendation: To maximise the positive impacts of agriculture on society, Government must take a comprehensive approach to food production which includes consideration of outcomes such as health and nutrition.

4. To deliver the best overall outcome for society, Government must consider the full range of inputs and outputs which influence agricultural practices – including water use, soil, climate, human health and animal welfare. As part of this, we would like the UK to adopt a vision for food production that recognises and incentivises health and nutrition from “field to fork”. While we welcome the paper's references to public health and healthier societies, we feel Government could go much further to embed nutrition within the farming agenda at this crucial moment.
5. Poor diet represents a major health and economic burden on the UK. Diets low in vegetables are associated with more than 20,000 premature deaths every year, and over half of UK adults are overweight or obese.^{4,5} The outcome of Brexit negotiations may exacerbate this issue as, except for potatoes, 42% of all vegetables consumed in the UK are grown abroad and those from outside the EU attract import tariffs, raising disproportionate cost barriers to those on lower incomes.^{6,7}
6. Lessons can be drawn from the analysis of co-benefits in areas such as climate change, where the extensive relationship between health and the environment is

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/684003/future-farming-environment-consult-document.pdf

² <https://wellcome.ac.uk/what-we-do/our-work/our-planet-our-health>

³ <http://farmcareltd.com/>

⁴ <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/FF-Veg-Doc-V5.pdf>

⁵ <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/food-system-challenges/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/import-and-export-plants-and-fresh-produce>

⁷ <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Farming-for-five-a-day-final.pdf>

increasingly considered in policymaking.⁸ Agricultural practices have impacts that span Departmental remits, and Government must develop the broadest possible perspective on the impact of farming on society (see Case Study). While we welcome the paper's discussion of incentives for opening access to rural land, and the public health dividend this can yield through greater physical activity and wellbeing, we urge further application of this open-minded approach to other elements of the food production chain.

Case Study – Palm Oil: Sustainability, Health and Economics (POSHE)

Professor Bhavani Shankar and Professor Richard Smith

SOAS, University of London, and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

Palm oil is now the most consumed oil in the world. While many of its qualities make it an attractive cooking ingredient, its health and environmental consequences are significant.

Previously, experts had only looked at aspects of palm oil in isolation. The Our Planet, Our Health team has funded a study which uses a transdisciplinary framework to consider the combined health, environmental and economic effects of palm oil.

The study focuses on Thailand, a significant producer and consumer of palm oil. Researchers are developing a model to look at the trade-offs between palm oil's health, environmental and economic effects. The model will simulate different policies, for example palm oil taxation or investment in new edible oils. Using these findings, they will develop recommendations for the Thai government about the most feasible and effective courses of action.

This project has been extended to consider wider palm oil trading relationships in the Asian region and deepen the analysis of alternative uses of palm oil in Thailand, in particular biofuel production.

7. Producer-facing policies should be used to reframe what is meant by productivity in farming, to incentivise agricultural practices which best support consumer health. For example, Government should establish objectives and accompanying metrics which value nutritional yield alongside calorific and economic yield.
8. These producer-facing incentives should align with consumer-facing policies to boost consumer access to nutritious foods at every price point. Maximising the impact of such policies will require meaningful public engagement, which Wellcome has sought to contribute to through The Crunch, a public campaign on our food and our health.⁹
9. With a growing population, threats to food security, and pressure for dietary change, it is essential that the UK agricultural sector can embrace and drive innovation. We welcome the paper's recognition of the UK's existing research expertise, and urge continued support for research across disciplines – from soil science, to robotics, to nutrition – that will help find solutions which improve health while protecting food security.

⁸ <http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/aa8f7b/meta;jsessionid=9D06DB8188345A345165A54BCC32CA3E.ip-10-40-2-120>

⁹ <https://thecrunch.wellcome.ac.uk/>