

Food and Fairness Inquiry

Dossier 3. Fair say

Voice and Autonomy

26 November 2009

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Summary

The purpose of this dossier is to inform the third Food and Fairness Inquiry hearing – which is about ‘fair say’ – by providing an overview of statistics and research relating to voice and autonomy in the food system, and by considering some of the main issues that emerge from this overview. The dossier also suggests some of the questions that the committee might consider in the course of the hearing.

Market and political voice in the food system

As *consumers*, people voice their values, needs and desires through their purchasing decisions, and through participation in surveys and similar exercises. Choices are increasingly well-informed, although marketing and choice editing can be seen as undermining consumers’ autonomy. People are also able to influence food systems politically, as *citizens* – through elections, participation in food policy-making, and engagement in civil society and social movements. The restricted scope for influencing policy through the electoral process has led to the emergence of new forms of citizen engagement, including a number of food-specific initiatives.

Producers, owners and investors have sharply diverging abilities to influence food systems and food policy. Small-scale farmers are economically and politically marginalized, whereas agri-food corporations and large scale-suppliers are able to exercise significant influence on public debate and policy. The requirement to satisfy shareholders’ (often short-term) expectations can work against corporate social responsibility initiatives, although ethical investment and shareholder collaboration has had positive outcomes in food supply chains. The voice of *workers* in the food sector is restricted by decreasing union membership, casualisation of jobs, and the limited efficacy of corporate codes of conduct.

Underlying issues

Ethical consumption has grown dramatically over the past two decades, although its impact on the food system – actual and potential - is open to question. Fairtrade provides an important example: the scheme has brought great benefits to many farmers and workers around the world; but it is in danger of becoming a victim of its own success, as its expansion into mainstream markets, and the emergence of ‘Fair trade-Lite’ initiatives, threaten to dilute its fundamental principles.

Innovations in *participatory democracy*, together with increased involvement in ‘pressure politics’, promise to compensate for the ‘democratic deficit’ that afflicts the electoral system. To date, however, these new avenues for civic engagement have largely failed to deliver genuine citizen participation in food policy-making – although there have been important exceptions.

We can identify two *competing models for development in food and agriculture*. The ‘ethical retail-led agri-food system’ relies on the maintenance and extension of existing trends: market mechanisms provide the framework and the motivation for the pursuit of ethical concerns. ‘Alternative agri-food systems’ – such as those promoted by ‘food sovereignty movements - promote new alliances, prioritise smaller-scale production, and promote inclusive participation and decision-making.

1. Introduction

In previous dossiers we have explored the concepts of social justice as equality of outcome and equality of opportunity. In *Fair Shares - Inequalities in health and nutrition* we analysed social justice in terms of people achieving certain positive outcomes such as being adequately nourished, having a healthy diet and lifestyle, having adequate incomes, etc. In *Fair play - Inequalities of opportunity* we inquired mostly about the access for all to the *means* to achieve those outcomes: fair access to markets, including the labour market, and fair opportunities to produce food. In this dossier, we go beyond outcomes and opportunities, and include the elements of autonomy and freedom. Social Justice will thus depend on people “having the freedom to lead lives they have reason to value”, our objective being the achievement of equality in people’s “ability to do (and be) certain things that they have reason to value” (Sen 2001). The aim of social justice will be to ensure all people have the positive freedom – that can be delivered by public policy or civil society provision - to be able to choose between a set of alternative outcomes, taking account of the fact that individuals needs and capabilities vary greatly due to physical disability, geography, identity politics, socio-economic structures, etc. An obvious example: nourishment is a desirable outcome, but social justice lies in the real freedom to choose a healthy diet vis-à-vis other alternatives. Even though the outcome is the same – starvation - in the case of a famine victim or a fasting yogi, social injustice lies in the fact that the yogi would be able to command food if he wished to, whereas a famine victim cannot.

The freedom of people to lead lives they value is an end in itself, but it is also instrumental in shaping public policy to ensure positive outcomes and opportunities for all. With freedom to do and be, comes the *responsibility* to participate politically to reproduce that freedom (Sen 2001). Individuals will need the ability to express their opinions and political systems should make those opinions count in the course of public discussion (Bonvin and Tellen 2003). This paper will assess these two roles of freedom in our food system:

- (i) *Autonomy and choice* in our food system: do different stakeholders have a voice in how food systems are governed?
- (ii) *Participation* in food policy: what is the degree of peoples’ participation in our food system? Are market behaviours and citizen participation making the institutions that shape their lives – in this case in the realm of food and agriculture – accountable to them?

To answer these questions this dossier will explore autonomy and voice in the food system, as well as the accountability of different actors in the food chain when promoting or limiting the freedom to lead lives they value.

When we speak about *autonomy*, we define it as the “capacity of a rational individual to make an informed, un-coerced decision” (Stanford 2009:1) which is explored when assessing the status of different actors in the food system, including consumers. It is important to note that autonomy can be waived to another authority - such as agreeing to follow governing laws or trust in business self-regulation - but this authority will thus have to be accountable for taking that power away from the individual. In the case of participation, we explore the responsiveness of the food system – through market response or through political engagement - to people’s values, interests and desires. In short: people’s voice. This also chimes with the concept of autonomy as “self-rule”, the “capacity to govern

one-self" (Dworkin 1988): calling for a redistribution of control and decision-making powers to consumers and citizens. Embedded within the notion of freedom and responsibility comes the notion of *rights* (Sen 2001).

The first section of this dossier will assess how much voice consumers and citizens have in our food system, followed by similar analysis of the other stakeholder groups that make up our food system: producers, corporations, owners and workers. The second section of this dossier will put forward structural issues that underlie these 'inequalities of voice', and that go beyond the realm of food and farming: ethical consumption, the state of democratic engagement and competing models of development.

2. Market and political voice in the food system

In order to voice their values, needs and desires in the food system, people can do so through their market behaviour – through their patterns of consumption - or through their political interaction with public institutions as citizens. Although the distinction between them is increasingly blurred – ethical consumption could be seen as a form of ‘citizen consumption’- for analytical purposes we distinguish the consumer as an economic actor from the citizen as a political actor.

2.1 Consumers

The ‘sovereign consumer’

Consumers are often portrayed as voters in a democracy where purchases are their ballots and their voice. If that is the case, is it working? Are consumers getting what they really want? Under this approach, if the market is working correctly, consumers searching to maximise satisfaction will make the food system shift to cater for their desire (Gunning 2009). Retail is perceived to be the most responsive to people’s wants, bringing quality foods at lower prices (British Retail Consortium 2009).

