

**‘FRONTING UP: UK SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS IN THE SPOTLIGHT’  
The Food Ethics Council**

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## Executive Summary

### The task in hand

If the UK leaves the EU in 2019, it will have seismic implications for its food and farming systems. Brexit poses huge risks e.g. that UK food standards might be eroded in the rush to secure international trade deals. It raises questions about who will grow and produce our food in the future. But it may also bring opportunities to reshape the way that farmers are supported, effecting a move away from subsidies based on size of farms towards new mechanisms that reward farmers for delivering public goods.

Now more than ever, is an opportune time for the UK Government and Devolved Administrations to consider the UK's place in the world – including the importance attached to 'good' food and farming. There has arguably never been a more important time for food ethics.

Having an aspirational ambition for the UK to be a world leader on food, farming, animal welfare and environmental issues – as the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has put forward – is a good starting point and an ethical imperative. However, for such an aspiration to become a *reality*, it needs other 'ingredients' that are currently lacking – from well-defined measures of success, to in-depth ethical analysis.

*"We have a great opportunity to make sure our food and farming industry is leading the way in modern, creative thinking"* (Rt. Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2017)

The purpose of this publication is to shine a spotlight on the UK's position on the Food Sustainability Index ('FSI'), to ask how we are really doing and to set out initial steps for what the UK needs to do to become a true global leader on food, farming, health, the environment and animal welfare. This work is a snapshot analysis of the UK's performance, based on the 2017 iteration of the FSI, an index produced by the Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition ('BCFN') Foundation and the Economist Intelligence Unit ('EIU').

We want the UK Government and Devolved Administrations to attach a higher priority to ethical concerns in food and farming policy. They need to be held to account for their progress (or otherwise) towards the ambition of being a global food sustainability leader. Hence why this analysis is so timely – at the start of a renewed journey towards global leadership on this agenda.

Our aim is to create food systems that are fair and healthy for people, animals and the environment. Hence, we take a broad interpretation of food sustainability and of sustainable food systems. That was what drew us to the FSI. It was a useful (if not perfect) attempt to bring together a range of important food issues, including food waste and losses, human health and nutrition, the environmental impacts of food and farming, treatment of workers and animal welfare concerns.

Judging how sustainable food systems are is a difficult job, but it is an important one. We are using the FSI to help give a sense of how the UK is doing on sustainable food systems. The FSI has limitations, not least that it does not consider many of the impacts relating to food imported into countries, which is particularly important for high food-importing countries like the UK. Nonetheless, the FSI is still a valiant attempt and we are keen to help further strengthen it in future.

Taking an ethical approach in tackling the food issues we face means having a better understanding of the implications of our choices when dealing with concerns about human health, animal welfare, environmental protection or trade justice. It is important to consider as best as possible what the *values* we want to promote as a country are, what the most *contentious* issues are and what the

*consequences* from particular courses of action are likely to be. Who are likely to be the biggest winners and losers? And how can national Governments – and others – address trade-offs head on?

We believe that food indexes – if done well – can engender healthy competition. What is more, they have the potential to drive a ‘race to the top’ on food sustainability. There are already several examples of indexes targeted at different actors in the food system, from Oxfam’s influential Behind the Brands company scorecard to IFPRI’s Global Hunger Index to the FSI.

In this analysis we focus particularly on the FSI, first published in December 2016. Its aims are to promote food sustainability concerns, to be a benchmarking tool to help policymakers identify priority areas to act, and to integrate work within global efforts to achieve the SDGs by 2030. The second iteration of the FSI was published in December 2017 and this is what our snapshot analysis is based upon. We are grateful to EIU and BCFN Foundation for allowing us early embargoed access to the 2017 FSI data.

Whilst the occasion of this report is the publication of FSI 2017, this is a free-standing and wider report, not merely a footnote on the FSI.

The FSI contains 66 sub-indicators under three main ‘domains’ and in 2017 assesses 34 countries. A simplified version of the FSI’s framework used is shown below:

<b>A. Food loss and waste</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Food loss</li> <li>2. End-user food waste</li> </ol>
<b>B. Sustainable agriculture</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Water</li> <li>2. Land (land use, biodiversity, human capital)</li> <li>3. Air (GHG emissions)</li> </ol>
<b>C. Nutritional challenges</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Life quality</li> <li>2. Life expectancy</li> <li>3. Dietary patterns</li> </ol>

*Table 1: Simplified version of the FSI framework [Source: adapted from 2017 FSI]*

### **How is the UK doing? UK food sustainability in the spotlight**

The UK comes 10<sup>th</sup> out of 34 countries assessed in the 2017 version of the FSI. ‘Significant room for improvement’ is perhaps the best way to describe the UK’s performance on food sustainability. However, the devil is in the detail, which is why we believe this snapshot analysis is so important. Unless you scratch beneath the surface, you get a misleading impression.

If we look at a regional level, the UK is lagging behind many of its European neighbours. The UK comes eighth out of the ten European countries included in the 2017 FSI, only ahead of Russia and Greece.

Overall ranking in FSI	Country	Score
1	France	74.8
2	Germany	70.6
3	Spain	70.4
4	Sweden	69.7
5	Portugal	69.5
6	Italy	69.0
7	Hungary	68.4
8	UK	68.0
9	Russia	62.1
10	Greece	61.6

Table 2: Overall ranking of European countries included in 2017 FSI (Source: 2017 FSI)

### Food loss and waste

The UK ranks seventh out of 34 countries for food loss and waste. It is estimated that 30-50% of food is lost, or wasted globally, at some point along the chain. But why does food loss and food waste matter? The problem is not simply the environmental impact of having to dispose of wasted food but more fundamentally, the wasted resources that have gone into growing and making that food in the first place.

The UK is often held up anecdotally as a global leader on food waste and food loss and, if FSI data is to be accepted, on the face of it the UK is performing reasonably well. But, the UK is not leading and there is a real risk that the great progress made in recent years may be undermined.

There is growing awareness of the problem, growing consensus around the need to tackle it and a strong business case for driving out food waste all the way along supply chains, from farm to fork and beyond. That said, food waste and losses in UK food systems – including global supply chains the UK sources from – are still unacceptably high.

Food waste is arguably one of the biggest injustices of our time. Indeed, any index that shows how well a country is doing should only be viewed as provisional if a significant proportion of the food waste occurs outside the country. The UK still imports substantial volumes from some countries performing less well on food loss and food waste – notably India and Brazil. As such, food waste should be viewed in the context of a country's trading relations and with an understanding that those that import food are responsible in part for waste along the chain.

Food waste can also be a useful proxy for understanding how much people value food. UK performance contrasts with France which, according to the FSI, is a leader on food waste – helped by a suite of approaches, including having a mandate to educate children about waste.

### Sustainable agriculture

The 'sustainable agriculture' category that is the largest and most diverse of the three domains in the FSI. It includes environmental impacts from agriculture, animal welfare (although only one measure is present), treatment of workers and more, but it has some limitations.

The figures presented paint a potentially worrying picture. On 'sustainable agriculture' impacts, the UK ranks in the bottom half of countries assessed in the FSI (20<sup>th</sup> out of 34 countries). The UK scores relatively well on water issues, including environmental impact of agriculture on water, water scarcity, water management, trade impact and sustainability of fisheries. One important exception though, is

for 'total net imports of virtual blue water from crop and animal products' where the UK ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> out of 34.

The UK performs particularly poorly in the 'air' category because it does not have a dedicated agriculture policy that deals with climate change, hence scores badly on 'initiatives of agricultural techniques for climate change mitigation and adaptation.'

How *people* working in our food and farming supply chains are treated is also hugely important. By one measure included in the FSI at least, the UK's position is worse than many might imagine.

On animal welfare, the UK ranks first in the FSI, which is very encouraging. However, the single animal welfare indicator used is 'quality of animal welfare regulation' and further outcome measures are needed to get a more complete picture.

### **Nutritional challenges**

The UK comes eighth out of 34 countries on nutritional challenges and is performing well in some areas - like very low levels of stunting and wasting. However, the current (average) *healthy* life expectancy in the UK is 71.4 years, which is outside the top ten of the FSI rankings and disguises significant regional differences between different parts of the UK. There are surely important lessons to be learned from countries at the top of healthy life expectancy rankings – notably Japan and South Korea.

In other areas, the picture is much more concerning. The UK ranks 20<sup>th</sup> out of 34 countries on prevalence of overweight in children and 24<sup>th</sup> out of 34 amongst adults (and the worst of the 10 European countries included in the FSI). The UK is the most obese country in western Europe, with 26.9% of the population obese in 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Nutritional challenges are by their nature long-term. The UK is facing both a short-term emergency and a long-term crisis in relation to obesity. The introduction of a UK Childhood obesity plan in 2016/17 was welcome and contained some positive measures. However, quite simply, it did not go anywhere near far enough and one year on very little progress has been made.

