

Strategy Unit Food Project Q & A

Why is the Government looking at food policy?

The Prime Minister recognises that food is an issue of great public interest and an important part of national life. He has asked for a study of the current issues in food, the linkages between them, and the implications for Government's future strategies.

Why is the Strategy Unit leading?

The Strategy Unit, which provides strategy and policy advice to the Prime Minister, is best placed to take forward the work with the cross-cutting approach required given the wide range of economic, environmental and social trends to be considered. The Strategy Unit is working with Defra, the Department of Health, the Food Standards Agency and other departments.

This study is one of a first set of projects that the Strategy Unit was asked to undertake by the new Prime Minister.

What is the project looking at?

The study is examining current and emerging trends in the production and consumption of food, and the key drivers of those trends in relation to long-term public health policy. It will also consider the wider implications for the economy, society and the environment.

It will look at the opportunities and challenges facing the food system, including issues such as diet's contribution to public health, the safety of the food we eat, changing consumer tastes and preferences, and impacts on the environment.

What will its outputs be?

The Strategy Unit will deliver a report to the Prime Minister in Spring 2008.

What's the process?

The study is in several stages. The first part is intended to provide a preliminary analysis of the key trends and draw out the key issues for further consideration in later stages. This will help to ensure that the public input is able to contribute to all the key issues.

A second part, now in progress, involves consulting on the trends, the challenges the UK faces in responding to the many issues in a coherent way, and how Government can help. These consultations involve (i) NGOs covering a wide range of consumer, environmental and health issues; (ii) industry representative bodies and companies from all along the food chain; and (iii) others with an interest.

A third and final part will draw out policy implications.

What are the aims of the project?

The project is looking at the main trends in the production and consumption of food in the UK. It is analysing the implications of those trends for the wider economy, society (including public health) and the environment, including an analysis of the main drivers of change (such as public attitudes). In light of this analysis, the project will assess the robustness of the policy framework for food in the face of current and future trends and the various drivers of change.

The project will explore what should be the objectives of future food strategy and identify what, if any, changes or measures might be needed to achieve them.

What aspects of food will the project look at?

It is adopting a 'system' view of food. This means looking at the whole food UK chain, from production (farming and fishing) through processing to retail and food services, food consumption and food waste.

The project is examining the operation of the system, the issues raised by its current state and future direction, and their implications for public policy.

The project is looking primarily at the UK domestic situation and at domestic policy issues, but will consider European and wider international policies where they are relevant to the domestic agenda and objectives.

The project is focused on food rather than alcohol, but data on and impacts of alcohol consumption may need to be considered in some parts of the project.

How is the project being run across Whitehall?

The project team is made up of staff from the Strategy Unit bringing in expertise from Defra, the Department of Health, the Food Standards Agency and others departments. Cross-Whitehall advisory and working groups have been established with staff from the various departments being invited to attend.

The project team is also involving a range of other appropriate and relevant government bodies such as the Sustainable Development Commission.

When will the project report?

It is expected to report to the Prime Minister in Spring 2008.