Shoppers are surveilled by way of store cards, consulted in focus groups and surveyed through market research; their preferences are incorporated, and to this extent consumers do have a say in the products they can buy and how they buy them. For instance, the UK Consumer Satisfaction Index carries out surveys and ranks retailers according to consumer satisfaction in terms of range, price, convenience, quality, service, ambience, facilities and layout. Supermarkets use this information to “retain existing shoppers, attract new shoppers and convert occasional users into main shoppers” in competition with other retailers (Verdict 2009).

Research into consumer satisfaction has shown that although food safety, affordability and quality are desirable, at a ‘local’ level the assortment and accessibility of retail outlets is also high on people’s agendas (Clarke, Kirkup and Oppewal 2007). The Competition Commission’s investigation into the supply of groceries in the UK draws on work in this area. They looked at how grocery retailers compete in local markets and found that some features “prevent, restrict or distort competition,” and because of this, “(c)onsumers also experience a more limited choice of stores than would otherwise be the case” (Competition Commission 2008).

Attempts to understand the ‘average’ consumer may overlook the needs of some consumer groups. Four distinct consumer groups that comprise 26.5% of the UK population are: people over 70 without a car (11.4% of the UK population), wealthier shoppers (the top earning 10% of the population), people of ethnic origin looking for specialist products/ingredients (6.7% of the population), and single parents with dependent children without a car (2.8% of the population) (Don Edwards & Associates et al 2007). Researchers investigating consumer satisfaction in these groups found that although supermarkets “satisfy needs such as quality, freshness, access, range and price to an adequate level”, it was in the interests of shoppers to have a thriving local convenience and specialist retail sector. They also found a clear perception among respondents that “all under one roof” shopping has grown at the expense of local stores and, as such, found that the

needs of significant and growing groups of the population are not being met (Don Edwards & Associates et al 2007).

Consumers are also represented collectively through consumer groups such as the government sponsored Consumer Focus and the associated Consumer Direct (Consumer Focus 2009). These organisations aim to give a voice to all consumers, help them to raise issues and resolve disputes. Consumer representatives are involved in consultations to improve the quality of decision making and to help avoid a recurrence of the problems that have led to a decline in consumer trust and confidence in food and food policy-making institutions (NCC 2002).

Move towards informed choice

Food labelling has been a significant shift in the food system towards placing increased information in the hands of consumers. Food labelling plays a triple role in the food industry: to generate trust in the food industry, to increase customers' knowledge of the product and promote its marketing and, finally, to generate changes in the industry.

In the wake of food safety scares and increased awareness of the environmental impact of farming in the 1980s and 1990s, government and industry were under increasing pressure to ensure food safety and restore consumer confidence (Lewis et al. 2008). A number of acts were subsequently passed (Food Standards Agency 2009):

- The Food Safety Act of 1990 decreed that food sold should not be damaging to health and be "labelled, advertised and presented in a way that is not false or misleading".
- In 1996 Food Labelling Regulations were introduced that required that food be marked by name, ingredients (including allergens), 'best before' or 'use by' dates and other details.
- The Food Standards Agency was introduced in 2000 under the Food Standards Act 1999, and charged with "protect(ing) public health from risks which may arise in connection with the consumption of food and otherwise to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food", including food labelling.

At the same time producers began to unite under assurance labels and set hygiene, safety and animal welfare standards such as Assured Food Standards (the red tractor), 'Lion quality' eggs, and the RSPCA's 'Freedom Foods' (Lewis et al 2008). There has since been an explosion in the use of logos and standards to inform the consumer on a range of issues from ecological impact, fair trade relationships, carbon and water footprints.

In a market in which direct contact with the personnel over the counter is declining and food processing and sourcing is increasingly complex, the majority of consumers read the food labels. Particularly interested in the additives and in the ethical certifications, consumers rely heavily on labelling to guide their purchasing behaviour (Wandel 1999). For example, in the UK, 86% read the food labels (50% always or usually), and 73 % say that they use labels to guide their purchases (FSA 2007).

Food labels – and the proliferation of ethical labelling - allow for higher levels of product differentiation and increased earning potential. The rise in ethical labels is a sign of the intense competition in ethical performance, particularly in food retail (Food Ethics Council 2008). Labelling

schemes can change industry behaviour, as they are under public scrutiny for specific criteria. For example, in response to labelling of ingredients, industry has progressively changed the composition of their products. In the UK, the Food and Drink Federation has significantly reduced salt content in bread, cereals, cakes and snacks, with decreases of up to 43% in breakfast cereals since 1998 (FDF 2009).

However, on top of its advantages, labelling has its limitations. See Table 1.

| Advantages | Limitations |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can make very complex issues accessible by taking a collection of difficult problems and distilling them into a symbol that shoppers can recognise during the few seconds in which they make most food purchasing decisions • They make ethical issues ‘real’ to shoppers and businesses by linking them to products • They can change corporate and consumer behaviour • They have become a ‘badge of honour’ that is valued by many food companies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect in black and white issues that are about shades of grey • Attach issues to products that may not in practice be product specific. Does it make sense to see sustainability for example in product by product terms or rather across the whole diet? • Rely heavily on the successful behind-the-scenes analysis and deliberation in order to avoid promoting perverse change in behaviour, because they depend on being simple to be effective • Are a blunt way to acknowledge the incremental progress many companies are making |

Table 1. Advantages and limitations of ethical labelling (Food Ethics Council 2008)

An uncoerced decision?

To assess if consumers are indeed autonomous in their shopping behaviour (i.e. are they making informed and uncoerced choices?) we must ask ourselves if consumers’ desires and wants today are ‘genuine’ and not generated by the food industry.

It is recognised that marketing and branding can create desires and affiliations that affect choices between and within stores (Clarke et al 2007, Jackson et al 2006). However, as Kate Soper points out, “many items in supermarket aisles would be almost indistinguishable if stripped of their brand insignia” and “choice provided and enjoyed at one level often obscures or compensates for its loss at another” (Soper 2007). More critically there are concerns that “consumers do not have – and have been deprived of – the information, knowledge and analytical frameworks needed to make informed decisions that reflect their own ‘fully costed’ interests” (Jaffe and Gertler 2006).

