

TEN-YEARS TO AGROECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE DIETS: 2020 PROGRESS REPORT

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Foreword

2020 was a difficult year for many of us. The Covid-19 crisis posed immense challenges, but it also provided a desperately needed 'wake-up call', an invitation to stop, take stock of the havoc we are wreaking on this fragile earth, and to set a new course. Many people have been urging governments to 'build back better' from the crisis, to grab this opportunity to tackle climate change, the inequalities in society, the depletion of soils and wildlife, and to invest in the health of this generation and future ones. We have irrefutable proof now that not to do so is an incredibly expensive and inhumane mistake. At the eleventh hour, we have one last chance.

We know that a better future is possible and within our grasp. We have ample evidence that our food and farming system can help to resolve the climate, nature, and health crises, if we move quickly and make the right choices. The 'Ten Years for Agroecology in Europe' study from French thinktank IDDRI demonstrated that we can feed a growing population a healthy diet, helping to tackle chronic disease, while phasing out fossil fuel and chemical inputs, protecting our pollinators, easing our environmental footprint overseas, and regenerating our soils – but only if strides are taken this decade to achieve a 'Ten-Year Transition' to agroecology and sustainable diets.

This new report from the Soil Association tracks progress in this transition. It looks back over the key events of the past year, primarily in England, assessing where advances have been made and where progress has stalled. It looks at government policies, the latest scientific evidence, and at the lived experience of people throughout the food system, summarising the milestones and stories that characterised the year, for better or for worse. It also looks ahead to the next 12 months, assessing the key challenges and opportunities ahead, with an eye always on the 2030 vision of agroecological land-use and good food for all.



Helen Browning

Soil Association Chief Executive and organic farmer

The Soil Association is the UK's leading membership charity campaigning for healthy, humane and sustainable food, farming and land use.



EXPERT VOICE

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It's tempting to look back on 2020 with the luxury of 2020 hindsight; but it may still be too soon to call just how transformative a year it has been – at home and around the world.

First, yet more 'unprecedented' climate events, from floods to droughts, affecting farmers and communities. And then a global pandemic, forcing people to re-evaluate so many taken-for-granted assumptions - where our food comes from, how we live and work, what we expect from governments, business and each other in a crisis.

I have been – and continue to be – inspired by things happening all around the UK, on farms, in communities, on campaigns, in businesses and governments, finding ways to talk about and make progress on what matters. Often these positive stories get drowned out by the amplified drama of global events, but they are adding up to a growing critical mass for change.

There is so much to do, to tackle the climate, nature, health, and now economic crises. The antidote to despair is not just hope, it is action, working on the practical things that change our world for the better. Let 2021 be our year for renewing commitments to act together. ”

Sue Pritchard

Director of the Food, Farming & Countryside Commission



Ten-Year Transition to Agroecology and Sustainable Land-Use

In 2020, where have we seen positive action?
Where has progress been made?
And where is there still much more to do?



Public money for public goods

The Agriculture Act achieved Royal Assent enshrining public money for public goods in law in England. Crucially, soil health is recognised as a public good, following advocacy by the Soil Association and our partners Sustain and the Sustainable Soils Alliance. It's essential that the new Environmental Land Management Scheme supports farmers to deliver these public goods, with an adequate multi-year budget that allows farmers to invest in agroecological systems.

POSITIVE



Input reductions

The EU's Farm2Fork strategy raised the bar, targeting a 50% reduction in pesticides and antibiotic use and a minimum 20% cut in nitrogen fertiliser use by 2030 while stating that 25% of European farmland should be organic. The UK is yet to adopt similarly ambitious targets, but it will need to if it is to compete with Europe on environmental ambitions.

POSITIVE



Agroecology ambassadors

Farmers spoke up louder than ever before on social and broadcast media for a regenerative farming future. Leading the charge were James Rebanks, author of 'English Pastoral', Martin Lines of the Nature Friendly Farmers Network, 15-year old Jess Walker, the youngest of the Soil Association's Agroecology Ambassador farmers, and the filmmakers and farmers behind the documentary 'Kiss the Ground'.

POSITIVE



Scotland

The Scottish Government has committed to the establishment of a statutory national Nitrogen Balance Sheet, which might provide vital impetus in a transition to agroecology. The Scottish Government also committed to a statutory ban on burning on peatland, except under licence for limited purposes, representing a vital step forward in addressing the climate crisis.

POSITIVE



Wales

The Green Recovery task and finish group, established at the direction of the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs in July 2020, put forward ambitious recommendations to support sustainable food and farming in Wales. Which included calling for government investment in infrastructure for local food processing and targeted investment to support the expansion of the horticulture sector in Wales.

POSITIVE



Trade arrangements

The UK's future trading arrangements remain uncertain. In the face of unprecedented public pressure, the Government was forced to put the Trade and Agriculture Commission on a statutory footing, but concerns remain that the Commission lacks teeth and that trade deals with the US and other partners such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia could lead to an erosion of UK food, farming, environmental and animal welfare standards. The next 12 months will be critical.

PROGRESS



Missing pieces

Boris Johnson's 'Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution' helped bolster the UK's credibility in hosting the COP26 Climate Summit, but food and farming were critical gaps, and nature and climate were inadequately funded in the subsequent Comprehensive Spending Review.

PROGRESS



Agroforestry

The Climate Change Committee's 'land use for net zero' report called for the expansion of agroforestry across the UK, recommending public funding and the removal of tax barriers to incentivise tree planting on farms. Agroforestry has been recognised as eligible for payment under the Basic Payment Scheme, but a comprehensive framework to support agroforestry and an expansion of farm woodland is yet to be developed. The upcoming National Tree Strategy provides an opportunity for this framework to be developed.

PROGRESS



Pesticide regulation

The UK's National Action Plan on Pesticides is being reviewed, which presents the opportunity to tighten pesticide regulation and set an ambitious pesticide reduction target, as a first step towards a fully agroecological farming system.

PROGRESS



Environmental Protection

The Environment Bill crawled towards Royal Assent this year, enshrining a new Office of Environmental Protection in law. The Office is intended to be 'a powerful new independent regulator', but critics have warned that it might be toothless. In the next 12 months, as the Office is established and begins working, the degree of concern should become clearer.

PROGRESS



Scotland

The Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Act, enacted in October 2020, does not enshrine in law any key principles around the long-term future direction of policy including public money for public goods. It is simply an enabling Act which allows the principles of the CAP to continue business as usual until at least 2024.

PROGRESS



Wales

Welsh Government is continuing to develop a scheme for farmers and foresters that keeps them on the land but integrates better environmental outcomes. The details of the scheme are yet to be confirmed, but a paper on the Agriculture (Wales) Bill has been published for consultation.

PROGRESS

AT A GLANCE: 2020 SCORECARD

Ten-Year Transition to Healthy and Sustainable Diets



Calls to reduce meat and dairy consumption

The Climate Change Committee's 6th Carbon Budget acknowledged the significant impact of animal feed production on climate and biodiversity and called for a 20% reduction in all meat and dairy consumption, including grain-fed poultry and pork alongside red meat for the first time.

POSITIVE



Support for dietary change

The ground-breaking UK Climate Assembly said they would support action on dietary change, including towards less and better meat, and they recommended a shift to a more localised food system.