The UK comes bottom of the FSI on exclusive breastfeeding at six months - and indeed rates of exclusive breastfeeding at six months in the UK are one of the lowest in the world. This matters for a range of reasons, not least because breastfeeding has been described as the *ultimate* healthy, sustainable diet.

As the FSI highlights, there is a relatively high proportion of people below the national poverty line in the UK. If you look more specifically at household food insecurity, this highlights food-related challenges even more vividly. According to UN data, an estimated 8.4 million people were living in households reporting having insufficient food in 2014 in the UK<sup>2</sup>.

### **Ethical tensions and responses**

To provide an ethical response to the FSI and our wider food systems, we must consider the different values that affect our food choices. We must look at the consequences of those values and their likely impacts on different interest groups, then weigh them up and try to decide what is right, all things considered. There are three ethical principles we feel are particularly important – respect for fairness, wellbeing and autonomy.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD's annual Health at a Glance report <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/healthier-lifestyles-and-better-health-policies-drive-life-expectancy-gains.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/FoodInsecurityBriefing-May-2016-FINAL.pdf>

## **UK tensions**

The FSI raises multiple tensions, contradictions and questions relevant to the UK. Examples of these tensions that key food system actors ought to deal with include:

### **1. Pushing the boundaries of responsibility**

Much of FSI's data focuses on impacts of food produced within the country. However, around 50% of the food eaten in the UK is imported. These overseas impacts are not properly reflected and, as such, there is a risk the UK is offshoring many of its negative impacts and abrogating itself of responsibility. Some countries are resorting to 'land grabs'. However, in developing responses, we need to put ourselves in the shoes of those most affected – in this case citizens of those countries.

***Key ethical questions: How can we ensure the needs of interest groups affected by UK food imports are taken into account? And how can we ensure our food choices are fair to people in other countries?***

### **2. Short and long-term**

There is a need to balance action on both short-term and long-term concerns. Failing to act, or acting too slowly, will store up trouble and unfairly put the burden on future generations. Failing to take preventative steps will see obesity rates spiral further out of control, with an accompanying health and financial burden. 'Short-termism' can also cloud deeper issues, and – unintentionally – exacerbate the problem in the long term. For example, establishing food banks in countries like the UK may serve a vital function in the short term by providing an emergency response and by feeding people in need. However, doing so may entrench charity food aid provision and allow the Government to step away from its obligation to provide a genuine safety net to people in need.

***Key ethical question: How can we ensure approaches to food system challenges are fair to future generations while still addressing current needs?***

### **3: High food standards and affordability**

For every £1 that UK citizens pay at the checkout, it is estimated that there are £1 of additional costs incurred.<sup>3</sup> We need to better reflect the true cost of food in the price we pay at the checkout. Unfortunately, it is often those on low incomes that are hit hardest here. Whilst this is a hugely complex area, cheap food cannot be the answer. We need to get more people into work that pays and treats them well (including a real living wage), with the Government providing a proper safety net. This will allow everyone to access the high food standards we should strive for.

***Key ethical question: How can Government make changes needed in wider society that will allow everyone to pay the true cost of food at the checkout in the future?***

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<sup>3</sup> <http://sustainablefoodtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/HCOF-Report-online-version.pdf>

## Conclusions – towards a leadership position

Overall, the UK comes tenth out of 34 countries on food sustainability in the 2017 FSI. In short, that is not good enough.

The FSI gives a sense of how sustainable UK food systems are, if not a ‘true’ picture. The reality is that the UK is not yet a global leader on food sustainability – despite areas of encouraging performance. The UK is doing badly on iconic indicators like childhood obesity, exclusive breastfeeding rates and climate change action. The road ahead may be more like a game of snakes and ladders than a smooth race to the top.

Taking an ethical approach is vital to make UK food systems fair and fit for the future. The Food Ethics Council believes food system leadership for the UK must include:

- **Standing for excellence:** establishing itself as a country based on values that lead to high food standards. It is about continually raising the bar in a race for ‘goodness’ – and never settling for first place if that is simply ‘the best of a bad lot’, with unacceptable levels of harm.
- **Taking responsibility for impacts of food consumed:** active and transparent monitoring of food imports to ensure they are produced to the highest food standards.
- **Taking a long-term approach:** short-term responses can become entrenched and blind us from long-term solutions. We need a long-term commitment and framework to deliver fair, food systems, focused on prevention rather than cure. This includes supporting the nation’s long-term health by investing a significantly higher proportion of health service budget to public health.
- **Tackling trade-offs head on:** a forthright recognition that any sustainable food and farming policy needs to face up to trade-offs between the interests of humans and animals, humans and the environment, or even different people and communities. Unlocking these tensions and trade-offs will be easier if we are not afraid to face them together and tackle their root causes.
- **Integrating policies:** having clear policy mechanisms to bring together environmental sustainability, agriculture and health at the Cabinet Office.
- **Pushing for outcomes as measures of success:** leading on identifying and implementing suitable metrics, including setting and embedding welfare outcome measures for all farm animal species, and introducing annual government-led measurement of household food insecurity.<sup>4</sup>
- **Inclusive leadership:** treating everyone equally and including people in decisions that affect them will empower people and generate better solutions. Being trapped in a consumer mindset contributes to the lack of agency many feel. By contrast, adopting a citizen mindset opens up a range of opportunities for how people can participate in – and positively shape – our food systems<sup>5</sup>.

The FSI reinforces the fact that our food systems need to change. There are many hard truths to confront. The UK Government and Devolved Administrations should take a leadership position on sustainable food systems and we should all help fulfil that.

Let us work together to deliver the UK’s global leadership ambitions and create a race for excellence.

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<sup>4</sup> The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) advocates its Food Insecurity Experience Scale.

<sup>5</sup> For further details, see our work with the New Citizenship Project on ‘Food Citizenship’ at <https://www.foodcitizenship.info/>

## Chapter 1: Introduction – the task in hand

### **A time for ethics**

The task in hand is immense. We want food systems awash with fairness, not chickens washed with chlorine. We want *conscious* food systems, where people make considered choices about what should happen to food and farming in the future, not *unconscious* food systems where impacts are too often hidden. More than ever, now is an opportune time for the UK Government and Devolved Administrations to consider the UK's place in the world – including the importance attached to 'good' food and farming. There has arguably never been a more important time for food ethics.

If the UK does leave the EU in 2019, it will have seismic implications for its food and farming systems. Brexit poses huge *risks* e.g. that UK food standards might be eroded in the rush to secure international trade deals. It raises question about who will grow and produce our food in the future. But it may also bring opportunities to reshape the way that farmers are supported, effecting a move away from subsidies based on size of farms towards new mechanisms that reward farmers for delivering public goods.

Whatever happens with talk of Brexit, we want to see the UK climbing key league tables – including on sustainable food systems. At the Food Ethics Council, we want the UK Government and Devolved Administrations to develop policies that demonstrably contribute to fair, healthy, humane and environmentally sustainable food and farming. We hope they - and others - will draw on the analysis in this report and our subsequent work to accelerate that shift.

### **An ambition for the UK to lead on sustainable food systems**

Early indications suggest that this government will maintain and perhaps even strengthen current animal welfare and sustainability policies. Indeed, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has shared an aspirational ambition for the UK to be a world leader on food, farming, animal welfare and environmental issues. However, for such an aspiration to become a *reality*, it needs other 'ingredients' that are currently lacking. These 'ingredients' include having well-defined measures of success; having well worked out ethical bases for why moving towards these ideals is ethically imperative; the four nations reaching agreement on things which need – or would by consent – benefit from a joint approach<sup>6</sup>; getting buy-in from all key UK Government departments; and having a long-term plan to deliver on the ambition.

In the absence of those, all that remains is aspirational rhetoric and any initial sense of empowerment it provides is likely to be short-lived. Conversely, add in the other ingredients and progress becomes possible.

This is not something that the UK Government – or indeed an individual department like Defra - can achieve on its own, but it is something that the UK Government and Devolved Administrations should take ownership of and drive forward. It does not need to do this in a top-down way – quite the contrary. We would love to see the UK Government and Devolved Administrations facilitate the setting of collective missions<sup>7</sup> - at the relevant national, regional or local level - to deliver this overarching ambition.

