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## Rio +20: Food and sustainable agriculture

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### Summary

- Rio +20 is an opportunity to set us on a pathway to a sustainable global food and agricultural system but it requires international agreement and action.
- Key goals should be to eliminate food insecurity and to reduce the impact of food production and consumption to sustainable levels.
- The challenge is to ensure access to food, water and energy for all, while meeting the long-term challenges of climate change and ecosystem management.

### Overview

Over half the global population is either eating too little, or too much; 1 billion people are suffering from malnutrition and hunger, while 1.5 billion worldwide are overweight.<sup>1</sup> Yet enough food is produced, it is the distribution, use and waste of food which are key issues.<sup>2</sup> Rio+20 should help build a sustainable system for food and agriculture.

With an increasing global population and with shifts to a western diet, ensuring production is sustainable should be a priority. Agriculture based on heavy use of chemical inputs, industrial livestock systems, and monocropping must be avoided. These systems contribute to climate change and land degradation, impact on water quality and supply, and compromise animal welfare. Sustainable farming techniques have the potential to raise yields, improve soil fertility, conserve natural resources, use water sustainably, and reduce dependence on expensive inputs.

While increased efficiency and technological advancement in food production can contribute to reducing the impact of food production, consumption patterns are equally important. The high environmental impact of a western diet is unsustainable for a growing global population; meat and dairy production use disproportionate resources with significant environmental impacts.

At the same time inequalities in the food system, such as unfair trade and subsidies, need to be addressed to ensure food security for all and to promote sustainable agriculture. To achieve a sustainable food system requires financial investment, improved technology, an integrated approach to land use and water use planning, a strengthened policy environment, and shifts in patterns of consumption and production.

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<sup>1</sup> WHO Obesity and Overweight factsheet <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/>

<sup>2</sup> Hunger targets difficult to achieve [http://www.fao.org/economic/es-policybriefs/briefs-detail/en/?no\\_cache=1&uid=35540](http://www.fao.org/economic/es-policybriefs/briefs-detail/en/?no_cache=1&uid=35540)

## UK Government can advance global food security by:

- Championing a renewed commitment to tackling hunger and ensuring investment in pro-poor, sustainable agriculture that secures basic human rights.
- Recognising food security incorporates a resilient food system, reliant on natural resources and a healthy planet, and that food security is more than quantity and supply.
- Supporting the concept of natural environment accounting so that impacts of food production on natural resources and ecosystem services are measured and reflected in policy.<sup>3</sup>
- Promoting sustainable consumption patterns, and less resource intensive diets, addressing equitable distribution in a resource constrained world.
- Ensuring environmental limits, equity and social issues are built into sustainable intensification of agriculture, not simply increased volume.
- Promoting sustainably produced products such as Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) fish, Bonsucro-certified sugar, Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil and on Responsible Soy.
- Increasing effort in Europe and internationally to ensure policy and trade mechanisms underpin sustainable food production, with a level playing field for sustainable products.

## At the international level:

- Encourage FAO and WHO to develop strategies which promote sustainable diets, addressing impacts on climate, natural resources and ecosystem services alongside health and equity.
- Address post-harvest loss in developing countries and post-consumer loss in developed countries. Efficiency in the food system can be increased by reducing waste. It has been estimated that as much as 30% of all food grown worldwide is lost or wasted.<sup>4</sup>
- Support research and investment in sustainable livestock systems, which will support both livelihoods and better nutrition in developing countries. In particular seeking to reduce the global demand for grain and protein used to feed livestock, as this is a driver of both global food insecurity and environmental damage.
- Invest in sustainable fishing practices and policies, and promote global production standards (ASC/MSC) to prevent, control, and reverse overexploitation of fish stocks.
- Phase out market distorting and environmentally harmful agricultural subsidies.
- Adopt interventions to manage volatility in global food markets to limit price spikes.
- Develop institutional and policy frameworks to secure equitable sharing of access to natural resources, including land, water and food. With finite resources for a growing global population, it is necessary to ensure that we live within the carrying capacity of the planet, whilst making sure that equity exists both within and between nations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.teebweb.org/>

<sup>4</sup> Foresight. The Future of Food and Farming (2011)

<sup>5</sup> Living Planet Report (2010) WWF