POSITIVE



Demand for organic

Lockdown created a boom in demand for veg boxes and organic produce. A YouGov survey conducted during lockdown found that some 3 million people had tried a veg box scheme or ordered food from a local farm for the first time. One major organic box scheme said deliveries were up 70% on the prior year at the companies peak during lockdown.⁶ Meanwhile, organic sales in supermarkets this year have hit a three-year high, with organic selling at the highest rate since December 2016.⁷

POSITIVE



Holiday meal provision

The campaign spearheaded by footballer Marcus Rashford forced the Government to take action to ensure hungry and vulnerable children are fed during the school holidays, with £400 million committed to holiday meal provision and an expansion of the Healthy Start scheme. With so many children and families struggling to eat an adequate diet, this is an important investment.

POSITIVE



Local food heroes

Brighton & Hove was awarded the first Gold Sustainable Food Places Award by Sustainable Food Places, co-founded by the Soil Association with Sustain and Food Matters. The award recognises the city's outstanding achievements on a range of key food issues and most recently on tackling food poverty during the Covid-19 pandemic.

POSITIVE





Hospital food standards

The Hospital Food Review, advised by Prue Leith, recommended investment in kitchens for freshly prepared meals and that food standards should be embedded in law and monitored. The Review also recommended that trusts should seek accreditation with the Soil Association's Food for Life Served Here scheme, which could help to transform food served across the NHS. The Government has indicated that it will implement the recommendations.

POSITIVE



Scotland

The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee Inquiry into the Green Recovery recognised the importance of local food provision during the pandemic and recommended that the Scottish Government make plans to build on this to increase food security and resilience.

POSITIVE



Deforestation in commodity supply chains

The Global Resources Initiative, a taskforce set up to consider how the UK can reduce the climate and environmental effects of supply chains, recommended that the UK Government introduce a legally binding target to end deforestation within UK agricultural and forestry commodity supply chains, as soon possible. The Government responded with a consultation on due diligence for the legality of forest risk commodities. Although a step forward, this has not yet been implemented and would not impact on more than half of all deforestation, which is legal under national laws.

PROGRESS



Childhood obesity

Positive strides were taken to tackle childhood obesity this year, following campaigning from the Obesity Health Alliance and the Children's Food Campaign from Sustain, with the Government proposing a ban on online junk food advertising and pre-watershed junk food ads on the television, as well as further controls on unhealthy 'BOGOF' offers. More needs to be done, however, to tackle the overconsumption of ultra-processed foods and the lack of fresh fruit and veg in children's diets.

PROGRESS



Scotland

Multiple political parties in Scotland have pledged to provide universal free school meals to all primary school children if they win 2021 Holyrood election. If those meals meet FFLSH standards this could represent a very positive change, though the details of implementation are not yet known and there are risks as well as opportunities depending on the nature of implementation and available budget.

PROGRESS

AT A GLANCE: 2020 SCORECARD

But there's still much more to do...

MORE TO DO



Ten-Year Transition to Agroecology and Sustainable Land-Use



MORE TO DO

Intensive animal farming

Animal farming continues to intensify in the UK. Data this year show a 7% increase in permitted intensive livestock facilities between 2017 and 2020. Scotland has seen a rise of 10% and Wales has seen the highest rise, up 21% since 2017.¹



MORE TO DO

Soil degradation

UK soils appear to be degrading, particularly in arable areas and on peat soils, research this year suggested. Data are limited, however, highlighting the need for national benchmarking to assess progress in improving soil health.²



MORE TO DO

Bioenergy crops

The UK's climate and land-use ambitions remain too focussed on bioenergy and carbon capture and storage, despite warnings that bioenergy crops can "have negative impacts on biodiversity, soil health, water quality and invasive species."³ A report from Feedback this year warned that bioenergy might be a false solution, highlighting that using food waste as animal feed would save nearly three times more emissions than sending it to anaerobic digestion.⁴



MORE TO DO

Greenhouse gases

The UK is not on track to hit its net zero target, the Institute for Government warned this year. Stronger leadership will be needed if the UK's commitment to reach the target by 2050 is to be credible, they said. A year on from adopting the target – a decision made by Theresa May which Boris Johnson endorsed – the UK has not yet confronted the scale of the task.⁵

Ten-Year Transition to Healthy and Sustainable Diets



MORE TO DO

Declining veg consumption

Children's veg consumption declined in lockdown, with half of the children who received free school meal vouchers reporting a marked drop in their intake of fruit and vegetables.⁸ The suspension of the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme throughout the summer term also meant that children missed out on an estimated 80 million portions of fruit and veg.



MORE TO DO

School food standards

An increasing number of schools and caterers are failing to comply with the School Food Standards, the Food for Life programme warned at the beginning of the year. While many schools continue to serve excellent food, a cocktail of pressures mean that some caterers are 'trading down' to unhealthy and less sustainable ingredients. The Covid-19 crisis has also prompted a move towards cold meal provision, putting further pressure on standards.

Ten years ahead

“Imagine a landscape where farming is working in harmony with its physical and social geography.”

“Soils, trees and grasslands soak up carbon, and provide the habitats for wildlife. Grazing livestock recycle nutrients and maintain biodiverse pastures, while pigs and poultry live mostly on waste streams, competing less with humans for food. A far greater range of crops are grown and eaten, and we produce the fruits, nuts, timber, pulses and vegetables in which we need and are suited to our climate. Pesticide, herbicide, antibiotic and soluble fertiliser use is minimised, with new knowledge flowing rapidly between farmers on how to utilise natural processes to generate fertility and manage weeds, pests and diseases. Regional processing, marketing and distribution infrastructure allows sufficient fresh, delicious, wholesome food to be delivered efficiently to customers, at prices that are fair to them and to producers. Farmers benefit from the technologies, and the investments, to make the successful transition to an agroecological system which feeds society well, without offshoring our responsibilities or undermining the opportunities for future generations.”

Food, Farming & Countryside Commission, 2019

‘Agroecology’ means farming in ways that learn from and enhance natural systems. Organic farming and agroforestry are the best-established examples, with regenerative farming also falling under the agroecological umbrella; organic farming, uniquely, is defined in law and backed by certification and inspection. In recent years, a growing international chorus has affirmed that agroecology represents our best hope of feeding ourselves sustainably and equitably in the face of the climate and nature crises.⁹

There is much that needs to change. In the past half-century, the UK’s food system has become increasingly specialised, and farmers have become highly reliant upon inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides, antibiotics and imported animal feed. Many farmers today produce few healthy foods for human consumption, but plentiful raw materials for the processing and intensive livestock industries. Half the cropland in the UK is used to produce feed crops for animals, primarily for poultry, pork and dairy production, yet the UK is only producing 17% of the fruit and 53% of the vegetables that it consumes, even with 90% of children failing to eat their five-a-day. Food insecurity and health inequalities are increasing, while one in four farmers lives in poverty.