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<sup>6</sup> There is already divergence between the four nations that make up the UK on some issues covered in the Food Sustainability Index. For example, Scotland was ahead on food waste reduction targets, but now arguably Wales is; or animal welfare, water quality and air quality where Scotland has its own legislation.

<sup>7</sup> Much like the collective ambition for Oklahoma City to 'lose a million pounds' in weight, led by the Mayor of Oklahoma Mick Cornett, as described in the Food Citizenship report we supported New Citizenship Project with.

## Creating a ‘race to the top’

The purpose of this publication is to shine a spotlight on how the UK is really doing and to set out initial steps for what the UK needs to do to truly become a global leader on food, farming, health, the environment and animal welfare.

This work is part of our ‘unleashing the power of indexes’ project. We want the UK Government and Devolved Administrations to attach a higher priority to ethical concerns in food and farming policy. We want to drive a ‘race to the top’ on such issues. We believe there is huge untapped potential for indexes - done well - to provide useful evidence to put constructive pressure on the UK Government, Devolved Administrations and other key stakeholders. They need to be held to account for their progress (or otherwise) towards that ambition of being a global food sustainability leader. Hence why this analysis is so timely – at the start of a renewed journey towards global leadership on this agenda.

We also want greater civil society focus and more coordinated effort on issues of ethical concern in food and farming - on UK policy areas identified by our analysis of major food indexes and by those identified as poor performing in our forthcoming Food Policy Barometer. We want to work with civil society organisations and others to act on major indexes such as the Food Sustainability Index (‘FSI’), leveraging media interest and prompting political interest, culminating in tangible improvements to the UK’s food system.

## What do we mean by sustainable food systems?

Our aim is to create food systems that are fair and healthy for people, animals and the environment. Hence, we take a broad interpretation of food sustainability and of sustainable food systems, not one focused on environmental sustainability alone, but one bringing in social, health, environmental, animal welfare and economic factors.

That was what drew us to the FSI. It was a useful (if not perfect) attempt to bring together a range of important food issues, including food waste and losses, human health and nutrition, the environmental impacts of food and farming, treatment of workers and animal welfare concerns. The FSI is produced by the Economist Intelligence Unit (‘EIU’) and the Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition (‘BCFN’) Foundation. Whilst the occasion of this report is the publication of FSI 2017, this is a free-standing and wider report, not merely a footnote on the FSI. *Note: Our analysis is independent of the Food Sustainability Index – and of the EIU and BCFN Foundation.*

We believe in taking a systems approach, rather than getting siloed in individual issues and stuck in narrow ways of framing problems. In short, we want fair, sustainable, humane, healthy food systems<sup>8</sup>.

## Assessing sustainable food systems

Judging how sustainable food systems are is a difficult job, but it is an important one. We are using the FSI to help give a sense of how the UK is doing on sustainable food systems. The FSI has limitations, not least that it does not consider many of the impacts relating to food imported into countries, which is particularly important for high food-importing countries like the UK.

One question we have long encouraged people to ask is ‘what should I do, all things considered?’ In the context of this analysis, we need to try to answer as far as is practical an overarching question of ‘how sustainable are UK food systems, all things considered?’. This is the ideal, as in practice, for reason of lack of time and complete information or of perspective, it is never possible or advisable to consider *all* things – or to question *everything* we do. However, it is wise to consider as many aspects as possible, in order to develop a more rounded picture and to be able to work out what you ought to do in response.

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<sup>8</sup> Note: Assume references to ‘food systems’ mean food *and farming* systems unless explicitly noted otherwise.

Judging on one issue alone will give an incomplete - and quite often misleading - picture. Whilst the FSI is not a perfect index, we feel it is a useful attempt to bring together a basket of indicators to see how different countries are performing relative to one another. We are keen to help further strengthen the FSI in future.

### **The UK – and the Devolved Nations**

This report is a snapshot analysis of how the UK is performing, based on the 2017 iteration of the FSI. However, we recognise there are important differences between different parts of the UK.

The FSI provides a common score for the four nations of the UK, and in practice the minor differences between the administrations would be unlikely to move individual nations far from the overall UK ranking. To cite just a few examples of the differences between administrations, there are different food waste targets in Wales and Scotland; an Agricultural Wages Board was retained in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but not in England, while a new organisation was set up in Wales; there are different rates of transfer between Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy in each of the four nations; and Scotland is doing worse on healthy life expectancy than the UK as a whole.

However, if the devolution settlement is maintained and the four nations continue to make their own food and agriculture policies, administrations may respond differently to the challenges of this index and indeed may diverge further in terms of sustainable food systems.

### **Why an ethical approach?**

Taking an ethical approach in tackling the food issues we face means having a better understanding of the implications of our choices when dealing with concerns about human health, animal welfare, environmental protection or trade justice. One way of describing food ethics is as articulation, defence and applications of the principles that dictate what counts as acceptable treatment of others, in the context of food production and consumption. Respect for the principles of fairness, wellbeing and autonomy can be a useful starting point here – one that the Food Ethics Council uses in its work.

There are certain ‘red lines’ or ‘ethical bottom lines’ on which most people agree e.g. that it is unacceptable to torture animals. However, on many issues, what is acceptable to one person will be unacceptable to another. Ethics refers to the values, principles and codes by which people actually live, but as an articulated enquiry into why we have the value responses we have, it can lead to greater clarity about what can reasonably be regarded as bottom lines. Our values often influence the decisions we make. Taking an explicitly and worked through ethical approach ultimately allows people to make ‘wiser’, more considered decisions – and that is what we would like all those with an interest in improving UK food systems to do more of.

There is no one way to do an ethical assessment and to judge how ethically a person, organisation or country is behaving - though this is not to concede a relativist view that all ethical responses are all equally reasonable. However, there are certain things it can be useful to do. It is important to consider as best as possible what the *values* we want to promote as a country are, what the most *contentious* issues are and what the *consequences* from particular courses of action are likely to be. In the context of this analysis, there are important questions to consider. What values are implicit in the indicators chosen in the FSI? What are the consequences likely to be if the UK carries on in its current trajectory? And importantly, who are likely to be the winners and losers? As part of this, it can be helpful to imagine one’s self in the biggest losers’ shoes. In considering responses, it is important to address trade-offs head on. The FSI does not yet provide us with all the answers to ‘how ethical are UK food systems?’, but it is still a useful to stimulate debate and to raise the profile of broad food sustainability concerns.

## Chapter 2: The power of indexes done well

### The rise of indexes

In recent years, many indexes have been developed to compare the performance of people, organisations, cities and countries. Some have been one-offs, while others have become well-established and are now seen as valuable tools. We believe that food indexes – if done well – can engender healthy competition. What is more, they have the potential to drive a ‘race to the top’ on food sustainability.

To be clear, we do not want, or need, a plethora of indexes; there is a real risk of index saturation. That said, the best indexes will thrive and endure, while the worst will disappear without trace.

There are already several examples of indexes targeted at different actors in the food system. Indexes that compare objectives and/ or performance of major *corporates* include Oxfam’s Behind the Brands company scorecard, the Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare (from Compassion in World Farming, World Animal Protection and Collier Capital) and the Soil Association’s ‘Out to Lunch’ scorecard which ranks restaurant chains in UK on a range of measures.

Indexes that compare how different *countries* are performing relative to each other range in their scope and complexity. They include the Global Hunger Index (by IFPRI), the Global Food Security Index (by the Economist Intelligence Unit – ‘EIU’ and DuPont) and the Food Sustainability Index (by the EIU and the BCFN Foundation).

### Characteristics of indexes done well

Characteristics of indexes done well include:

- **Credible index provider** – For an index to be credible, it requires the index providers to be reputable and ideally independent. Hence the Global Food Security Index faces potential perceived independence challenges because it is sponsored by Du Pont, even if the EIU do the work and have editorial independence.
- **Appropriate set of indicators with robust data sources** – Linked to the point above, the credibility of the methodological approach adopted is vital, including an ‘appropriate’ set of indicators. Good indexes use – and rely on - robust, independent data sets. An effective index has a basket of measures that fits the challenge at hand, and a suitable balance of metrics – not too *many* that they risk overcomplicating and defeating the purpose of an index, but not so *few* that they paint a misleading picture. Indexes should be attempts to pick out key indicators rather than *all* indicators – otherwise they lose their simplicity and their value. Sometimes there is a need for more detailed and multiple sets of metrics of course, but often fewer, carefully chosen, indicators can serve as decent proxies for other indicators.
- **Regularity and long-term commitment** – For an index to be effective, it usually needs to be produced regularly, ideally at the same point each year (or couple of years), and over a long period of time. One-off indexes do not achieve much. Of course, there is an element of ‘survival of the fittest’ when it comes to indexes – producing and using indexes takes time and resources. Only those that are credible and that people value will survive the test of time.
- **High profile in media** - Indexes are at one level a communications tool. When being designed, it is important that index providers think about the media hook and how they will seek to raise profile of the index via media and social media. An index that no one knows about is not a useful index.