The exceptions to this rule come when this autonomy is voluntarily waived by consumers to the food industry to make certain decisions for them. Given the complexity of ethical and food safety determinants, some retailers are deciding to choice edit on behalf of their customers. The Sustainable Development Commission endorses this approach: “choice editing by manufacturers, retailers and regulators already has a track record in getting high-impact products off the shelves and low-impact products onto them” (SDC 2006). This would leave consumers to make decisions between “good” products (Lang and Heasman 2004).

2.2 Citizens

People exercise their influence over food systems through other means than through the market: politically, through the exercise of their citizenship. Voting in elections, engaging in policy-making and participating in civil society are all, in theory, means to influence the rules of the game in food and farming. But are the open political avenues today really giving citizens power to shape decisions in food and farming? Are people's voices heard?

Voice through elections

Liberal electoral democracies require us to compress all our different concerns into just one ballot every four years. According to critics, elections require citizens "to commit to too broad a range of policies" (Power Inquiry 2006). Specific concerns on sustainability, including food and farming, are dwarfed by other concerns such as health services, the economy, crime, immigration and unemployment (Ipsos Mori 2009). For example, in the UK environmental sustainability ranked 10th in the latest *Issues Survey* for October 2009 (see Figure 1).

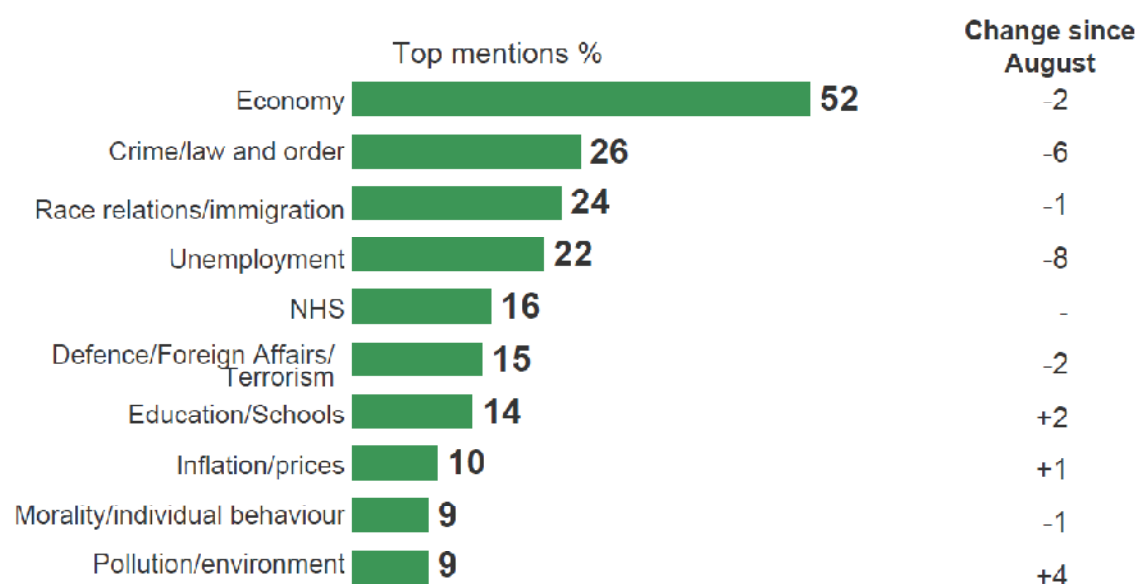


Figure 1. Important issues for the UK public (Ipsos Mori 2009)

People have increasingly developed concerns for issues of sustainable production and consumption (Vermeir and Verbeke 2004), but at the same time feel a "lack of influence and control" over "institutional processes" related to food and agriculture (PABE 2001). The issues that have sparked changes in UK food policy have been 'food scares', bringing about regulation on food safety and the creation of the Food Standards Agency (Barling and Lang 2003, Barling 2007) and lately concerns over the availability and affordability of food (Food Navigator 2008, Chatham House 2009). Therefore, fundamental ethical issues in food and farming explored in this Inquiry fall largely outside the realm of electoral politics, and are out of reach for ordinary citizens. The third part of the dossier, on 'Underlying issues', will explore the increasing questioning of formal representative democracy as being "unable to respond to the diverse and complex values of individuals" in contemporary societies (Power Inquiry 2006), and the subsequent search for more direct and participatory forms of governance.

Voice through participation in food policy

If citizens can't really influence food policy through their votes, are there mechanisms to voice their demands in food policy-making? As shown in Figure 2, there are many domains that shape our food systems and that could be subject to public engagement.



Figure 2. The food policy web (Lang 2007)

As a response to the 'democratic deficit' and citizen disengagement with party politics, western democracies have progressively opened up new forms of citizen engagement in the making of policy (Demos 2008).

In the case of the UK, since the end of the nineties, citizens and civil society have been called to participate in new consultative processes, including several related to food and farming. All Ministerial Departments are by law bound to initiate consultations to make policy (HM Government 2008). For example, only in 2009, DEFRA ran 26 consultative processes on specific policies. Important joint inter-departmental strategies such as *Food Matters: Towards a strategy for the 21st century* included consultations with civil society organizations (Cabinet Office 2008).

As will be shown in later sections, there are already experiences that have taken consultative processes a step forward in order to bring about deliberative and participatory processes that give a voice to citizens. An important example in food and farming is the IAASTD report on Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD 2008): a three-year (2003-2005) consultative process that involved 900 participants from 110 countries, its multi-stakeholder bureau including consumer and producer organizations. This process has been praised for its openness and inclusivity, and its courageous questioning of conventional farming (IAASTD Civil Society press release 2008).

Voice through engaging in civil society and social movements

Civil society democracy finds value in citizenship participation in spaces separate from the state (Jones and Gaventa 2002). As Dryzek put it: “flourishing oppositional civil society is the key to further democratization” (1996). Civil society and social movements have historically played key roles in promoting changes in food and farming. UK historical examples of ‘food democracy’ range from the peasant revolts in the 14th century, the Luddite push for technology assessment and the campaigns on Corn Laws and against adulteration in the 19th century, the public demand for school meals and the Hunger Marches in the early 20th century and the public outcry for food safety in the 1980s and 1990s (Lang 2007). A later example has been the civil society movements against GM crops spanning across Europe and developing countries, bringing the issue to centre stage, and in certain countries bringing about bans, moratoriums or labelling legislation. Similarly, although with less impact, there have been campaigns against supermarket power in the food system, such as Tescopoly (2009). Social mobilisation around climate change is also being somewhat effective in driving policy change.