CASE STUDY

BRIGHTON & HOVE FOOD PARTNERSHIP

Sustainable Food Places (previously Sustainable Food Cities) is one of the fastest-growing social movements in the UK, and a partnership programme led by the Soil Association, Food Matters and Sustain. The network brings together food partnerships from towns, cities, boroughs, districts and counties across the UK that are driving innovation and best practice on all aspects of healthy and sustainable food. Brighton and Hove were awarded the first-ever Gold Sustainable Food Place Award in 2020.

“Founded in 2003, we were probably the first food partnership in the UK,” says Vic Borrill, Director of Brighton and Hove Food Partnership. “We are a non-profit organisation and as well as our strategic work we help people learn to cook, eat a healthy diet, grow their own food and waste less food. We aim to connect and inspire individuals, community groups and organisations. We believe food is more than just fuel. It brings people together and changes lives.”

“In achieving this first ever Gold Sustainable Food Places Award, Brighton and Hove has shown what is possible in transforming a local food system for the better,” says Tom Andrews, National Programme Manager of Sustainable Food Places.

“Recognising that food is not only at the heart of some of today’s greatest challenges but is also a vital part of the solution, Brighton and Hove Partnership are leading a vanguard of more than 50 pioneering local food partnerships and creating one of the fastest growing social movements in the UK today.”

Though much needs to change, there is now broad agreement on the best direction of travel. The agroecological scenario, outlined above by the Food Farming and Countryside Commission, has been endorsed by a broad group of consumer, farming and environmental bodies. The Ten-Year Transition offers a positive and inclusive vision of a future food system, where power is redistributed back into the hands of producers and citizens, where we are healthier and more connected to where our food comes from, and where our soils, farm animals and wildlife are thriving.

This report will track progress towards this vision, year-on-year, with the ambition that by 2030:

- We all experience meaningful connections with each other and with nature through food.
- Soil carbon loss is reversed, and all soils are sustainably managed.
- Declines in abundance and species diversity of pollinators, butterflies and birds are reversed.
- Environmental pollution from farms is reduced by 90%.
- All farmed animals experience a ‘good life’, reducing antibiotic use in UK livestock farming and aquaculture by 90%.
- A fairer deal for food producers and citizens: a healthy, ethical and sustainable diet is affordable, accessible and the norm for all.
- Childhood obesity (and inequalities) is halved and all children eat at least 5-a-day fruit and veg.
- No net environmental harm is associated with the UK’s food, farming and forestry consumption footprint.
- We all understand the value of diversity in what we grow, eat and consume.
- We all live by the organic principles of fairness, care, health & ecology.



Ten things we learned this year

1. We have a nitrogen problem. Most of the UK’s protected habitats, such as marshes, bogs, meadows and woods are at critical levels of nitrogen pollution, despite rarely having nitrogen applied, a report from the Soil Association, with Plantlife and the Woodland Trust, warned this year.

The intensification of farming has seen nitrogen-tolerant species outcompete wild plants and fungi, leaving many species of plant, insect bird and mammal that depend on these habitats threatened. 80% of the nitrogen fertilisers used in Europe are applied to feed crops for animal farming.¹⁰

2. On a (slightly) brighter note, new research has suggested that **reports of an insect apocalypse might have been (modestly) overstated.** While an alarming 9% of land-dwelling insects are being lost each decade, the rate of decline was found to be slightly slower than previously suspected.¹¹ A 45-year UK study also found that invertebrate trends are more complex than previously suspected, with signs that freshwater species are recovering.¹² With pesticides a known driver of declines, a transition to agroecology is increasingly seen as a key solution.¹³

3. We are hungry for positive change. A YouGov survey conducted by the Food Farming and Countryside Commission found that 85% of people want to see at least



some of the personal or social changes experienced during lockdown to continue afterwards. 51% say they have noticed cleaner air and 27% have noticed more wildlife. Social bonds are also stronger, with 40% saying they feel a stronger sense of local community as a result of the pandemic. 42% say the outbreak has made them value food more.

4. The pandemic also prompted some positive changes in how children and young people eat.

60% of young people say that eating as a family positively impacted their health and wellbeing while in lockdown, while a third of teens reported cooking more, although those from less affluent socio-economic backgrounds were less likely to.¹⁴

5. Veg consumption among children and adults remains low, however.

Despite the latest Eatwell Guide, which captures current dietary recommendations, recommending roughly seven portions of fruit and veg a day, very few people of any age eat even half this amount, with these figures having remained fairly static over almost a decade. One in three children aged 5-10 eat less than one portion of fruit and veg each day.¹⁵

6. The UK's overseas land footprint is growing, increasing by 15% in the

past five years, according to WWF and the RSPB. This increasing land-take is partly to satisfy demand for intensively reared meat. The land required overseas to meet the UK's annual demand for soy, mostly for animal feed, was on average 1.7 million hectares, or an area approaching the size of Wales. 65% of the UK's 'soy land footprint' is situated in Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, all of which are high-risk countries in terms of the potential for deforestation, ecological degradation and habitat loss.¹⁶

7. UK supermarkets and fast food outlets are fuelling deforestation and land degradation

by selling chicken fed on imported soy linked to thousands of forest fires and at least 300 square miles (800 square km) of tree clearance in the Brazilian Cerrado, an investigation by Greenpeace and partners revealed.¹⁷

8. We cannot resolve the climate crisis unless we farm and eat differently, a study published in 2020

found. Even if fossil fuel emissions stopped immediately, emissions from the global food system alone could raise global temperatures by more than 1.5°C. What we eat, how much we eat, how much is wasted, and how food is produced will need to change dramatically.¹⁸

9. The climate crisis could signal the end of arable farming in the UK. A study published in 2020

found that the collapse of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), one of a handful of established 'climate tipping points', could lead to the widespread cessation of arable farming in the UK. Fortunately, the collapse is not thought to be imminent, though without meaningful action to resolve the climate crisis, it becomes more likely.¹⁹

10. Soil carbon is critically important. A new study

found that soil carbon represents 25% of the sequestration potential of the 'natural climate solutions' that could help deliver the Paris Agreement – 40% of this potential lies in protecting existing soil carbon and 60% in rebuilding depleted stocks.²⁰ Another study found that future warming of 2°C would release billions of tons of soil carbon, equivalent to double the emissions of the USA over the last 100 years.²¹

Farming and land use

The year of 'climate and nature action' that never was

"2020 must be the year of climate action," the UK Climate Change Committee said in a letter to the Government at the beginning of the year.²² The stars were positively aligned. The summer of 2019 had seen the UK make a statutory commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions and the UK Parliament had become the first in the world to declare a 'climate and environment emergency', responding to popular protests including Youth Climate Strike and Extinction Rebellion. The UK was set to host COP26, providing an opportunity to show global leadership. But it wasn't to be. Covid-19 forced the postponement of COP26, and the UK's progress towards net zero has been stuttering.

Public appetite for ambitious climate action remains high, however. The UK Climate Assembly, convened this year, provided a strong public mandate. The Assembly said they would support action on diets, including towards less and better meat, and they recommended a shift to a more localised food system. The Assembly said that farmers should be supported in the climate transition, and they insisted that while 'making farming more efficient' might be helpful, this efficiency should not be attained at the expense of animal welfare or wildlife.²³



FARMER VOICE

16-year-old Jessica Walker of organic Barnside Farm in the Scottish Borders is an Agroecology Ambassador working with the Soil Association.