- **Accompanying engagement strategy** – It is much easier for indexes to get traction and to drive a race to the top if index providers have an engagement strategy – with policy makers, businesses, academics and civil society organisations – to encourage and allow improvements to happen.
- **Open and transparent** – A good index is transparent and open, allowing users to easily check the raw data and its source.
- **Desire to continually improve** – The index providers should be willing to listen to criticism and open to further strengthening metrics and data sources each year. There is of course a balance to be struck between consistency of metrics – to enable an index to retain some measure of comparability - with changes to the basket of indicators each year to further strengthen them.

Oxfam’s Behind the Brands index is a good example of many of the above. Oxfam’s ‘Where to from here’ statement on its Behind the Brands website neatly demonstrates many of the above features:

*“This is not a short-term challenge, and we’re committed to sticking with it. We will update the scorecard regularly and will continue to improve and strengthen it over time. The index tackles some cutting edge issues that will require rigorous debate and dialogue between companies, civil society and industry experts. For this reason, Oxfam will work with a range of stakeholders to improve how it assesses the companies, paying particular attention to new approaches to addressing supply chain issues.... We’ll also be looking and listening for specific cases where action can make an immediate difference.”<sup>9</sup>*

### **The Food Sustainability Index**

In this analysis, we focus particularly on the Food Sustainability Index (‘FSI’). The first iteration of the FSI was published in December 2016. In the second quarter of 2017, we did some initial analysis on the 2016 version to unpack key findings from the FSI relating to the UK. We published these in the summer of 2017 in the form of a magazine<sup>10</sup>, where we asked a number of commentators for their views on the FSI. In the magazine, Maria-Luiza Apostolescu from the Economist Intelligence Unit described what the FSI is trying to achieve:

*“The overall aims of the project are to promote food and its surrounding issues of production and access to the top of the agenda for the near future. The research is presented in the form of a benchmarking tool that can help policy makers identify the areas of urgency/ priority and the need for action. Another key project objective is to integrate this work within global efforts to achieve the SDGs by 2030.”<sup>11</sup>*

The second iteration of the FSI was published in December 2017. It is the second iteration on which our snapshot analysis is based. We are grateful to EIU and BCFN Foundation for allowing us early embargoed access to the 2017 FSI data in November 2017.

The 2017 FSI includes 34 countries: France, Japan, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, Italy, South Korea, Hungary, UK, Canada, Ethiopia, Colombia, Australia, Israel, Turkey, Russia, Argentina, South Africa, Greece, US, Mexico, China, Nigeria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Brazil, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Indonesia, India, UAE.

The FSI contains 66 sub-indicators under three main ‘domains’. A simplified version of the FSI’s framework used is shown overleaf:

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.behindthebrands.org/about/>

<sup>10</sup> *Sustainable Food Systems: how does the UK measure up?* (July 2017) <http://www.foodethicscouncil.org/our-work/unleashing-the-power-of-indexes/sustainable-food-systems-how-does-the-uk-measure-up.html>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.foodethicscouncil.org/uploads/publications/sustainability\\_index\\_2017\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.foodethicscouncil.org/uploads/publications/sustainability_index_2017_WEB.pdf)

- A. Food loss and waste**
  - 1. Food loss
  - 2. End-user food waste
- B. Sustainable agriculture**
  - 1. Water
  - 2. Land (land use, biodiversity, human capital)
  - 3. Air (GHG emissions)
- C. Nutritional challenges** (e.g. relating to hunger and obesity)
  - 1. Life quality
  - 2. Life expectancy
  - 3. Dietary patterns

*Table 1: Simplified version of the FSI framework [Source: adapted from 2017 FSI]*

In chapter five, in the spirit of wanting to help make the FSI as impactful as possible, we provide recommendations to the EIU and BCFN Foundation for how the FSI could be further strengthened in subsequent iterations. This includes suggestions for strengthening metrics and approaches used to ensure they have an appropriate balance of measures across environment, social, health and animal welfare concerns.

## Chapter 3: How is the UK doing? UK food sustainability in the spotlight

### **OVERALL RANKING**

In the 2017 version of the FSI, UK comes.

- 7<sup>th</sup> out of 34 countries on food loss and waste
- 20<sup>th</sup> on sustainable agriculture
- 8<sup>th</sup> on nutritional challenges

**Overall, the UK comes 10<sup>th</sup> out of the 34 countries assessed**

The UK comes 10<sup>th</sup> out of 34 countries assessed in the 2017 FSI. 'Significant room for improvement' is one way to describe the UK's performance on food sustainability. On the face of it, the reaction might be to claim the UK is performing OK. It is in the top half of the rankings and (just) inside the top ten.

However, the devil is in the detail – which is why we believe this snapshot analysis is so important. Unless you scratch beneath the surface, you get a misleading impression. The best that can be said of the UK is that it is in the chasing pack, not the leading pack.

If we look at a regional level, we immediately see the UK is lagging behind many of its European neighbours. The UK comes eighth out of the ten European countries included in the 2017 FSI, only ahead of Russia and Greece. This suggests that the UK is a long way away from being able to claim good performance in Europe, let alone globally.

Overall ranking in FSI	Country	Score
1	France	74.8
2	Germany	70.6
3	Spain	70.4
4	Sweden	69.7
5	Portugal	69.5
6	Italy	69.0
7	Hungary	68.4
8	UK	68.0
9	Russia	62.1
10	Greece	61.6

*Table 2: Overall ranking of European countries included in 2017 FSI (Source: 2017 FSI)*

Below we look at the three main 'domains' in the FSI – namely food loss and waste, sustainable agriculture and nutritional challenges in turn.

### **FOOD LOSS AND WASTE**

**2017 rating for food loss and waste: 7<sup>th</sup> out of 34 countries**

2016 rating for food loss and waste: 8<sup>th</sup> out of 25 countries

The UK ranks seventh out of 34 countries for food loss and waste. An estimated 30-50% of food is lost or wasted globally, at some point along the chain. But why does food loss and waste matter? The problem is not simply the environmental impact of having to dispose of that wasted food, but more fundamentally, the wasted resources that have gone into growing and making that food in the first

place: the embedded greenhouse gases, the embedded water, the (often) damage to soil, the biodiversity impacts and the 'embedded sweat' (in the form of the hard work done to produce that food that is then all for nothing – and the associated opportunity cost). The list goes on. And then there is the huge financial cost of wasting so much food.

The UK is often held up anecdotally as a global leader on food waste and food loss. Through initiatives such as 'Love Food, Hate Waste', it has made positive steps in raising awareness of food waste issues in the last decade or so – with many households and many organisations. For several years, household food waste levels in the UK have been declining.

If FSI data is to be accepted, on the face of it the UK is performing reasonably well on food loss and food waste. But the UK is not leading according to the FSI. So, is that claim of leadership misplaced or are the FSI measures giving a slightly misleading picture on food waste? In short, we believe both are probably true.

There are varying levels of robustness of data collection about food loss and food waste in different countries. Food loss and food waste figures are inevitably estimates. Arguably the UK has more robust ways of collecting data than many other countries, hence figures for some other countries may be underreported.

The UK has made great strides on food waste in the last couple of decades. However, there is a real risk that great progress made in recent years may be undermined. In recent years, some major food companies have started collecting and publishing lots more information on food waste in their operations – and soon in their supply chains too. These moves to greater transparency are welcome.

To understand the UK's genuine food loss and food waste impacts, it is important not just to look at food loss and food waste in the UK, but also at major countries that the UK imports agricultural products from. The five biggest food exporting countries to the UK that are included in the FSI – Spain, France, Germany, Italy and United States – are all in the top 10 countries in the FSI on food loss and waste. This suggests that when it comes to food loss and food waste, the UK tends to import from countries where food waste is (relatively speaking) less of an issue. However, we still import substantial volumes from other countries performing less well on food loss and food waste according to the FSI – notably India and Brazil.

A conclusion that the UK is doing reasonably well on food loss and food waste in relative terms lets the UK off the hook. Food waste and losses in UK food systems - including global supply chains the UK sources from – are still unacceptably high. The same is true in most countries in the world.

Food waste is arguably one of the biggest injustices of our time. Indeed, any index that shows how well a country is doing should only be viewed as provisional if a significant proportion of the food waste occurs outside the country. Food waste should be viewed in the context of a country's trading relations and with an understanding that those that import food have some responsibility for waste along the chain. More generally the environmental impacts of any group, large or small, are a function not merely of what they do but what is done by others to enable them to do what they do.

