

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Session 2008-09

11 December 2008

NEW INQUIRY ANNOUNCED: Securing food supplies up to 2050: the challenges for the UK

The dramatic rise in food prices in 2007 and the early part of 2008 significantly raised the political profile of food policy on a global scale. These price rises resulted from a number of factors, including harvest failure, the use of land for bio-fuels, population expansion and an increasing demand for meat and dairy products in developing countries such as China and India.

In July 2008, the UK Government responded by publishing a Cabinet Office Strategy Unit report, "Food Matters", and a Defra discussion paper on "Ensuring the UK's Food Security in a Changing World". Food prices are beginning to fall again, but the spike highlighted the importance of a long-term approach to food security.

At the June 2008 summit on World Food Security in Rome, organised by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, the UN Secretary General announced that world food production would have to increase by 50% by 2030 to meet the demand caused by population increases and rising prosperity. The FAO further estimated that food production needed to double by 2050, to feed an anticipated population of 9 billion.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee are interested in how well the UK is equipped to play its part in meeting this challenge. While the UK's population will not increase on the same scale as some other countries, the UK is part of a global food system and population growth elsewhere in the world will inevitably affect our ability to secure our own food supplies.

The Committee will conduct its inquiry in two parts: the first will concentrate on establishing the challenges the UK faces in responding to the call to increase food production and the second on what actions should be taken by the Government, the food industry, farmers, growers, and fishermen, to meet those challenges.

The inquiry will address the following points:

- How robust is the current UK food system? What are its main strengths and weaknesses?
- How well placed is the UK to make the most of its opportunities in responding to the challenge of increasing global food production by 50% by 2030 and doubling it by 2050, while ensuring that such production is sustainable?
- In particular, what are the challenges the UK faces in relation to the following aspects of the supply side of the food system:
 - soil quality
 - water availability
 - the marine environment
 - the science base
 - the provision of training
 - trade barriers
 - the way in which land is farmed and managed

- What trends are likely to emerge on the demand side of the food system in the UK, in terms of consumer taste and habits, and what will be their main effect? What use could be made of local food networks?
- What role should Defra play both in ensuring that the strengths of the UK food system are maintained and in addressing the weaknesses that have been identified? What leadership and assistance should Defra provide to the food industry?
- How well does Defra engage with other relevant departments across Government, and with European and international bodies, on food policy and the regulatory framework for the food supply chain? Is there a coherent cross-Government food strategy?
- What criteria should Defra use to monitor how well the UK is doing in responding to the challenge of doubling global food production by 2050 while ensuring that such production is sustainable?

The Committee invites all interested parties to address these and related matters in writing by **Thursday 22 January 2009**. More information about the required format of submissions is given below.

NOTES FOR SUBMITTERS

Submissions should be in Word or rich text format and sent by e-mail to efracom@parliament.uk. The body of the e-mail must include a contact name, telephone number and postal address. The e-mail should also make clear who the submission is from.

Submissions must address the terms of reference. They should be as brief as possible, and no more than 3,000 words. Paragraphs should be numbered for ease of reference, and the document must include an executive summary (no more than one page long).

Committees make public much of the evidence they receive during inquiries. If you do not wish your submission to be published, you must clearly say so. If you wish to include private or confidential information in your submission to the Committee, please contact the Clerk of the Committee to discuss this. Please bear in mind that Committees are not able to investigate individual cases.

Personal information, such as address and contact details, should be provided separately from the body of your submission. You should be aware that there may be circumstances in which the House of Commons will be required to communicate information to third parties on request, in order to comply with its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Submissions should be original work, not previously published or circulated elsewhere. Once submitted, no public use should be made of the submission unless you have first obtained permission from the Committee.

For further details about this inquiry, please contact Joanna Dodd, Inquiry Manager, on 020 7219 3279.

http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/environment__food_and_rural_affairs/efra_pn02_081211.cfm