“My friends don’t know a lot about farming at all. A lot of them don’t really think about it too much – they just eat food and that’s it. They don’t really think about the ethics behind it. And those who do think it means they should be eating vegan or vegetarian to prevent animal cruelty and to help with the climate change.

But I believe that if you’re eating British meat that is organically produced and grass-fed, then that really isn’t the case. If you were to look more into animal welfare standards, you’d discover that it is not animal cruelty that produces beef or lamb.

It is a problem, because when we grow up, we become the main consumer base, and we will be buying food for our children, which means that there will be uninformed choices across the board. It means that farmers producing meat on feedlots, which is cheaper, will become mainstream and normal.

And more and more people will turn to vegetarianism and veganism to counter that, whereas you could just turn to nature-friendly farming.

It should be discussed in the core subjects at school. PSE (Personal, Social and Health Education) touches on healthy eating, but I think it should teach us how to choose the food that is not only good for us, but good for our future on this planet.”



In joining the dots between climate, nature and animal welfare, the Assembly appears to be a step ahead of the UK Government. The need for joined-up action is at the heart of the Ten-Year Transition, and this year we also learned that nature is under severe pressure in the UK:

- The Government’s ‘UK Biodiversity Indicators 2020’ showed ongoing declines in the status of priority animal and plant species, including declines in farmland and woodland birds; ongoing declines in the genetic diversity of farm animals, as indicated by use of native breeds; and ongoing declines in public sector expenditure on UK biodiversity.²⁴
- The Prime Minister committed (to great fanfare) to protecting 30% of the UK’s land by 2030, as part of the ‘30 by 30’ initiative. But the Government conceded that existing National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other protected areas, which comprise approximately 26% of the land in England and are often nature-depleted, are included in the target meaning an only additional 4% – some 400,000 hectares – will be protected.²⁵
- All political parties made commitments to increase tree-cover during the 2019 General Election, but the UK is behind in its tree planting targets. The policy framework and incentives needed so that farmers can lead the UK’s tree revolution, both through planting and natural regeneration, are yet to be delivered.²⁶
- No rivers in the UK are safe to swim in, as waterways are being used as open sewers, experts warned. 80% of rivers fall short of the EU’s ecological standard – the minimum threshold for a healthy waterway – up from 75% a decade ago. Half of all stretches of river monitored by the Environment Agency

exceeded permitted limits of at least one hazardous pollutant, with nitrogen pollution from intensive farming contributing to the issue.²⁷

In an agroecological scenario there would be more trees, more nature-friendly ‘infrastructure’ such as hedgerows and ponds, more resilient and more carbon-rich soils, and a greater diversity and abundance of insects and wildlife. The Climate Coalition – comprised of over 140 organisations and 22 million people – wrote to the Prime Minister this year in support of the Ten-Year Transition, saying:

“Governments must end burning of unsustainable bioenergy and help farming across the UK to be net-zero and nature-friendly by supporting agroecological food production and agroforestry, introducing measures to significantly reduce pesticide and fertiliser application.”

With ‘nature-based solutions’ set to be one of the themes of COP26, it’s essential that the UK Government steps up its ambitions and embraces 2021 as the year of climate and nature action.



Intensive animal farming and threats to human health

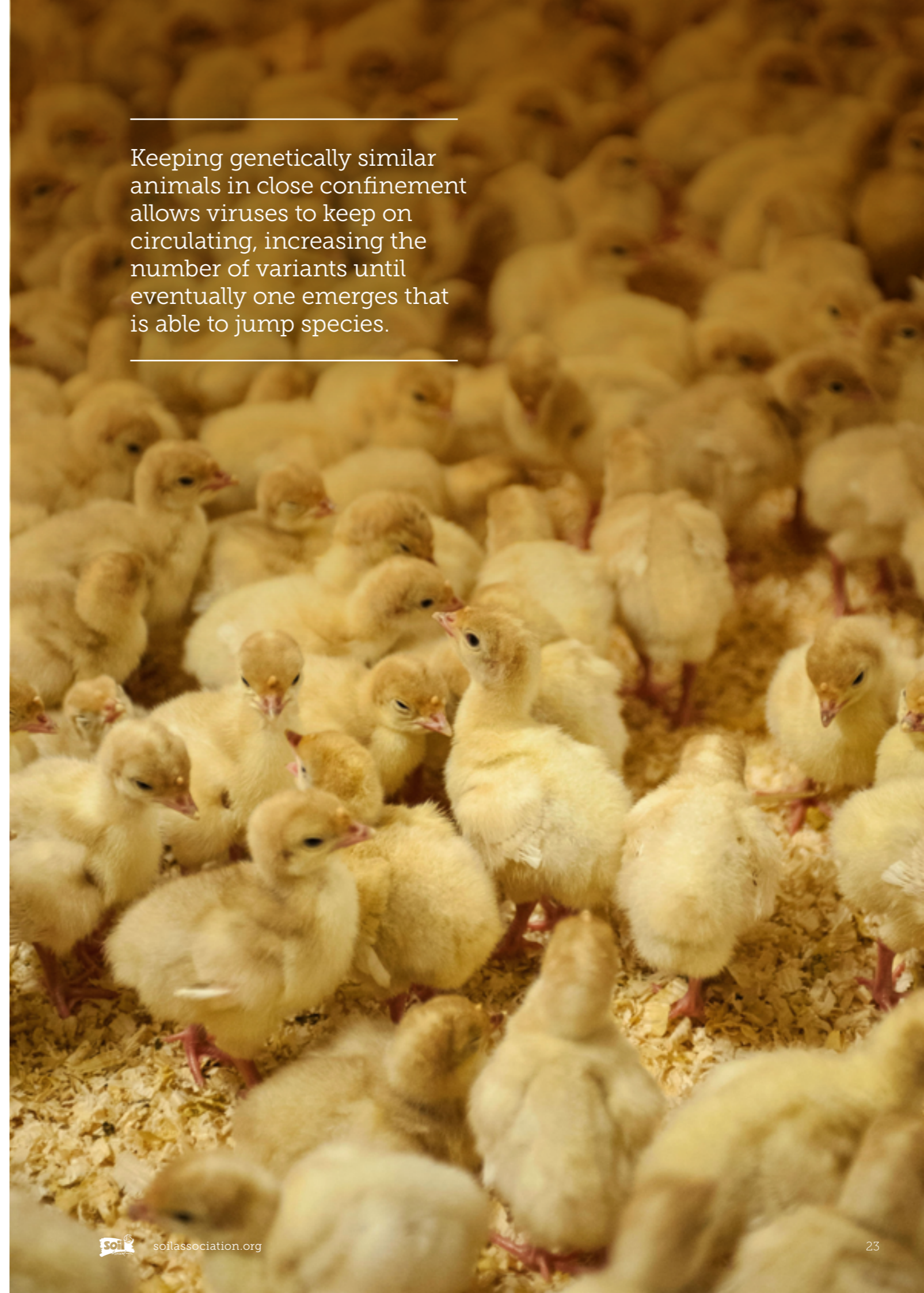
As the Covid-19 crisis broke, scientists warned that further encroachment into wild habitats would increase the risk that we encounter novel pathogens. Agricultural expansion is the main cause of habitat and biodiversity loss globally, with forests being cleared for pasture or feed crops.