However, there is good news. There is growing awareness of the problem, growing consensus around the need to tackle it and a strong business case for cutting food waste all the way along supply chains, from farm to fork and beyond.

Food waste can be a useful proxy for understanding how much people value food. Clearly, there is a huge issue around how most UK citizens value food and the growing disconnect between people and

where their food comes from. This contrasts with France which, according to the FSI, is a leader on food waste – helped by a suite of approaches, including having a mandate to educate children about waste.

### **A leadership position on food loss and food waste**

A leadership position on food loss and food waste should include:

- A bold comprehensive national waste strategy focused on *avoidance* of waste and losses and tackling root causes. It should include reducing pre- and post-harvest losses through managing pests and diseases, particularly in the Global South. It should include reducing loss of primary produce from the human food chain through making best use of imperfect produce and eating the whole crop (e.g. broccoli leaves and stalks) or the whole animal. It should include measures to reduce waste in manufacturing, and at retail and caterer level. It should also include measures to reduce food waste all the way along the chain, including active and ongoing public campaigns targeted at reducing household food waste.
- Playing a leading role in pushing for consistent definitions and measurement of food losses and food waste around the world.
- A mandate to educate children about waste and about the hidden impacts of food waste.
- Clear links between waste and public health, highlighting the related and important issue of ‘wasted calories’ through overconsumption in many countries.
- Shifting the focus towards food *value* (that goes beyond economic value alone) and positive messaging, rather than just focusing on negative rhetoric around food waste.

## **SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE**

2017 rating for sustainable agriculture: 20<sup>th</sup> out of 34 countries<sup>12</sup>

2016 rating for sustainable agriculture: 8<sup>th</sup> out of 25 countries

The figures presented paint a potentially worrying picture. On ‘sustainable agriculture’ impacts, the UK ranks in the bottom half of countries assessed in the FSI (20<sup>th</sup> out of 34 countries).

The category of ‘sustainable agriculture’ is the largest and most diverse of the three domains in the 2017 FSI. It includes environmental impacts from agriculture, farm animal welfare (although it only has one measure at present) and treatment of workers. It is not possible to do justice in this snapshot analysis to the full set of indicators used in this part of the FSI. We have pulled out a subset of these below.

### **Environmental measures**

The UK scores relatively well on ‘water’ issues, ranking 5<sup>th</sup> out of 34 countries assessed. The water category includes environmental impact of agriculture on water, sustainability of water withdrawal, water scarcity, water management, trade impact and sustainability of fisheries.

The UK scores well on sustainable fisheries, being ranked fourth, which is encouraging. However, there will be significant changes over the next few years, as the UK leaves the EU and moves away from the Common Fisheries Policy. It is vital that the UK co-operates with its European neighbours to manage fish stocks sustainably.

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<sup>12</sup> Note – there have been some changes to the metrics used, hence it is perhaps not useful to attempt a comparison with performance in the 2016 FSI for sustainable agriculture.

Countries like the UK are sometimes accused of ‘importing drought’ through taking the embedded water in crops and food products grown in water-stressed areas. Whilst the method for collecting data of this kind is still developing, the data used in the FSI suggests that UK food imports do have a lot of embedded blue water<sup>13</sup> – not necessarily from water-stressed areas, but some of it will be. For ‘total net imports of virtual blue water from crop and animal products’, the UK ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> out of 34, with only Germany and Japan faring worse.

In the **land** category, the UK does moderately, coming 11<sup>th</sup> out of 34 overall. This ‘land’ category has perhaps the broadest set of indicators, covering land use, biodiversity, agricultural subsidies, farm animal welfare regulation, productivity, diversification of agricultural system, participation of youth in farming and more. Some of these are not environmental measures, so have been covered in subsequent sections.

The UK performs particularly poorly in the ‘**air**’ category – ranking 30<sup>th</sup> out of 34. One crucial indicator within this category where the UK scores particularly poorly is a qualitative indicator that asks if the country has any initiatives of agricultural techniques for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The UK scores equal bottom here as the judgement of the index providers is that the UK does not have a dedicated agriculture policy that deals with climate change – even though some farmers are individually taking action to reduce greenhouse gases. Climate change is of course a hugely important issue. The UK Government, Devolved Administrations and businesses must develop bold and urgent plans to radically decarbonise food and farming sectors – and to take measures to mitigate climate risk.

### **Fair treatment of workers**

It is not just damage to the environment that should be a cause for concern. How people working in our food and farming supply chains are treated is also hugely important.

There is only one indicator relating to fair treatment of people in food and farming included in the FSI – and that relates to conditions of workers (in general). On this measure, it might be expected that UK is in the leading pack. However, by the measure used at least, this is not the case and the UK’s position is worse than many might imagine.

The FSI uses data from the ITUC Global Rights Index. However, there is now more recent data available. If the ITUC Global Rights Index 2017 - ‘the World’s Worst Countries for Workers’<sup>14</sup> – is used instead, then the UK scores even lower. In the 2017 version, the UK gets a rating of ‘4’, alongside the Democratic Republic of Congo. This is the category of ‘systematic violation of rights’<sup>15</sup>, which is highly concerning. There are clearly issues with the rights of workers in the UK. However, we feel an indicator which ranks the UK so lowly on workers’ rights is unduly harsh – and we would like to see other data sources used around fair treatment of workers in subsequent iterations.

As the UK seeks to negotiate trade deals with other countries for after it has left the European Union, will factors such as the rights of workers in those countries be taken into account?

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<sup>13</sup> Blue water refers to freshwater, in contrast to *green* water (water stored in soil) or *grey* water (polluted water).

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/survey\\_ra\\_2017\\_eng-1.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/survey_ra_2017_eng-1.pdf)

## **Animal welfare**

On animal welfare, the UK ranks first in the FSI, which is very encouraging. However, the single animal welfare indicator used is 'quality of animal welfare regulation'. This only gives a partial picture. Having strong regulation is clearly important – and to echo points made previously – there will be changes ahead as the UK leaves the EU. We may be amongst the leading group on regulation in this area, but the FSI does not take into account animal welfare in practice. Hence, we would like to see measures introduced such as number of animals in crates used. Further outcome measures are needed to get a more complete picture on farm animal welfare.

We feel that the animal welfare area is underweighted and we want to put animal welfare on a fairer footing with some of the environmental, social and health measures. We are doing a specific project on this in 2018 and intend to use the findings to feed into future iterations of major food indexes such as the FSI.

The FSI does not incorporate the animal welfare of meat consumed in a country where the animals have been reared elsewhere. This is particularly important for countries that import large quantities of meat e.g. the UK imports c. \$6 billion of meat each year, with Ireland and the Netherlands being the top two supplying countries, while the fastest growing country in terms of meat exports to the UK is Thailand<sup>16</sup>.

## **A leadership position on sustainable agriculture**

A leadership position on sustainable agriculture – and broader food systems - should include:

- A forthright recognition that any policy in this area needs to balance concerns for the welfare of people (e.g. healthy food at affordable prices; the protection of workers' rights within the UK and elsewhere; the protection of smaller farmers from major food companies, both within the UK and elsewhere); the welfare of animals within the country and in other countries from which we import animal products; and the general environmental welfare of the planet (e.g. appropriate use of fertilisers);
- Active and transparent commitment to the principle that checks are made to ensure that the food that is imported from other countries is produced to the highest standards;
- Supporting the notion of farming for nutrition;
- Incorporating impacts all the way along food value chain;
- Having a long-term commitment and framework for addressing key environmental concerns including, but not limited to halting biodiversity loss, restoring soil health, rebuilding fish stocks, radically decarbonising (or even recarbonising) food systems and reducing climate risk;
- Respecting the vital role that food and agricultural workers play in a country's economy, in putting food on people's plates and in stewarding the land, sea and animals by paying and treating them fairly – and by celebrating the best of the sector;
- Having a leadership position on farm animal welfare including having baseline law defining welfare standards for all farm animal species, and having welfare outcome measures embedded for all farm animal species; and
- Fostering a spirit of pre-competitive collaboration and of pursuit of excellence and continual improvement in the sector.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://resourcetrade.earth/data?year=2015&importer=826&category=12&units=value>

## **NUTRITIONAL CHALLENGES**

2017 rating for nutritional challenges: 8<sup>th</sup> out of 34 countries

2016 rating for nutritional challenges: 7<sup>th</sup> out of 25 countries

### **Introduction**

The UK comes eighth out of 34 countries on nutritional challenges. The category of ‘nutritional challenges’ includes measures of life quality, life expectancy and economic determinants of dietary patterns. Crucially that includes measures relating to the prevalence of malnourishment – both undernutrition and overnutrition.