In the Global South, social movements – including peasant movements such as Via Campesina, that advocate for people’s autonomy in the framing of food and farming policies - have questioned industrial-intensive models of food and agriculture, trade agreements and access to resources, among other things (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005).

2.3 Producers and owners

In addition to their ethical standing as consumers and citizens, producers, owners and investors have a distinct stake in the food system. What voice(s) do they have, and in what ways are they able to participate in the food system?

Small scale producers

Half of the working people worldwide are farmers and most of them live in the Global South. The vast majority of these farmers are small-scale producers who do their agricultural work by hand (around 1 billion farmers), or by using animals for ploughing (300 million). It is estimated that there are 50 million modern farmers, compared with 1.25 billion peasant farmers (Pimbert 2007). Are small farmers’ voices proportional to their numbers?

As shown in Dossier 2, the capacity of farmers to influence food systems through the *market* has decreased significantly due to the restructuring of food systems. The leading position of supermarkets in coordinating supply chains has fragmented food markets into two: (i) a high-value, high-profit, high-risk supply chain for a small number of large scale-suppliers and (ii) marginal markets, low prices and low returns for the majority. The pressures from prices and standards are pushing most small-scale suppliers into marginality (Vorley 2003).

Further, structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and trade liberalisation policies have favoured large-scale, industrial export-oriented farms (see Dossier 2). Flooded with subsidised imports, farmers had to cater for faraway markets, which demanded particular crop varieties, particular product specification and particular process standards (THREAD 2009). Production

changed from being driven by ecosystems and available resources to being driven by industry and retail (Perfecto et al 2009).

In parallel to their economic marginalisation – small-scale farming perceived as the ‘residual’ of processes of modernisation of agriculture – small farmers have rarely been included in *political* debates. In policy-building exercises, “large scale farmers and agri-food corporations are usually centre stage in these debates, not small-scale producers and other citizens” (*Farmers Views* 2005). Small scale farmers are “political(ly) disempowered” and “marginalised from public policies” (de Schutter 2009).

The fair trade movement has successfully brought to consumers in the North the voice of small-scale farmers in the Global South and the communities they live in. In Section 3.1 we will discuss how the mainstreaming of fair trade in conventional supply chains has shaped this small producer-consumer relationship.

Some initiatives, albeit small and with low impact, have taken place to enhance the voice of smallholder agriculture in policy debates. Recently, a project led by FIAN, the UK food group and others has aimed to strengthen the voice of small-scale farmers’ networks in the discussion on WTO and Economic Partnership Agreements (FIAN 2008). Other examples have been the citizens’ juries in Andhra Pradesh in 2001 (Pimbert and Wakeford 2002) and Mali in 2006, that deliberated on models of agricultural development and the role of biotechnology. The latest World Bank Report on Agriculture advocates for the strengthening of participation and deliberation and the engagement with smallholder organisations in order to better tailor policies and programmes to specific needs, providing the example of the *new vision for agriculture* strategy-building exercise of the Senegalese government (World Bank 2008).

Agri-food corporations and large scale producers

Food industry and retail/catering corporations have taken the lead in the *market* coordination of food and farming systems. Retail and catering corporations, as the gatekeepers to consumers, and aiming to deliver high quality products at the lowest price, get involved throughout the food chain to make this happen (Gereffi et al 2005, Vorley 2003). In the case of agri-food corporations, the power they exert at different stages of the farming process – agricultural inputs, seeds, machinery and the marketing of the produce – gives them a great presence vis-à-vis other actors in the food chain (MacLaughlin 2003). With such great power and voice in the markets comes great responsibility. Are corporations accordingly accountable?

Corporations’ market power is matched by their *political voice*. Corporations influence States via (i) corporate lobbying or political campaign financing, (ii) setting the agenda and making proposals within states and globally, punishing or rewarding countries for their policy choices by relocating investments and jobs, (iii) the development of private standards and pushing for certain standards and procedures to be mainstreamed, and (iv) generating public discourse – through the media – over what is preferable in political and economic developments (Clapp and Fuchs 2009).

Reactions towards the increase in power of multinational corporations in the food industry, to ensure accountability, are diverse. One would be a call for ‘corporate citizenship’ – granting corporations citizen status and thus handing them duties and responsibilities, traditionally through the roll out of often voluntary Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) schemes – together with the

rights and freedoms they already enjoy (Zadek 2001). Others advocate for strict public regulation of corporations (de Schutter 2009, ActionAid 2005) or call for them to be made irrelevant and dismantled (Patel 2007, Via Campesina 2009, Mulvany 2007).

Large scale producers, although subject to supply chain pressures – from corporate traders and/or supermarkets - have an important *economic* clout: being able to bank on economies of scale, access credit, make investments in technology and standard compliance and access export markets (Wiggins 2008). This strong position in the market is complemented by public support to large scale farmers and foreign direct investment ventures – through subsidies and soft loans (Farm Subsidy 2009), tax exemptions, favourable trade policy, the tailored construction of public infrastructure (roads, rail, etc), and on occasions turning a blind eye to breaches in labour or environmental legislation (ActionAid 2005). Their *political* clout is very significant when influencing public policy making, either through lobbying or taking a centre stage in consultative processes (Pimbert forthcoming).

Investors/Owners

Most agri-food and supermarket corporations are listed in stock exchange and thus owned by investors. Corporate behaviour is therefore shaped by shareholders' expectations and stock price movements. Owners hold important power over what type of practices can be put in place – regarding environmental concerns or social sustainability for example - and only allow those practices that bring substantial dividends. Corporate social responsibility measures do represent a decrease in business risk and the delivery of long term profits (on top of promoting the corporate brand), so would be a worthwhile investment. However, recent changes in the financial sector are prioritising short-term gains over long term gains. The rise of high-risk, high-return financial instruments (e.g. private-equity funds, hedge funds and real estate investment) is testimony to this change.

Top managers are no longer guided solely by the long-term success of the firm because their salaries are linked to short-term stock price movements (Coelho 2007). This can translate into not engaging in CSR initiatives unless the payback is immediate – and thus the impact on fairness only tokenistic. It also creates perverse incentives to restructure, cut costs, reduce jobs and eliminate productive capacity in order to generate cash for share buy-backs, and thereby boost share prices (Rossman and Greenfield 2006).