Analysis released at the end of 2020 found that the UK had imported more than 1 million tonnes of soy without any sourcing requirements from areas at high risk of deforestation in Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil in the previous year, primarily as animal feed.²⁸

Intensive livestock systems also increase the risk of zoonotic diseases. Keeping genetically similar animals in close confinement allows viruses to keep on circulating, increasing the number of variants until eventually one emerges that is able to jump species, landing in a human host.²⁹ These systems also pose threats to human health by fuelling antimicrobial resistance, with 73% of all antibiotics worldwide used to treat livestock. Antibiotic use in UK farming has been cut by an impressive 50% in recent years, but much greater reductions are still needed. Other forms of mass medication, such as coccidiostats in poultry feed and zinc oxide in piglet feed, are used routinely to control diseases in intensive systems in the UK.

The rationale for a move to less intensive animal farming has never been stronger, but UK animal farming continues to intensify. In England alone, the number of permitted intensive livestock facilities has risen 7% since 2017 to 1,313 as of February 2020. Of these, 1,092 are poultry and 221 are pig units, up from 1,016 and 210 respectively. Poultry farms tend to be biggest, with seven out of the 10 largest housing more than 1 million birds, and the biggest two capable of holding 1.7 million and 1.4 million birds. The biggest pig farm found holds about 23,000 pigs, while the biggest cattle farm, in Lincolnshire, houses about 3,000 animals. Big does not necessarily mean bad, but this trend towards intensification, and the economic forces driving it, will need to be addressed if we are to protect human and ecological health, while providing a good life for farm animals.³⁰

Keeping genetically similar animals in close confinement allows viruses to keep on circulating, increasing the number of variants until eventually one emerges that is able to jump species.



The UK in a global context

In 2016, the UK Government promised a 'Green Brexit', saying the UK would be an 'environmental superpower' after it left the European Union.

Whether this ambition will be realised remains to be seen, but Europe continued to raise the bar this year, setting ambitious targets in the Farm2Fork strategy to boost organic to 25% of total farmland and slash fertiliser, pesticide and antibiotic use.

Whether the UK truly becomes an 'environmental superpower' will partly depend on the trade deals it strikes in the next two years.

For most of the year, the Government was seemingly set on a rushed deal with the US, prompting public opposition to 'chlorinated chicken' (and all that it stood for) to reach fever pitch. The Alliance to Save our Antibiotics warned that US livestock receive on average 5.4 times more antibiotics per animal than their UK counterparts, with US cattle receiving 8 to 9 times more antibiotics per animal than British cattle, largely due to the much more intensive conditions in which they are raised and their worse health and welfare.

PAN-UK also warned that pesticides should be of concern in the context of trade negotiations. If the UK agrees to weaken its pesticide standards in

striking a deal, then foods containing significantly larger amounts of highly hazardous pesticides might be available in the UK. American apples, for example, are allowed to contain 400 times the level of the insecticide malathion than UK apples. Malathion has been linked to cancer and can impair the respiratory system and cause confusion and headaches. Australian wheat can contain ten times the amount of the insecticide carbaryl than UK wheat. Carbaryl has been linked to cancer and is a suspected endocrine disruptor.³¹

Part 1 of the National Food Strategy called for greater democratic and Parliamentary oversight of trade deals, and the Government responded to widespread pressure by putting the Trade and Agriculture Commission on a statutory footing, but concerns remain that the Commission is toothless and not representative of environmental and animal welfare concerns. With a new Biden administration, the UK's prospects of a US trade deal look uncertain, but one thing is clear. The trade decisions in the next 12 months could be of far-reaching significance, either hindering or advancing the Ten-Year Transition.

WHAT WE LEARNED THIS YEAR

SOILS AND FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCE



New research published in 2020 highlighted the central importance of soils to the climate and nature crises. A global study found 90% of conventional top-soils are thinning, with a third (including many in wealthy countries) having lifespans of less than 200 years.³² In the UK, the Royal Society reported a 'soil structure crisis', highlighting that good soil structure benefits biodiversity, productivity, clean water and flood prevention and climate change mitigation.³³ Evidence amassed that soil degradation is threatening future UK food production,³⁴ yet there remains no comprehensive baseline monitoring on the state of UK soils, and spending on soil monitoring continues to make up a tiny fraction (0.4%) of total environmental monitoring in England.³⁵ Scientists also emphasised that the complexity of soils, their extreme variability, plus gaps in our knowledge, mean that a multifaceted approach to improving soil health is needed. Instead of focussing on one issue – such as soil carbon – the evidence suggests that we should focus on the restoration of multiple soil functions across the whole farm system, including via a transition to agroecology and organic.^{36 37}

CASE STUDY

FARMER-LED INNOVATION

Ben Coode Adams, a grower in Essex, traditionally used black sheet plastic under his blackcurrant bushes to suppress weeds. The mounting concerns around plastic and the environmental impacts of microplastics led him to question whether there might be more sustainable alternatives. Before he could make a change, he needed to understand the options to see how they worked in practice. This prompted him to join an Innovative Farmers field lab.

The Innovative Farmers programme established by the Soil Association brings farmers together with researchers to test solutions to practical problems that farmers face. Ben, along with five other growers and researchers from the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, is now testing alternatives such as wood chip and biofilm. The growers knew that change was needed, and with support from researchers, they were given the tools to test their ideas. Once the data collection phase is complete, they will collaboratively report and share their learnings with the wider community.

"The really great thing about field labs is that it's farmers deciding what they want to research, having the technical support to enable them to do it and Innovative Farmers has given us a fantastic framework in the field lab for doing that. Farmer led research speeds up innovation without question because it's immediate, so you can see something and immediately respond to that," Ben says.



Consumption and diets

A difficult year for children and families

It's been a difficult year for many children and families. The Covid-19 crisis closed schools and businesses; unemployment rates increased, income dropped, and food insecurities intensified. Around 32% of households with children saw a drop in household income between March and August 2020 and 10% of parents say their children experienced food insecurity during lockdown. Applications for Universal Credit surged, and pre-existing social inequalities were exacerbated. Covid-19 disproportionately affected black and mixed ethnicity families, with 50% higher rates of food insecurity compared to white ethnicity households.³⁸

The Government responded with a voucher scheme for Free School Meal-eligible children, along with other emergency food aid measures. The scheme provided a lifeline for many families, but parents found the scheme difficult to access and many children remained ineligible, even though they were in need. The Department for Work and Pensions says there are 4.1 million children in the UK living in relative poverty, far more than the 1.2 million claiming Free School Meals. School cooks and caterers stepped up, wherever possible, working with the Soil Association's Food for Life initiative and other expert organisations such as School Food Matters and Chefs

in Schools, to provide hot meals and healthy food parcels to families during term time and throughout the holidays.