The UK is performing well in some areas, but very poorly in others.

The UK has a very low proportion of the population below minimum levels of dietary energy consumption. As a relatively prosperous country in the Global North, we should expect that the country has very low rates of stunting and wasting for example, which it does.

All sectors of UK society face nutritional challenges – no groups, ages, geographies, races or classes are exempt. However, it is important to acknowledge that relying on average figures alone can be dangerous – and this masks significant differences in different parts of the UK and amongst different socio-economic groups.

A key measure within the ‘nutritional challenges’ domain of the FSI is that of healthy life expectancy. This is valuable because it adds in the important dimension of ‘quality of life’ to measures around life expectancy alone, by dividing people’s time spent in different states of health. For the UK, the current (average) *healthy* life expectancy is 71.4 years, which is just outside the top ten of the FSI rankings. There are surely important lessons to be learned from countries at the top of healthy life expectancy rankings – notably Japan and South Korea.

There is an important question here about the extent to which people want to – and should be enabled to - live longer lives, but with an increasing proportion in ill health. This raises lots of ethical questions, including who should pay for that person’s treatment. What proportion of our life is it reasonable to expect to live healthily rather than in ill health?

In other areas, the picture is even more worrying. If the focus of the FSI was on the nutritional challenges *for future generations*, the UK would score poorly.

### **Overweight and obesity**

The UK ranks 20<sup>th</sup> out of 34 countries on prevalence of overweight in children and 24<sup>th</sup> out of 34 amongst adults (and the worst of the 10 European countries included in the FSI). Indeed, on obesity, the UK is the most obese country in western Europe, according to OECD’s annual Health at a Glance report<sup>17</sup>. This highlighted that 26.9% of the UK population were obese, i.e. had a body mass index of 30 and above, in 2015.

Talk of an obesity epidemic is not sensationalist or overblown. It is a reality. The UK is not alone here, but that is not an excuse. To the contrary, there is surely an opportunity for collaboration between nations and to learn from one another’s successes and failures. Measures to tackle overweight and

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/healthier-lifestyles-and-better-health-policies-drive-life-expectancy-gains.htm>

obesity are palpably not working. We do not have a ticking timebomb of obesity any more. The timebomb has ticked. We have a national – and indeed international – emergency.

There has long been a debate about who is responsible for obesity – but the answer is surely simple. It is all of us. Crucially that includes individuals, but also those – in Government, in food corporates and in advertising – who have helped create the obesogenic food environment in which UK citizens now live. The real debate should be about how consciously and knowingly that environment has been allowed to develop. It is not the case that our obesogenic food environment has suddenly been discovered.

The problem of ‘passive obesity’ was aptly described in the Foresight report on obesity in 2007 (and indeed has been talked about for several years):

*“Although personal responsibility plays a crucial part in weight gain, human biology is being overwhelmed by the effects of today’s ‘obesogenic’ environment, with its abundance of energy dense food, motorised transport and sedentary lifestyles. As a result, the people of the UK are inexorably becoming heavier simply by living in the Britain of today. This process has been coined ‘passive obesity’. Some members of the population, including the most disadvantaged, are especially vulnerable to the conditions.<sup>18</sup>”*

Whilst undoubtedly complex, the multiple factors driving obesity are increasingly well understood. And the ‘pass the buck’ excuse – in terms of whose responsibility it is - can no longer be used. As noted above, diets rich in energy dense foods are not the only factor – however they are an important one.

Nutritional challenges are by their nature long-term. The UK is facing both a short-term emergency and a long-term crisis in relation to obesity. The challenge is akin to having to have not just both eyes on the road ahead whilst driving, but also to have to simultaneously look round the next corner, and several corners after that.

“Most countries are facing rising levels of obesity, putting pressure on health and social care systems. While England has the worst rates of adult obesity in western Europe, **our plans to tackle this are among the most ambitious.**” (Dr Alison Tedstone, chief nutritionist at Public Health England)  
*[emphasis in bold added]*

The introduction of a UK Childhood obesity plan in 2016/17 was welcome and contained some positive measures. However, quite simply, it did not go anywhere near far enough, and one year on very little progress has been made. The closing line of the report said: *“Over the coming year, we will monitor action and assess progress, and take further action where it is needed.”* It is the last line that we at the Food Ethics Council urge the Government to follow up on. We challenge anyone to say that further action is not needed.

## **Breastfeeding**

The UK comes bottom of the FSI on exclusive breastfeeding at six months - and indeed rates of exclusive breastfeeding at six months in the UK are one of the lowest in the world. Why does this matter? Breastfeeding has been described as the *ultimate* healthy, sustainable diet.

As First Steps Nutrition writes:

*“Breastfeeding is one of the most important things that a mother can do for her baby’s health and for her own health, and is the normal way to feed a baby. Breastmilk costs a lot less than formula feeding,*

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<sup>18</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/287943/07-1469x-tackling-obesities-future-choices-summary.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/287943/07-1469x-tackling-obesities-future-choices-summary.pdf)

*it is environmentally sustainable and is safely available, at the right temperature, whenever and wherever a baby is ready for a feed..... If someone invented a product that had all the amazing health benefits of breastmilk, it would sell at a very high price – yet we frequently waste what is a valuable and unique resource.<sup>19</sup>*

### **Household food insecurity**

The FSI includes two measures under the category of economic determinants of dietary patterns – one about poverty and the other about inequality. The former is the ‘national poverty line’ indicator, which shows that in the UK c 15% of the population are under the national poverty threshold (minimum level of income deemed adequate in a particular country), compared to c. 3% in a country like China. The second is the ‘GINI coefficient’ – a statistical measure of the degree of variation or inequality represented in a set of values, used especially in analysing income inequality – in which the UK scores twelfth, below countries such as Sweden, Hungary and Germany.

As the FSI highlights, there is a worrying high proportion of people below the national poverty line in the UK. If you look more specifically at household food insecurity, this highlights food-related challenges even more vividly. According to UN data, an estimated 8.4 million people were living in households reporting having insufficient food in 2014 in the UK<sup>20</sup>. There is a huge – and arguably growing – issue of food and poverty. There is an important distinction to be made between household food insecurity and nutrition insecurity. The key point to highlight is that there are too many people in the UK that can not afford to eat well.

### **A leadership position on nutritional challenges**

A leadership position on nutritional challenges should include:

- Having an obesity plan that is unafraid to take a more interventionist approach where required, given the urgency of the problem.
- Effectively linking nutrition and agriculture policies.
- Supporting the long-term health of the nation by reversing the current trends of cuts to public health budgets and investing a much higher proportion of health service budget on public health.
- An annual government-led measurement, and ongoing monitoring of, household food insecurity, at a national level<sup>21</sup>. As the End Hunger UK campaign (that Food Ethics Council support) rightly states: *“If the government consistently collected statistics on food insecurity a full picture of the problem could be determined. Only if the scale of the problem is known do we stand a chance of knowing how to respond to the need.”*
- Establishing itself as a country based on high quality food that include tasty, healthy, nutritious products, rather than as a cheap, unhealthy nation. This is particularly important for the UK at present, as the UK Government is keen to increase UK food exports and to export the ‘Great British food’ brand around the world. If the UK becomes synonymous with unhealthy food and ‘exports obesity’, that will be damaging for the long-term standing of the UK.
- National governments championing breastfeeding – given breastfeeding is “a major contributor to public health and has an important role to play in reducing health inequalities

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<sup>19</sup> [http://www.firststepsnutrition.org/pdfs/Breastfeeding\\_guide\\_for\\_web\\_14\\_Dec\\_2014.pdf](http://www.firststepsnutrition.org/pdfs/Breastfeeding_guide_for_web_14_Dec_2014.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/FoodInsecurityBriefing-May-2016-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> The End Hunger UK campaign states “There are easy and validated tools for collecting data on food insecurity which are already in use. In the United States the Department of Agriculture (USDA) Household Food Insecurity Survey Module is included within national household surveys. This is also used in Canada. The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) advocates their Food Insecurity Experience Scale. The Scottish government has adopted three of the FAO questions in its 2017 Health Survey and is including the full set of eight questions in 2018.”

even in the industrialised countries of the world<sup>22</sup>.” Unicef and the World Health Organisation recommend exclusive breastfeeding up to six months of age.