More positively, ethical investment and shareholder collaborative initiatives have proved that changes can be driven through financial markets to promote public good benefits downstream in the food supply chains. The argument holds not only on ethical terms but also on economic terms: the integration of social, environmental and governance risks into decisions can safeguard investments (Eiris 2009). The question is: what are the challenges to the mainstreaming of ethical investment? Further, what is the voice of the 'small-scale owner': people with savings or pension funds? Do they have a say in how their savings feed into the financial markets? What is people's voice in the rules that shape these markets and consequently their agri-food systems?

2.4 Workers

In this section we ask: what voice do workers have in the food system? Has it changed due to the restructuring of the food systems explored in the second dossier?

Workers' voice in the labour market

The employment opportunities available in the food sector have changed markedly over the last two decades. As detailed in Dossier 2, the flexibilisation of the food industry has meant that jobs are increasingly casualised. Workplaces are more likely to be run by subcontractors, employers are often agencies or gangmasters (ECCR 2009), and there has been an increased reliance on migrant workers and other vulnerable groups, particularly women (Vorley 2003).

For casual or informal workers, jobs are often precarious. The TUC's Commission on Vulnerable Employment found that many employers of vulnerable workers exploit the powerlessness of their workers, taking advantage of the ineffective enforcement of employment rights. For these workers, to speak up or to object can be met with the threat of losing work - without contracts, 'voices' are not encouraged (TUC 2008). The increased reliance on migrant labour further complicates the issue of 'voice' because of the additional barrier presented by communication in a second language. (Rogaly 2006).

Workers' political voice through association and collective bargaining

Trade Unions and collective bargaining have been hard hit by the restructuring of agri-food systems and changes in the nature of social movements. Trade union membership has been steadily declining globally since the 1980s. In the UK, for example, membership declined from 52% of the workforce in 1978 to 28% in 2007 (Capitalism and Freedom 2009).

The main challenge for trade unions has been to adapt to the restructuring of labour markets across all sectors. Since the 1980s production has been increasingly outsourced to contract companies, labour has been casualised and often subcontracted through labour providers and contract companies. In some cases, work is subcontracted to homeworkers. This has both decreased worker security and the spaces for workers to organise.

Further, trade unions have experienced difficulties in mobilising around issues other than class. In new social movements, people have been mobilising around other sources of social exclusion, such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability and sexuality. Faced with a flexible workforce increasingly made up of women and migrants, traditional white male-dominated trade unions have had to adapt their mindsets in line with these changes (Della Porta and Diani 1999, Colgan and Ledwith 2000)

Despite codes of conduct promoting the freedom of association and the right of collective bargaining (see below), we have received evidence of anti-union practices in contravention of these codes. UNI Global Union submitted evidence of Tesco employees in Thailand being denied freedom of association, and of an information campaign by Tesco against trade union membership, organisation and recognition in the United States (UNI Global Union 2009a&b). The ACONA report

in 2004 summarises evidence of unfair labour practices at a global level, including actions against association and attacks on union members (ACONA 2004).

Workers' voice in corporate social responsibility schemes

Since the 1990s, in response to civil society demands for accountability, exposing corporate 'wrongs' such as worker exploitation in their supply chains, agri-food corporations have expanded their CSR departments and activities. CSR responses have been mainly the application of codes of conduct, and the running of social audits and multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Corporate codes of conduct can be set up by a particular company, or by a particular sector or industry, or, most recently, by a set of different actors involved in supply chains to ensure good labour standards. Company codes of conduct - criticised for being designed unilaterally and without consultation - have given way to broader initiatives that include other actors in supply chains (Opondo 2005). A good example of this is the Ethical Trading Initiative, a collaboration between supermarket, NGOs and trade unions to implement a code of conduct for good labour standards (Vorley 2003). Marks and Spencer, Tesco and Sainsbury's are among the main UK supermarkets that say they support this code.

However, despite codes of conduct - and the proliferation of civil society initiatives to hold corporations to account regarding their effective implementation - worker exploitation has persisted (Dolan and Opondo 2005, Opondo 2005). Problems of 'contextualization' (the application of general codes to specific workplace circumstances), monitoring of standards and commercial pressures have proved too great an obstacle to the success of corporate codes in addressing labour exploitation (Barrientos 2005). More often than not, casual, contract and migrant workers, often women, were not reached by these initiatives.

Multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) and participatory social auditing attempted to save the day, bringing together non-confrontational NGOs and labour unions into the picture to address standards. Ideas of 'partnership' and 'participation' were brought forward to mainstream CSR thinking, implying that the presence of different stakeholders - NGOs, trade unions, sometimes the State - would represent a civil regulation of sorts (Bendell 2005).

However, critics have questioned whether MSIs are sufficiently representative of the groups they purport to act for (Dolan and Opondo 2005, Bendell 2005). How representative of the affected groups are the NGOs involved? How representative are participating trade unions of workers? Despite being seated at the table, aren't the unequal power relations still in force? How democratic and inclusive are the processes?

Further, some companies send contradictory signals to their suppliers through the CSR and buyer departments (ACONA 2004), forcing suppliers to overlook breaches in labour regulation to meet buying department requirements (ActionAid 2008). Despite the existence of developed labour laws in countries of origin, commercial pressures can see suppliers and public authorities to turn a blind eye to lack of compliance (ActionAid 2008).

Workers and alternative livelihood strategies

When looking at food and farming workers' autonomy, at their capacity to govern their own lives, it is important to include in our assessments the livelihood alternatives that are available to them. This is much linked to the discussion on access to resources in Dossier 2. For example, rural labourers in South Africa have few other options than to be the flexible labour force for plantations, as they do not have access to land and other productive resources. The lack of alternatives undermines their bargaining power. South Africa has not undergone long-promised land reform and most black farmers can only migrate to cities or work as contract workers in export farms (ActionAid 2005).

3. Underlying issues

3.1 Ethical consumption: a market-based search for autonomy

In the last decade of the twentieth century the products available to the concerned consumer grew dramatically, greatly enhancing the ability of consumers to purchase goods that fit their principles (Cowe and Williams 2000). The market expanded to include products that can take into account health, human and animal welfare, genetic engineering, environment damage and labour rights (Strong 1997). Between 1999 and 2007 consumers of all ages have increased their predisposition to ethical behaviour, and in the past five years household expenditure on ethical goods and services has almost doubled (The Co-operative Bank 2007). Figure 3, below, delineates the breakdown of the increased consumption of ethical food and drink between 2005 and 2006.