Part 1 of the National Food Strategy focused its attentions on the impacts of Covid-19 on diets, supply chains and public health. The strategy recommended an expansion of Free School Meal eligibility to all children in receipt of Universal Credit and extended meal and activity provision over the school holidays. The Government was slow to respond. A national campaign led by footballer Marcus Rashford, with a coalition of organisations including the Food Foundation and BiteBack 2030, called for the implementation of the recommendations. As public outcry over the lack of provision during the October half-term grew, many local businesses, caterers and food banks step in to fill the 'holiday hunger' gap. The Government was forced to respond, committing funding in the Comprehensive Spending Review for an expansion of holiday meal and an activity provision and the increase in value of the Healthy Start Voucher. This is hugely welcome, though the recommendation to widen the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals remains outstanding. School meals promise to be of ongoing political concern in the year ahead.

CASE STUDY

COMMUNITY FOOD RESILIENCE

Many schools and early years settings offered vital support to children and families throughout lockdown, providing hundreds of food parcels and helping families with nutritional advice and support. This included Upper Valley Children's Centre in Calderdale.

"Food parcels are really invaluable, and the family enjoy receiving them as they feel they are weekly treats. This week's contain eggs which the parent was grateful for as they had been unable to get them," one member of staff at Upper Valley Children's Centre commented.

Schools and early years settings throughout Calderdale worked to ensure the food they provided was healthy and nutritious, with Calderdale benefitting from a longstanding engagement with the Soil Association's Food for Life network. This meant that an ethos of healthy and sustainable food provision already permeated the local area, and caterers had developed good relationships with their suppliers.

The Early Years team in Calderdale also uploaded tutorial videos on growing and cooking throughout lockdown, providing boxes of ingredients and holding online 'cook-alongs' with 7-13-year olds. To support healthier eating, they also created educational videos on sugar in cereals and drinks, and tips for fussy eaters.



Towards less and better meat (and more and better plants)

The Ten-Year Transition requires changes in the way we eat and farm.

Half the cropland in the UK is used to produce animal feed, and we import roughly 3 million tonnes of soy each year, largely as animal feed. In an agroecological scenario, we would be importing far fewer feed crops (and using much less land overseas), and we would be using our land more wisely. We would grow more veg, and we would be farming in more nature-friendly ways. Ruminant animals would remain integral, with their manures and grazing benefitting soils and wildlife, but we would be eating less and better meat, phasing out meat from grain-fed intensive systems.

This would mean eating much less chicken. Chicken is the most popular meat in the UK, and per capita consumption continues to rise year-on-year.

The Covid-19 crisis did little to change this. The pandemic disrupted normal eating behaviours, but it did not result in a shift towards less and better meat. While sales of meat-free products increased 5% in the first month of lockdown, beef and pork rose by 12% and 6% respectively.³⁹ These trends are

partially explained by the closure of food service outlets such as cafés, which prompted people to shop differently. In both meat and plant proteins, ultra-processed products continue to make up a large share of the UK diet, with ultra-processed meats making up 7% of the UK's shopping basket.

Government action on diets this year was mixed. The UK Climate Change Committee took the important step of treating red and white meat equally in their recommendations for the Sixth Carbon Budget, covering the period 2033-2037, providing an important corrective to the unhelpful focus on red meat in recent years, which ignored the climate and nature impacts of feed crop production. However, the long-awaited update of the School Food Standards, which was exploring the possibility of introducing more beans and pulses and a meat-free day, was put on hold, slowing progress towards 'less and better' meat in schools.

WHAT WE LEARNED THIS YEAR

ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

Research in recent years has found ultra-processed foods to be associated with a range of chronic diseases and adverse health outcomes. The UK diet has also been identified as the most ultra-processed in Europe. Research in 2020 affirmed these concerns and revealed that the UK diet might be even worse than we thought.

A 2020 review of the literature on ultra-processed foods and health found that 37 of 43 peer-reviewed papers had established a clear association between ultra-processed foods and poor health outcomes. The authors said: "There is now a considerable body of evidence supporting the use of ultra-processed foods as a scientific concept to assess the 'healthiness' of foods within the context of dietary patterns and to help inform the development of dietary guidelines and nutrition policy actions."⁴⁰ Another study found a clear correlation between the consumption of ultra-processed foods and obesity in the UK.⁴¹

Evidence was also published showing that UK consumption of ultra-processed foods might be higher than previously thought. A study found ultra-processed foods to be 54.3% of the total food consumed in the UK (up from the 50.7% identified a few years ago). Other research explored potential policy responses, highlighting that rather than focussing on reformulation, education and motivational strategies, policy responses should focus on a structural shift in the food system aimed towards re-balancing diets towards more fresh and natural foods.⁴²



EXPERT VOICE

“ This report highlights the importance of people, social equity and democracy by shining a light on the areas of our food system that are failing society. The challenge for our transition to agroecology is being able to include all people, through rights and participation to ensure everyone eats. Our diverse food cultures and knowledge, an important but often overlooked element of agroecology, must find their place alongside biodiversity, and ecological practices. ”

Dee Woods

Co-founder of the Granville Community Kitchen cooperative in Kilburn, BBC Food and Farming Cook of the Year in 2016, and member of the London Food Board and Food Ethics Council



A just transition?

A move to sustainable farming could affect the cost of food, at a time of rising levels of hunger and household food insecurity. This is not an argument to hold down food standards, but to tackle poverty and inequality.

The UK already has the third-cheapest food among developed countries, yet it also has the highest food insecurity in Europe. A shift towards fresh and healthy foods, and away from commodity crops, will require different routes to market, and a fairer price for farmers. Social justice and 'food citizenship' are key components of the Ten-Year Transition, but inequalities in our food system remain rife. In 2020, the Food Foundation reported:

- There remains a huge difference in how affordable the government's recommended diet is depending on how wealthy a household is. The poorest 20% of UK households would need to spend 39% of their disposable income after housing costs in order to afford a healthy diet in line with the Eatwell Guide.

16% of workers in the food sector also earn the minimum wage compared to 7% of all workers across the UK.

- Healthy food could be more affordable, with healthier foods being on average more expensive per calorie than unhealthy food (though calories might not be the best measure).

- There is no real change with levels of childhood obesity among children in Reception two times higher in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived. These disparities are growing in England and Scotland. Wales, however, seem to be reversing this trend.
- 46% of food and drink advertising goes on confectionary, sweet and savoury snacks and soft drinks; while only 2.5% goes on fruit and vegetables.
- It was also reported this year that many farmers struggle with low emotional wellbeing. Some 84% of farmers under the age of 40 are battling with poor mental health.

There was some positive news this year, however. The Agriculture Act introduced new measures on fair dealing regulation and transparency in the supply chain, recognising that supply chain abuse can hurt farmers' livelihoods. If properly implemented, these measures could be a real game changer, ensuring farmers and growers have tools to demand better deals and a regulator to enforce new contract codes of practice, designed with each sector in mind so supply chains are forced to play fair.

Only 2.5% of food and drink advertising goes on fruit and vegetables



The year ahead: What will 2021 deliver?

On the horizon in the next 12 months–

January

The UK's departure from the European Union is completed, but huge uncertainties remain regarding future trading relationships. With a new US President set to be sworn into office, what will become of UK-US trade negotiations? Will food standards be protected, as the Government has promised, or will they be sacrificed in pursuit of a hasty deal? Watch out for the launch of the new 'Ten Years for Agroecology in the UK' research findings at the Oxford Real Farming Conference.