- Putting in place measures to promote uptake of healthy, sustainable, humane meals – preferably using existing independent certification schemes. In the UK, there has been a rapid rise in Food for Life Served Here in schools, hospitals and care homes.
- Having incentives in place to provide a nutritional safety net for low-income pregnant women and families with young children. The UK’s Healthy Start scheme is a good example of this. It supports young and low-income pregnant women and families with children under four years of age who are in receipt of a main means-tested social security payment. The problem is that one-third of eligible participants in the UK do not currently receive the benefit. Therefore, there is a need to increase the uptake and voucher value of the Healthy Start scheme in the UK.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/news-and-research/baby-friendly-research/>

## Chapter 4: Ethical tensions and responses

### **'All things considered'**

Taking food ethics seriously requires that we try to take into account all the different values involved in our food choices, looking at all the consequences, weighing them up and trying to decide what is right, all things considered. So, an ethical analysis can help unravel who or what will be affected and how. By doing so, it can help inform which options for ways forward are likely to be better – for people, the planet and animals.

### **UK tensions**

The FSI uses a basket of food sustainability measures. In its totality, it helps to raise multiple tensions, contradictions and questions relevant to the UK. We have selected just a few here – and will dive deeper into some of these in subsequent work.

#### **1. Pushing the boundaries of responsibility**

Much of the FSI's data focuses on impacts of food produced within the country. At one level that makes sense, because the data sets may be more readily available in that country. Also, national Governments have a much greater degree of control and influence over practices and impacts in their own country than they do over those in other countries.

However, UK sustainable food systems do not just relate to food produced in the UK. The impacts on animals, people and planetary resources from producing food overseas are in most cases not included in how the country is ranked. Around 50% of the food eaten in the UK is imported. By its overseas impacts not being properly reflected, the risk is that the UK is offshoring many of its negative impacts and is abrogating itself of responsibility. The same of course applies to other countries with high levels of food imports too.

One response to 'offshoring impacts' is for countries to buy up land in other countries – in 'land grabs' to use the emotive phrase. This is not a practice we support. We need to guard against colonialism and taking away land from indigenous people. In developing responses, we need to put ourselves in the shoes of those most affected – in this case citizens of those countries.

***Key ethical questions: How can we ensure the needs of interest groups affected by UK food imports are taken into account? How can we ensure our food choices are fair to people in other countries?***

#### **2. Short and long-term**

There is a need to balance action on both short-term and long-term concerns. Businesses often claim they need to respond to current 'consumer needs', while governments often struggle to develop long-term strategies that go beyond (relatively) short-term political cycles.

An emphasis on 'today' is understandable, as there are so many pressing needs and challenges. However, a short-term focus should not be at the expense of longer-term concerns. Issues of fairness must include intergenerational fairness.

Failing to act, or acting too slowly, will store up trouble and put the burden on future generations. Doing so would be deeply unfair and in many cases, the impacts of our actions (past and present) on e.g. the climate, are unlikely to be reversible.

There are likely to be severe consequences for any country in 'standing still' or settling for the status quo on food sustainability – including broader health concerns. Failing to take preventative steps will see obesity rates spiral further out of control, with an accompanying health and financial burden.

‘Short-termism’ can also cloud deeper issues and – unintentionally – exacerbate the problem in the long term. For example, establishing food banks in countries like the UK may serve a vital function in the short term by providing an emergency response and feeding people in need. However, doing so may have unintended consequences in the long run by entrenching charity food aid provision and allowing the Government to step away from its obligation to provide a genuine safety net to people in need.

***Key ethical question: How can we ensure approaches to food system challenges are fair to future generations while still addressing current needs?***

### **3: High food standards and affordability**

There are long-running tensions between quality standards and keeping food affordable, between making food ‘cheap’ and paying a fair price to producers, between the price we pay at the checkout and the true cost of food.

For every £1 that UK citizens pay at the checkout, it is estimated that there are £1 of additional costs incurred. These ‘hidden costs’ are passed on to society in a range of hidden ways.<sup>23</sup> We need to better reflect the true cost of food in the price we pay at the checkout.

Unfortunately, it is often those on lowest incomes that are hit hardest. Whilst this is a hugely complex area, cheap food cannot be the answer. Keeping prices artificially low will not work for anyone in the long-run. Crucially, we then also need to sort out the ‘money in’ side of the equation. We need to get more people into work that pays and treats them well (including a real living wage) and the Government needs to provide a proper safety net. This will allow everyone to access the high food standards we should strive for.

***Key question: How can Government make changes needed in wider society that will allow everyone to pay the true cost of food at the checkout in the future?***

### **4. Balancing trade-offs between people, the environment and animals**

We are often discouraged from facing up to the trade-offs between the interests of humans and animals, between humans and the environment, or even between different people and communities.

One of the disadvantages of having a Government that is not joined-up in its policy responses is that it is much harder to balance trade-offs appropriately than with a coherent approach. Ministers with the ‘loudest voices’ (figuratively at least) are more likely to have their concerns reflected in policies, rather than there be a considered reflection of trade-offs, values and consequences.

One challenge is how to give a voice to the voiceless – including, but not limited to animals, the environment, future generations and very young children. Unless their voices are somehow represented, outcomes will not be fair. As we noted in our Food Justice report<sup>24</sup>, ‘fairness’ is not just about achieving ‘fair shares’ (or equality of outcome). It is also about there being ‘fair play’ (or equality of opportunity) and crucially also having a ‘fair say’ (or autonomy and voice).

***Key ethical question: How can we represent interest groups that are too often ‘voiceless’ in decisions that are likely to affect their wellbeing?***

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<sup>23</sup> <http://sustainablefoodtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/HCOF-Report-online-version.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.foodethicscouncil.org/uploads/publications/2010%20FoodJustice.pdf>

## Chapter 5: How to further strengthen the FSI in the future?

We welcome the improvements to the FSI that there have been in the 2017 version compared to 2016.

The EIU and BCFN Foundation ran a workshop in the summer of 2017 with a range of expert stakeholders to gather input on metrics, indicators and data sources, and we would strongly encourage them to run similar workshops annually. We are keen to participate and feed in ideas.

In the spirit of wanting the FSI to be further strengthened in the future, so that it becomes even more valuable as a tool, we offer the following suggestions to the EIU and the BCFN Foundation to improve the tool further in future years. These lessons are applicable to other indexes too.

There are four broad sets of areas where we would like to see further strengthening.

### 1. Fully embrace the production versus consumption challenge

We strongly urge those behind the FSI to incorporate metrics and outcomes that address the concern noted previously about reflecting food production *and* consumption impacts, including ‘offshored impacts’. If national governments and their citizens better understand these wider impacts, they are more likely to be able to work with representatives from supplier countries to push for improvements. Ultimately if standards – on animal welfare, environment or workers’ rights - in ‘supplier countries’ are unacceptably low, that may influence how and where governments and businesses choose to source from in the future.

### 2. Gaps in issues and indicators

There are several areas we would like to see more and/ or stronger indicators for. These include:

- **Animal welfare** – as previously noted
- **Impacts beyond the farmgate** – many of the social and environmental measures are at the agricultural end of the supply chain and therefore only paint a partial picture of impacts. To cite one example, we would encourage those behind the FSI to seek appropriate measures and data for greenhouse gas impacts for the parts of food value chains beyond the farmgate (including food manufacture).
- **Household food insecurity** – as previously noted. One possible data source is the UN FAO’s ‘Voices of the Hungry’ work and the Food Insecurity Experience Scale.<sup>25</sup>
- **Treatment of food and farming workers** – we are encouraged that an indicator has been included in the 2017 version of the FSI on workers’ rights (albeit more recent data is available than has been used in the FSI). However, this appears to paint some countries in an unduly harsh light. It would be even better to include measures relating specifically to food and farming workers in future.

Having said that, we do not claim to have all the answers on what metrics and data sources should be for these – and other areas. Indeed, we would like to be one of many voices looking to help further strengthen the FSI. It is vital to bring in voices from the Global South on this too, to avoid accusations of imposing an imperialistic bias on the index. This will be particularly important if the country coverage of the index grows in future.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.fao.org/in-action/voices-of-the-hungry/resources/en/#.Wg223zFLHIU>

### **3. Weighting**

Assigning weightings to different indicators is a subjective task, and it is impossible to get the 'right weighting', as people will value different issues differently. Those behind the FSI recognise this challenge, which is why they have allowed several different weighting schemes to be used – and even to allow the user to assign their own weightings to different indicators and sub-indicators.

However, in our view, the weightings given to some indicators distort the results to a greater extent than they intuitively should. If one single indicator 5.2.1 - where the UK scores equal bottom - is zeroed out for example, the UK suddenly rises rapidly up the rankings.