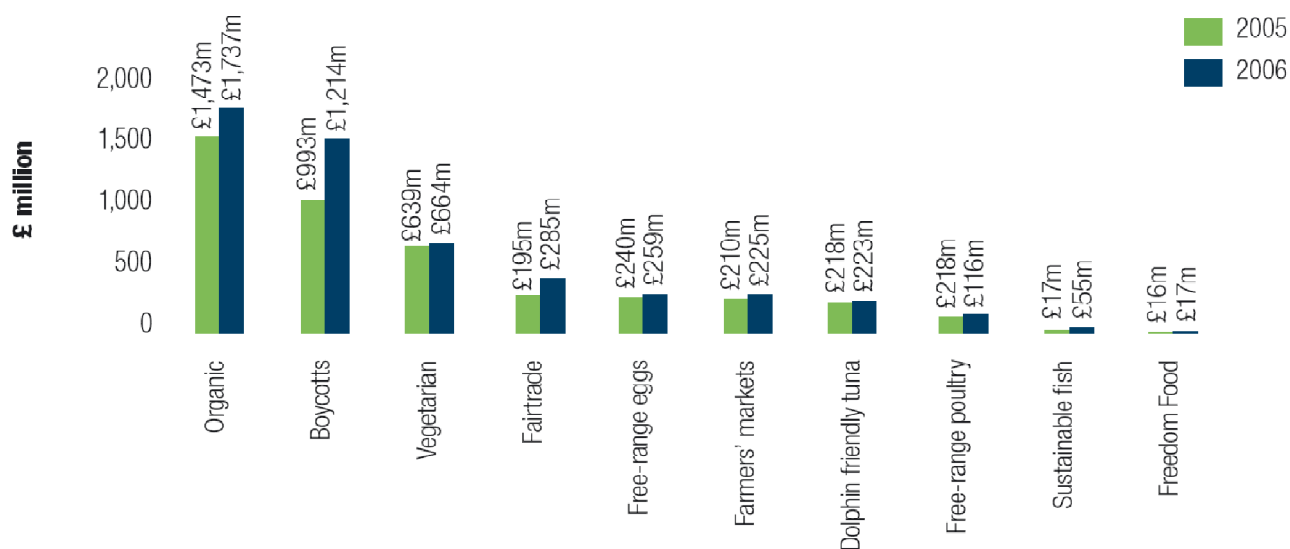


Figure 3: Ethical Food and Drink in the UK, 2005–2006 (The Co-operative Bank 2007)

The idea that the ethical consumer uses their purchasing power to account for the public consequences of their consumption leads to the concept of the consumer citizen, who as a consumer makes choices that affect him or her, but as a citizen makes decisions that affect others (Korthals 2000). The rise in ethical consumption is seen to be a direct result of the globalisation of the market and the inability of governments to control abuses of economic power by multinational corporations. The public can no longer lobby against the government to make changes when the issue is not within their country. Through campaigns by NGOs and other concerned bodies the public has been made aware of the power they can exert through their consumption. The increased choice within the market has increased the power given to the consumer (Clarke et al 2007).

There are, however, limitations to the impact of ethically-motivated consumption on the food system. The consumer's choice to purchase ethically rests on many factors and these factors can

vary in accordance to their environment at any particular moment. With the recession there has been a shift in people moving down the scale from organic to free-range, free-range to barn and so on (FEC 2009). External influences such as the media's representation of issues can bring to attention an ethical issue but with time this "can then weaken as people's commitment is not long term and tends to be weaker than their commitment to a comfortable life for themselves" (Clarke et al 2007). This limits the potential for growth within the ethical market when trends in sales can fluctuate and a guaranteed market is not long-term. Also, it is possible that while a particular product meets a given set of ethical criteria, the organisation supplying it could also be sourcing products that involve exploitation of labourers or genetic modification. Consumers could become blinded to a business's other ethical issues by the single product purchase that is well informed (Strong 1997).

Tim Jackson (2009) writes of the ecological limitations facing us today and with this the need for prosperity without further growth. This is an important take on the ethics of consuming: could ethical consumption be viewed as a paradox? Consumption itself needs to be addressed if the ecological limits of this planet are to be considered. There is a play off with the need for change through consumer buying power and the preserving of scarce resources, and a shift in emphasis "from 'buy more ethical products' to 'buy less but better'" (FEC 2009).

The mainstreaming of fair trade: a case study

The first Fairtrade (FT) initiative started 20 years ago with the objective of guaranteeing market access to smallholder producers from southern countries. It is 15 years since FT appeared on our shop shelves and, today, producer groups in 56 developing countries supply the UK market and more than £700 million is spent on FT goods (Fairtrade Foundation 2009 & FLO 2009). In 2006, FT represented around 900,000 families of farmers and workers worldwide, a figure which has subsequently increased further (Ruben 2008).

Involvement of FT has conferred numerous advantages upon FT farmers, relative to their conventional counterparts. Output is increased, and there is a positive and stabilising effect on incomes. Through long-term contracts, FT farmers achieve an improved credit rating, giving them better access to credit and allowing them to invest and have the capacity to diversify. It has been found that, particularly for Latin American coffee, the premium has enabled smallholders to convert to organic production, allowing access to another niche market. Moreover, premiums benefit participants' health, education and agricultural development. Aspects of empowerment felt by the individual producer include self confidence, greater access to training and improved market and export knowledge.

Mainstreaming and buying practices

The increasing awareness and support is propelling the FT movement into mainstream markets. Engaging with corporate brands like Procter & Gamble, Nestlé and Cadbury, and major supermarket chains, has led to a 50% growth rate. Yet the mainstreaming of FT has also engendered debate within the movement (Murray and Reynolds 2007). Engaging with businesses that have little visible commitment to the founding social principles of FT, and a primary objective of maximising profits, has raised concerns regarding the definition of FT as a "trading partnership based on dialogue, transparency and respect" (Barrientos and Smith 2007).

The standardized quality and last minute adjustments to orders for perceived consumer expectations risk creating the problems seen in the conventional market. Supermarkets are not required to obtain FT certification, as they do not produce or package the food. In the absence of any commitment to have a stable purchasing arrangement, there is the possibility of switching between the producers, changing of orders or abandoning the trading relationship when the market declines (Barrientos and Dolan 2006).