February

The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy is expected to publish a white paper on energy at the beginning of the year. This will provide a key litmus test of thinking across government. Will the paper encourage further investment in damaging bioenergy crops, or will there be evidence of a joined-up approach to the climate and nature crises, recognising the risks posed by an excessive reliance on bioenergy?

March

The final National Food Strategy will be published in the spring, probably between March and June, with Part 1 setting a high bar for Part 2. Will the strategy deliver? Will it lay the foundations for the Ten-Year Transition, including by championing agroecology and a shift away from ultra-processed foods? Will it introduce measures to improve public procurement and ensure all children receive quality food education?

April

The Government's new net zero strategy is expected to be published around this time. There are big decisions to be made, for the wrong net zero pathway could lock us into intensification and further damage to wildlife and soils. Will the new strategy prioritise nature alongside the climate? Will it include the necessary measures to catalyse a farmer-led tree revolution in the UK, recognising the role that agroforestry and farmland woodland can play in a net zero society?

May

The UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 15) will gather at Kunming in China, with the '30 by 30' target for 30% land to protect nature by 2030 on the agenda. After years of wrangling between the 'land sparing' and 'land sharing' camps, is a consensus emerging that nature-friendly farming, coupled with land sparing through diet change away from grain-fed meat, provides the best solution? What will this target mean for the Ten-Year Transition, both in the UK and internationally?

June

Defra will be publishing a new Nature Strategy, linked to the 25-Year Environment Plan and the Environment Bill. Will the strategy recognise the well-established benefits of organic farming? Will it recognise the need for a national pesticide reduction target or improved soil monitoring? Will it include measures to expand nature-friendly farming, and support for more trees on farms?

July

The UK Climate Change Committee will publish their latest risk assessment report. Previous reports have highlighted that the UK is falling behind on its adaptation planning, including with regards to soils. Will this latest assessment bring the pivotal role of soils into focus, both as a carbon sink and a key contributor to flood prevention and food security?

August

Schools prepare to return for the new school year. After 12 months of turmoil, what state will the school meals service be in? Will children be receiving hot meals or cold? Will the Government have provided reassurance that the universal infant free school policy will be retained, and will they have committed to the recommendation from Part 1 of the National Food Strategy, expanding Free School Meal eligibility to more children in need?

September

The UN hosts its Food Systems Summit, proving an opportunity for governments to make bold commitments to make the food system part of the solution to the climate, nature and health crises. Action Track 3 champions 'nature-positive production'. Will the summit build consensus for an agroecological future? Will it recognise the benefits of nature-friendly farming and the urgent need to re-balance diets away from ultra-processed foods?

October

The Government has committed to responding to Part 2 of the National Food Strategy with a white paper within six months. Will the white paper endorse the recommendations of the strategy? Will the Government take ambitious action, or will key proposals be watered down?

November

In arguably the most important event of the year, the UK will host the COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow. Will national governments bring fresh pledges to help deliver the Paris Agreement? Will the UK show leadership on food and farming, framing agroecology as a 'nature-based solution', and the key to joining up the mitigation and adaptation agendas?

December

Governments, businesses and NGOs will gather at the Tokyo Nutrition4GrowthSummit with the aim of transforming the way the world tackles malnutrition. Will the solutions agreed be democratic, and ensure food sovereignty and agroecology? Will the 'Westernization' of diets, including via a shift to ultra-processed foods be recognised as key driver of the crisis?

In focus: The devolved nations



Wales

In Wales, 2020 saw the government repeatedly state their intentions to devise a payment scheme for farmers and foresters that keeps them on the land, while delivering environmental outcomes. The Soil Association hosted government officials on farm, reviewing the proposed outcomes that would qualify for payments under the framework. Despite this positive momentum, the Covid-19 crisis has delayed the development of crucial policy. Consultations have been launched, extended and unresolved, such as the consultation on ammonia emissions. On top of this, uncertainty related to Brexit has caused anxiety, with an ongoing lack of clarity on trade and access to EU markets. 2021 will be an important year, with the most pressing priority the development of a support payment framework and trading environment that works for farmers and helps to resolve the climate and nature crises.



Scotland

In Scotland, the Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Act was passed, enabling the Scottish Government to continue delivering the Common Agricultural Policy in Scotland after 1st January 2021, with provisions for 'simplifications and improvements' to be made. The Act doesn't commit to 'public money for public goods' in the same way as the Agriculture Act in England, but Scottish Government has committed to developing new payment mechanisms that secure a productive sector that contributes towards delivering Scotland's climate change ambitions. The commitment from the Scottish Government to a statutory national Nitrogen Balance Sheet, as part of the new payment framework, might positively incentivise a shift to agroecological approaches to nitrogen fertiliser and livestock feed. The devil will be in the detail, to be thrashed out in 2021. The Scottish Government has also convened a cross-ministerial group encompassing health and agriculture as a precursor to developing a food strategy for Scotland, with the group to develop proposals throughout the next year.



Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the impacts of Brexit on trade flows and community wellbeing could be significant. Food is central to the economy of Northern Ireland, with hundreds of thousands of tonnes criss-crossing the border with the Republic each year. The UK Government has committed to the full implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol and upholding the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its dimensions, but at the time of writing, talks are ongoing regarding the details, namely concerning goods 'at risk' of entering the EU market. The Protocol would ensure that Northern Ireland will retain tariff-free access to the EU, even in a 'no deal' scenario, but the flipside is that goods, particularly food, arriving into Northern Ireland from rest of the UK will be subject to a new range of controls and checks. The EU and UK are taking steps to minimise the impacts, but Northern Ireland businesses might still face significant new complexity when bringing in goods from the rest of the UK.



Grow Back Better: Our recommendations for the next 12 months

In August, the Soil Association published the 'Grow Back Better' manifesto for post-Covid-19 recovery. The report outlines our priorities for the future of food and farming in the UK. As a matter of urgency, in the next 12 months, we want to see...

TEN-YEAR TRANSITION TO AGROECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE LAND-USE

1. A TRANSFORMATION IN LIVESTOCK FARMING

As England's new agricultural policy takes form, it's vital that farmers are supported to transition away from intensive livestock. A combination of policy change and financial support will be needed, including by ensuring the new farm animal welfare grants and payment support schemes set bold ambitions. In the next 12 months we would like to see the UK Government help farmers repurpose buildings and animal housing, and public procurement used to create a secure demand for the meat produced in more extensive systems.

The Soil Association, as founding members of the Alliance to Save our Antibiotics, will continue to shine a spotlight on the antibiotic risks posed by new trade deals, and we will be launching a new campaign, 'Food not Feed', calling for a shift from intensive to agroecological and organic livestock farming.

2. AMBITIOUS TARGETS TO SLASH PESTICIDE AND FERTILISER USE AND GROW ORGANIC FARMING, IN LINE WITH TARGETS ACROSS EUROPE

If the UK is to be a global leader in environmental food production, it will need to continue raising its ambitions in line with its European neighbours. In England, the new Environmental Land Management Scheme must ensure farmers are rewarded for moving to agroecology across the 'whole farm system', not just for taking individual actions that improve the environment, which could see production systems unchanged, and concern for nature relegated to the margins. The Government should also introduce a legally binding pesticide reduction target, with a programme of support for all farmers to adopt agroecological methods of integrated pest management, based on prevention first and pesticides last.