Environmental issues and nutritional issues get assigned a much greater weighting than other issues that we at the Food Ethics Council feel are as important – namely treatment of people working in the food supply chain and treatment of farm animals. We would assign a greater weighting to these latter issues in particular. The food systems that we want are environmentally sustainable, healthy, fair and humane. It would be interesting to have a default weighting option which allowed equal weighting for environment, health & nutrition, treatment of people and treatment of animals for example.

Some areas feel potentially overweighted, purely because there are lots of indicators in those sections relative to others – particularly on nutrition and health. We would encourage EIU and BCFN Foundation to explore the option of removing some of the sub-indicators in future iterations, where one indicator might be a 'good enough' proxy for other related indicators. Otherwise the risk is that there will be pressure to grow the number of indicators each year, meaning the FSI will become more unwieldy.

### **4. Country coverage**

We welcome the increased number of countries covered in the 2017 version of the FSI compared to the original version in 2016. Increasing the coverage is so important because it enables the index to give a truer sense of 'relative positioning' of any individual country's food footprint in the world.

Our hope is that the FSI continues to expand its country coverage as well as further strengthening the indicators and metrics used each year. We appreciate that getting consistent, reliable data in many countries is challenging, hence it is not currently possible to include every country in the world in an index such as this at present.

No one country is more 'important' than any other to include. However, from an explicitly and unashamedly UK perspective, to understand the UK's performance on food sustainability better, we would ideally like to see the inclusion in future versions of the FSI of countries from which the UK imports large amounts of food, but that are currently missing from the FSI. This would include countries like the Netherlands, Ireland and Denmark, to name just three.

We urge the EIU and BCFN Foundation to call out data gaps and desirable metrics more loudly – as one of the side-benefits of the FSI could and should be to encourage a debate on 'measuring success in the food system' and to drive a 'race to the top' on metrics and data coverage, as well as on country performance.

### **Towards the pre-eminent global food index?**

Despite the challenges above, the FSI in its existing format remains a valuable index – to provide a 'marker in the sand' for how different countries are performing in terms of food sustainability impacts. By taking the measures above, the index would be further strengthened, would become more robust and more valuable to its intended target audiences.

We urge the EIU and BCFN Foundation to continue the FSI in future years and to adopt the measures above, so that it becomes *the* pre-eminent global food index. It will then be much more likely to succeed in engaging policy makers, civil society organisations, businesses, academics and individual citizens in the featured countries and driving the race to 'goodness' that is so needed.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions – towards a leadership position

Overall, the UK comes tenth out of 34 countries on food sustainability in the 2017 FSI. In short, that is not good enough. Once you scratch beneath the surface of the overall ranking, the picture is a mosaic of poor performance in some areas and much better performance in others.

The FSI gives a sense of how sustainable UK food systems are, if not a ‘true’ picture yet. The reality is that the UK is not yet a global leader on food sustainability – despite areas of encouraging performance. The UK is doing badly on iconic indicators like childhood obesity, exclusive breastfeeding rates and climate change action.

The UK is at risk of slipping backwards during this sustained period of uncertainty following the EU referendum. The reality is that the UK will have to stay in lockstep with the EU on many issues, and we should do better than baseline on lots of issues, including animal welfare. Most of the countries doing better than us on this index are part of the Common Agricultural Policy (‘CAP’). Apart from the ‘quality of subsidies’ indicator, the CAP – and being part of the EU - is not standing in the way of doing well on this index.

The road ahead may be more like a game of snakes and ladders than a smooth race to the top. There will be approaches to be taken that help us reach the ladders, but there will also be snakes to metaphorically slide back down again. Looking ahead and having a long-term strategy is vital.

Taking an ethical approach is vital to make UK food systems fair and fit for the future. The Food Ethics Council believes food system leadership for the UK must include:

- **Standing for excellence:** establishing itself as a country based on values that lead to high food standards. It is about continually raising the bar in a race for ‘goodness’ – and never settling for first place if that is simply ‘the best of a bad lot’, with unacceptable levels of harm. This is particularly important for the UK at present, as the UK Government is keen to increase UK food exports and to export the ‘Great British food’ brand around the world. If the UK becomes synonymous with unhealthy food and ‘exports obesity’, that will be damaging for the long-term standing of the UK. The UK should lead the way in fostering a spirit of pre-competitive collaboration, pursuit of excellence and continual improvement in the sector.
- **Taking responsibility for impacts of food consumed:** active and transparent monitoring of food imports to ensure they are produced to the highest food standards. As a nation, our responsibility does not end at the UK’s borders. The UK is doing reasonably well on issues like food waste, yet that does not fully reflect the reality. While lots of UK food imports come from countries performing better than average, there are still substantial volumes coming from countries that perform badly on food loss and food waste. This offshoring of impacts is not properly recognised when assessing the UK’s own performance. The same displacement is true of many other social and environmental impacts relating to the UK’s food. While the UK imports around 50% of its food (and much of its animal feed), recent evidence suggests almost two-thirds (64%) of the associated greenhouse gas impacts are located overseas<sup>26</sup>. The UK Government and UK food businesses must take ownership and put as much focus on helping supplier countries and businesses drive down negative impacts as they would in the UK.
- **Focusing on values and food value:** significantly increasing the focus on food *value* (that goes beyond economic value alone) and turning the message positively, rather than focusing on the punitive rhetoric that food waste often comes with. This should include a mandate to educate children about the hidden impacts of food waste and the value of food.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://rsif.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/13/114/20151001>

- **Taking a long-term approach:** short-term responses can become entrenched and blind us from long-term solutions. We need a long-term commitment and framework to deliver fair, food systems, focused on prevention rather than cure. This includes supporting the nation's long-term health by investing a significantly higher proportion of health service budget to public health. It should also include long-term plans for addressing key environmental concerns, including, but not limited to halting biodiversity loss, restoring soil health, rebuilding fish stocks, radically decarbonising (or even recarbonising) food systems and reducing climate risk; as well as long-term plans to address social issues and animal welfare concerns. As part of this, the UK needs to invest in long-term food and farming research focused on delivering fair, sustainable, humane and healthy food systems.
- **Tackling trade-offs head on:** a forthright recognition that any sustainable food and farming policy needs to face up to trade-offs between the interests of humans and animals, between humans and the environment, or even between different people and communities. Unlocking these tensions and trade-offs will be easier if we are not afraid to face them together and tackle their root causes.
- **Integrating policies:** having clear policy mechanisms to bring together environmental sustainability, agriculture and health at the Cabinet Office.
- **Pushing for outcomes as measures of success:** leading on identifying and implementing suitable metrics, including setting and embedding welfare outcome measures for all farm animal species, and introducing annual government-led measurement of household food insecurity.<sup>27</sup> It is vital we understand the extent and nature of food systems problems if appropriate solutions are to be developed – and outcome measures are important here. However, the quest for better measures of success and better data should not be used as an excuse for inaction, while we wait for 'perfect measures'. We need to follow the 80:20 rule here and focus on material issues of concern.
- **Inclusive leadership:** treating everyone equally and including people in decisions that affect them will empower people and generate better solutions. Being trapped in a consumer mindset contributes to the lack of agency many individuals and organisations feel. The language of 'consumer' suggests that someone's only ability to influence is around the point of consumption, i.e. whether they buy one product or another. If breakthroughs are to be made on multiple areas of concern and if worrying trends like obesity are to be reversed, then a more fundamental mindset shift is needed – from consumer mindset to citizen mindset – right across society. Adopting a *citizen* mindset opens up a range of opportunities for how people can participate in – and positively shape – our food systems for the better<sup>28</sup>.
- **Learning from others:** True leadership is about taking others with you. It is about being humble and learning from other countries that are doing things better or differently.

We want the FSI to be further strengthened in the future and for subsequent iterations to continue to highlight challenges that the UK and other countries need to respond to.

The FSI reinforces the fact that our food systems need to change. There are many hard truths to confront. The UK Government and Devolved Administrations should take a leadership position on sustainable food systems and we should all help fulfil that.

Let us work together to deliver the UK's global leadership ambitions and create a race for excellence.

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<sup>27</sup> The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) advocates its Food Insecurity Experience Scale.

<sup>28</sup> For further details, see our work with the New Citizenship Project on 'Food Citizenship' at <https://www.foodcitizenship.info/>

**Report author:** Dan Crossley  
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The contents of this report are the full responsibility of the author. Note, this publication is from the Food Ethics Council and does not represent the views of the BCFN Foundation or the EIU.

[info@foodethicscouncil.org](mailto:info@foodethicscouncil.org)

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