Partial introduction of fair trade

The competition has become acute between vendors who commit to selling 100% FT and those who sell only a small proportion, such as the supermarkets, where FT is found next to the produce that necessitated making trade fairer (Barrientos, Conroy, and Jones 2007). The successes seen by businesses selling only a percentage of FT have been publicly criticised by smaller businesses who are totally dedicated to selling FT as a principle of their company (Grodnik and Conray 2007). There is a risk that it will become increasingly difficult for the traders with a social mission and producers with low capacity if the supermarket own brand FT continues on its trajectory. As the 'own brands' take off, it is likely that they will require greater volume and will consequently be less inclined to work with small-scale producers who require substantial support and cannot produce the same volumes as plantations (Barrientos and Smith 2007).

Expansion of fair trade into plantations

When Fairtrade certification was first offered to plantations, it was agreed that it would only be for products that were not grown by small scale producers, such as tea. However, with greater emphasis in the market on volume and specifications, pressure exerted on Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) has resulted in the extension of certification to estate and plantation suppliers of produce that is also provided by small producers (Renard and Perez-Grovas 2007).

The co-operatives of hundreds of small producers are less able to maintain quality controls and argue that "to allow plantations to be certified exerts greater pressure on prices, thereby eliminating them from the fair trade market" (Wilkinson and Mascarenhas 2007). There is also the concern that it is the plantation owners who will gain rather than the workers themselves. The co-operatives also argue that FT labelling was built around small producers, and that customers still identify the FT label as a label of small producers (Renard and Perez-Grovas 2007).

The rise of 'Fair trade-Lite' initiatives

There is an increasing range of new certification schemes which combine some of the values of fair and ethical trade, such as US-based Rainforest Alliance and Utz Kapeh. These schemes are lower cost than the full FLO certification and some certificates may appear on the label with only the need for a minimum percentage of the certified product. Some have expressed a concern that these labels are 'Fair trade-Lite', but this has been met with the response they provide producers with a wider access to niche markets. However, whereas FT 'guarantees farmers a minimum price of \$1.21 per pound of green coffee beans, Rainforest Alliance can offer no minimum guarantee' (Barrientos and Dolan 2006).

3.2 Shifts towards a more participatory democracy

Liberal representative democracy at the turn of the millennium stands accused of losing touch with its citizens (Power Inquiry 2006). For example, in the UK, turnout at general elections has dropped 20% since 1992, and membership of the main political parties has fallen by more than three quarters since 1964 (nef 2009). This is not a product of apathy, as more than half of Britons participate in community and charity work, and people are increasingly getting involved in 'pressure politics'- signing petitions, supporting consumer boycotts, joining campaign groups, etc - and have kept a high interest in 'political issues' (Power Inquiry 2006).

People today don't feel formal democracy offers them enough influence over political decisions. This disillusionment stems from the existence of political elites that seem detached from what the public needs, the lack of channels to express voice and dissent, and the lack of identification with public structures (Narayan et al 2000, Commonwealth Foundation 1999). Such concerns are even more widespread in the South, as western democratic institutions struggle to prove their appropriateness for southern countries' historic conditions, and fail to deliver on issues of poverty, inequality and social justice (Gaventa 2006).

Food and farming are part of this broader trend. With regards to food and sustainability, consumers "feel powerless, unable to impact the big picture, locked into high levels of harmful consumption" (Opinion Leader 2007), and citizens find they don't have a real voice when issues such as biotechnology and other food and farming policies are discussed (PABE 2001). Many consumers, farmers and workers feel food policies do not represent their needs or interests, and feel they cannot influence these decision-making processes (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005).

The recent innovations in participatory democracy mentioned above - in Section 2.2 - have largely failed to address these feelings of powerlessness (Demos 2008, PABE 2001). Consultations in food policy have been attacked for being tokenistic: people's views are called upon when the outlines of policy have already been set (Power Inquiry 2006, Barling and Lang 2003). Overwhelmed by the number of consultations and disenchanted with the lack of decision-making in them, CSOs are showing stakeholder fatigue (Barling and Lang 2003).

Certain debates have been artificially kept open, re-debated and portrayed in different lights in order to shape outcomes (Levidow 2007). A clear example is the constant reopening of the debate on GM foods, most recently through news of a further Food Standards Agency public engagement process around the issues (see for example Lean 2009). The Royal Society has argued that "dialogue [with members of the public] should start with the problem that needs to be addressed, rather than presupposing any particular solution" or debating a specific set of technologies (Royal Society 2009).

The backdrop of the UK's drive toward biotechnological innovation is the macroeconomic priorities established by the government. Having embraced EU and WTO trade liberalization policies to open the way for the export of industrial goods, the quest for growth and competitiveness in the food and agriculture sectors has driven changes in food policy towards efficiency and capital-intensive technology, including GM crops (Barling 2007, Levidow 2007). This drive thus "sits uneasily with some other softer but nonetheless heartfelt policy commitments - to the environment, rural regeneration, public health and social justice (at home and internationally)" (Barling and Lang 2003).

Further, despite interventions in food safety, the creation of institutions like the Food Standards Agency and a drive for efficiency in the food chain, the State (and thus the political influence of citizens) has largely kept clear of the food industry in terms of upholding environmental and social sustainability (Lang 2004). As is shown in other sections of this dossier the private sector has taken the lead through voluntary initiatives. The question is, are market incentives enough? According to Opinion Leader (2007), the public believes that supermarkets and food manufacturers have a central role to play in creating change, but that government should have a key role in “forcing businesses to change” if changes to sustainable practices “are not delivered voluntarily”.

Another critique of consultative processes in contemporary democracies is that some policy areas have remained untouched by public debate, as certain economic discourses have remained unchallenged. Economic policy has been ‘depoliticised’ and regardless of the party in power certain priorities have prevailed: trade and financial liberalization, liberal competition policy, and privatization (Klein 2008, Levidow 2007). And these are precisely the structural factors identified in Dossiers 1 and 2, which have great influence on social justice in food and farming.

These critical assessments of attempts to enhance participatory democracy have also generated a number of proposals for alternative procedures and techniques to deepen citizen participation in policy-making, tailored to each specific policy context. They include:

- Improving the *quality of consultation* processes: increasing decision-making powers of citizens in policy-building exercises, including agenda-setting, problem-framing and budgeting (Power Inquiry 2006, Demos 2008).
- Engaging in *deliberative processes* through multiple tools and techniques: citizen’s juries, citizen’s panels, committees, consensus conferences, scenario workshops, deliberative polling, focus groups, multi criteria mapping, public meetings, rapid and participatory rural appraisal, and visioning exercises (IIED 2001).¹
- Degrees of decentralization of decision-making and devolving *control to local government* and local organizations (Pimbert *forthcoming*, Mulvany 2007)
- Ensuring *quotas and seats* for socially excluded groups (Demos 2008)

3.3 Alternative models for the future of food and agriculture

Heuristically, we can define two leading paradigms of progress towards sustainable food and farming: the dominant ethical retail-led agri-food system; and the competing alternative agri-food system.