The Soil Association will be championing organic as a key solution to the climate, nature and health crises, calling on the UK Government to match the EU ambition for 25% total farmland to be organic by 2030.

3. A FARMER-LED TREE REVOLUTION

As stewards of our land, farmers should be supported to lead the UK's efforts to increase tree cover, with a minimum of 5% of agricultural land under agroforestry by 2030 and 10% by 2040, and a doubling in farm woodland cover in the same period. Trees and farming are too often seen to be in competition, when farmers should be in the driving seat in increasing tree cover. In the run up to COP26, the UK's national governments should fast-track efforts to support uptake of agroforestry, including via ELMS.

The Soil Association will be publishing a report in the spring, looking at the measures needed to kickstart the farmland woodland economy.

4. FARMER-LED INNOVATION AND R&D

Public investment in agricultural research is not aligned with the principle of 'public money for public goods' and its governance excludes farmer and citizen participation. Transformational change in farming will require a shift in investment towards innovative solutions for agroecological systems, alongside support for new entrants going into agroecological production. Towards the end of 2020, the Government announced increased investment in agricultural Research & Development from 2022, including farmer-led R&D projects to trial and demonstrate viability of new and existing technologies to address immediate on-farm productivity challenges as well as research into how agriculture can achieve net zero.

The Soil Association will be highlighting the pioneering work of the Innovative Farmers programme and calling for investment to be targeted at farmer-led innovation that furthers the transition to agroecology.

5. A RENEWED FOCUS ON SOILS FOR NET ZERO AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

The Agriculture Act in England recognises soil health among the measures for which farmers should receive payments, but soil measurement is not established as common practice. It's essential that the new Environmental Land Management Scheme supports farmers to monitor their soils, creating the basis for national benchmarking of progress.

In the year ahead, the Soil Association will be calling for a legally binding target for improving soil health to be embedded in the Environment Bill, with payments for agricultural support contingent upon baseline measurement and data-gathering.



TEN-YEAR TRANSITION TO HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE DIETS

6. INCREASE DEMAND FOR UK-GROWN FRUITS, VEGETABLES, PULSES, AND NUTS

The Governments within the UK should take steps to boost demand for UK horticultural produce, doubling (or tripling) UK consumption and production of vegetable, fruit, nuts and pulses. Public procurement should be harnessed to increase demand, backed by financial incentives and grants to support farmers to move into horticultural production, with an emphasis on agroecological growing techniques. Policies should also be introduced to improve access to land for diverse new entrants, and investment in skills for agroecological production. The labour challenge will need to be addressed, with a sure supply of workers to pick fruit and other crops at harvest.

The Soil Association will be highlighting the vital role that public procurement can play in providing a market for UK-grown produce, including by calling for a re-specification of the School Fruit and Vegetable scheme to include more British produce.

“

A transformation of agriculture will require a reshaping of the economic framework so that the polluter pays, public money delivers public goods, and the net gain principle is consistently applied. Technological development is accelerating, and has the potential to disrupt the food and farming sector fundamentally with significant benefits.”

Professor Dieter Helm, CBE,

Professor of Economic Policy, University of Oxford

7. RE-BALANCING THE UK DIET AWAY FROM ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

Despite France's relatively low consumption, the French Government has set the target of reducing ultra-processed foods in the diet by 20% (of the 14% that they form) between 2018 and 2021. The UK Government should follow suit, aiming to move from 'worst in class' to 'best in class' within ten years. Across nineteen European countries, the median proportion of ultra-processed foods in the diet is 33.9%, with Portugal (10.2%) and Italy (13.4%) at the bottom, and the UK at the top. The UK Government should aim to rebalance our diets to the European median within 5 years and achieve an 80 percent decrease on today, down to 10-15% total by 2030.

The Soil Association will be campaigning for the Government to adopt this target via the National Food Strategy in the next 12 months.

8. BOLD PUBLIC PROCUREMENT – IMPROVING QUALITY AND INCREASING ORGANIC

The Governments within the UK should commit to a world-leading public procurement strategy that aims to normalise healthy and sustainable diets, while providing a secure market for agroecological and organic production. As a priority, in England, Defra's Balanced Scorecard should be implemented across the public sector, with procurement decisions required to place a minimum weighting of 60% of quality relative to price.

The Soil Association will be championing the caterers and settings leading the way throughout the next 12 months, highlighting the pioneering work of caterers involved with the Food for Life programme who are putting organic and other sustainable ingredients on the menu.

9. PROVIDING WORLD CLASS FOOD EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN

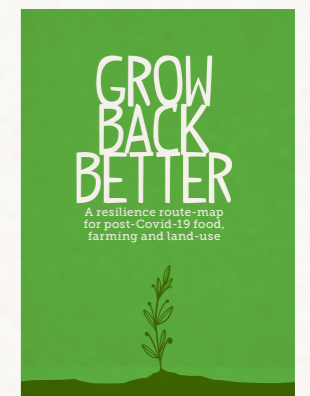
We know that food education can be transformative. The 'whole school approach' embodied in the Food for Life School Award has had a marked impact on diets and inequalities. If every primary school in the country was a Food for Life school, a million more children would be eating their five-a-day. Among other school food initiatives, TasteEd is reconnecting children with the sensory qualities of fresh and natural foods.

The Soil Association will be calling for a commitment in the National Food Strategy to boost uptake of Food for Life, TasteEd and other school food initiatives, as a key measure to improving child health and wellbeing, and normalising the consumption of fresh fruit and veg.

10. BUILDING RESILIENT, REGIONAL FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS AND STOPPING DEFORESTATION ASSOCIATED WITH UK ANIMAL FEED

The Governments within the UK should invest in regional supply chain infrastructure to bring renewed diversity and resilience to routes to market. Over-specialised global and national supply chains for retail and catering are vulnerable to disruption and caused the dual tragedy of food dumping and shortages. Crucially, the UK Government should legislate to end deforestation and loss of high conservation value habitats from UK supply chains, beginning with commodities and products that contribute most significantly to losses, including animal feed. A mandatory due diligence obligation should also be imposed on companies that place commodities and products on the UK market that might have contributed to deforestation.

The Soil Association will be campaigning over the next 12 months for 'Food not Feed', including for the reallocation of UK farmland away from feed crop production, and for a decline in both intensive livestock production, easing the UK's overseas footprint.



Glossary

Agroecology – farming practices and systems that learn from nature and enhance natural systems, minimising synthetic inputs while producing healthy food.

Intensive livestock – animal farming characterised by high stocking densities and a reliance on feed crops grown with synthetic fertilisers and pesticides.

Organic farming – a type of agroecological farming that benefits climate, nature and human health, backed by legal standards and inspection.

Regenerative farming – agroecological farming practices that enhance soil health and biodiversity in a similar manner to organic systems.

Sustainable diets – dietary patterns that benefit the climate, nature and human health, typically composed of fresh ingredients sourced from agroecological farming systems.

The 'Ten-Year Transition' – the process by which farming, land-use, diets and consumption are transformed to become healthy and sustainable by 2030.

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