¹ For an overview on deliberative processes and democratic engagement please read IIED 2001. Deliberative Democracy and Citizen Empowerment. PLA Notes 40. London: IIED. http://www.planotes.org/pla_backissues/40.html

Ethical retail-led agri-food system.

As explained in Dossier 2, the restructuring of the food system has left supermarkets and catering companies with a leading role in coordinating of the food chain. Responding to consumers' concerns (that they voice through purchasing behaviour) - on price, but also on quality, and increasingly on ethical issues - supermarkets and catering companies have the leverage to engage at all levels of the supply chain to make changes happen. What would be the ideal future of this model of development? CSR schemes are already drawing the lines of the ideal ethical retail-led agri-food system. A system that treats workers fairly, suppliers contracted by supermarkets obtain fair deals; on-farm chemical use is reduced, or eliminated in organic sites; carbon emissions decrease; and healthy products are available on the shelves. All these are to be provided through market mechanisms, in open economies. Supermarkets increase their presence internationally and at all income levels, and deal directly with a limited number of suppliers to be able to govern quality. Agricultural holdings, mostly industrial, tend to be larger, with workers with flexible timetables treated fairly.

What are the limitations of this approach? Fundamentally two:

(a) *The negative impact of the restructuring of agri-food systems.* The same processes that give supermarkets a leading role are those that dispossess other actors in the chain. Most small-scale suppliers who cannot take the price and standard pressures will lose their access to supermarkets, the gatekeepers to consumers. Their only option is to quit agriculture or cater for low-return marginal markets (Oxfam 2004). Others can only become rural labourers or contract workers in food processing, getting minimum wage and being treated fairly, but bearing the insecurity of casual employment on a day-by-day basis, most probably through a labour provider, with few livelihood alternatives (Oxfam 2004, Barrientos and Kritzinger 2004) .

(b) *Growth dependency.* Our economic models depend on consumption growth. Fierce competition in retail will drive efficiencies achieved through mechanisation and shedding and casualising labour, further growth will be necessary to offset labour productivity. The pursuit of efficiency and growth will eventually clash with the CSR commitments on environmental sustainability and on labour standards, sustainability being the most likely loser (Jackson 2009).

Alternative agri-food systems

In response to this paradigm, an alternative paradigm has arisen. The concept of alternative agri-food systems agglomerates the diversity of systems that (i) promote new alliances between producers, rural labourers, consumers and the environment; (ii) prioritise local short-distance food chains; (iii) prioritise diversity over homogenisation; (iv) prioritise smaller-scale production; (v) embed farming practices in ecology; and (vi) promote inclusive participation and decision-making (Levidow 2007, Mulvany 2007, Pimbert 2007).

In the recent years, social movements around 'food sovereignty' have been the strongest voice against conventional agri-food systems. Their ideal vision of future food systems is summarized in Table 2.

| Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty |
|--|
| Focuses on Food for People , putting the right to food at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies; <i>and rejects</i> the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business. |
| Values Food Providers and respects their rights; <i>and rejects</i> those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them. |
| Localises Food Systems , bringing food providers and consumers closer together; <i>and rejects</i> governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations. |
| Puts Control Locally over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations; <i>and rejects</i> the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes. |
| Builds Knowledge and Skills that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems; <i>and rejects</i> technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering. |
| Works with Nature in diverse, agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise ecosystem functions and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; <i>and rejects</i> energy-intensive industrialised methods which damage the environment and contribute to global warming. |

Table 2. Pillars of Food Sovereignty (abridged) (Mulvany 2007)

What are the challenges to this approach? The main critiques of this approach are:

(a) *Can it scale up?* Are non-industrial small-scale agriculture, small-scale food processing and local markets able to produce enough food to feed the world (Collier 2008)? Can agro-ecological production deliver the necessary productivity as put forward in the IAASTD report?

(b) *How can the transition happen?* Food systems are already heavily industrialised and interconnected. A high degree of interdependency already exists. For example, many poor urban dwellers worldwide depend on imported grain from industrial farms. How can the transition be made without affecting the food security of these people? What are the intermediate steps? Further, in a world economy 'hooked' on growth and material consumption, how do we overcome the risk of the transition to a 'prosperity without growth' economy?

4. Questions for the third hearing

The hearing is an opportunity for the committee to discuss the evidence and issues addressed in the dossier, and also wider factors relevant to understanding ‘fair say’ in food and farming. With this aim in mind, the Inquiry secretariat has formulated a series of questions that the committee may wish to bear in mind during the course of the third hearing. Our intention in proposing these questions is not to direct or limit the committee’s deliberations - it is crucial to the hearings process that members feel at liberty to pursue whatever lines of inquiry they judge to be most relevant.

Overarching question

This hearing explores people’s freedom in food and farming. It specifically focuses on the role of voice and accountability in delivering people’s freedom to lead lives they value vis-à-vis their food system. Do different stakeholders have a voice in how food systems are governed? What is the degree of peoples’ participation in food and farming? Are market behaviours and citizen participation making the institutions that shape our food systems accountable to them?

General questions relating to the hearing as whole

What are the most important deficits in voice and accountability in food and farming?

What are their immediate and root causes?

What opportunities exist for addressing these causes?

To what extent should businesses, government and citizens be responsible for pursuing these opportunities?

What are the limits of our responsibilities? When can we say that we – in the food sector or in the UK – are doing enough to address wider problems?

Specific questions about wider influences on voice and autonomy

Consumer choice: Are consumers getting what they really want? Are they adequately informed? In what degree are their desires genuine or created by the food industry?

Citizen engagement: Are people’s voices heard in the design of food-related public policies? What alternatives exist to increase voice and participation in decision-making in food and farming?

Stakeholders’ voice: What relative voice do producers, workers, corporations and owners have in the food system? Are they equally held to account?

Ethical consumption: What benefits does it bring and what limitations does it have in achieving changes towards social justice and environmental sustainability? What can be learnt from examples such as fair trade?

Deepening democracy: How can the introduction of elements of direct and deliberative democracy affect our food systems? How can we make them work towards social justice?

Models of development: What alternative forms of food and agriculture systems are proposed? What are their strengths and limitations?

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