Zero hunger

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
UKSSD — Measuring up

Part 1: Sustainable Development Goal 2

The food supply in the UK is relatively secure and stable. Food is produced and imported to sufficient levels, and the percentage of income spent on food has remained steady. However, the ‘average’ situation in the UK hides large variations according to socioeconomic status, and two juxtaposed challenges: high and growing levels of obesity and diet related disease, and among the highest levels of household food insecurity in Europe. These challenges are underpinned by a food system which is struggling to provide healthy, sustainable, diverse diets for everyone in the UK.

Performance rating

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<th>Sustainable Development Goal Target</th>
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<td>2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round</td>
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<td>2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons</td>
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<td>2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment</td>
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<td>2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality</td>
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<td>2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed</td>
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<td>2.a Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries</td>
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<td>2.b Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round</td>
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<td>2.c Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility</td>
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**Key findings**

1. The UK is struggling to address malnutrition in all forms, with food insecurity and obesity rising.

2. The food system in the UK is relatively stable but reliant on large farms and close to half of all food is currently imported.

3. Performance on the biodiversity and sustainability targets has been mixed.

4. Policy changes as a result of leaving the European Union will be closely linked to the UK’s ability to achieve SDG2.

**Performance and progress**

Despite having a relatively secure food system with stable food prices, the UK rates amber or red on the nutrition related targets under SDG2. This is because when interpreting Goal 2 in the UK context, the challenges of food insecurity, poor nutrition and obesity need to be considered under the heading of ‘malnutrition in all its forms’ (Targets 2.1, Target 2.2).

Though the prevalence of people who are underweight is relatively low, in a country such as the UK with a developed health and social care system and consistent food supply, it should be feasible to achieve nearly undetectable levels of undernourishment. The prevalence of child and adult obesity is high and though childhood obesity seems to have stabilised in recent years, it is not declining.

The level of adult food insecurity in the UK is among the worst in Europe, and for children it is one of the worst, if not the worst, performing nations. The continuing rise in food bank use suggests it is increasing. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO) defines food insecurity as: “A situation that exists when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life.” It can range from mild to severe, indicating worrying about where your next meal will come from, skipping meals or going without food.

Typically measured at the level of the household, there are existing validated survey measures for food insecurity that are used globally, including the FAO’s Food Insecurity Experience Scale and the United States Department of Agriculture Food Insecurity Module. Food insecurity is not currently being measured for the UK as a whole, however in a one-off 2016 survey by the Food Standards Agency, 26% of those surveyed reported experiencing food insecurity.

The food system in the UK is one in which calories from healthy foods consistently cost more than those from less healthy foods. Households and individuals with insecure income or access to resources, are more reliant on less healthy foods. Thus, while seemingly juxtaposed, the challenges of obesity and food insecurity are often co-located in the UK, indicating the interrelation between socioeconomic inequalities and nutrition status in the UK. Furthermore, there are large social inequalities evident in obesity in the UK – childhood obesity is twice as prevalent in the poorest areas of England compared to the richest.
The status of the UK’s food production system tells a story of reliance on large farms, agricultural subsidies and food imports (Target 2.3). The total volume of UK food production has risen steadily since 1973 and land use for agriculture has remained consistent over time. However, the UK imports close to half of its food.\textsuperscript{9} The ability of agricultural producers to provide for their own livelihoods is also challenging. The data in DEFRA’s farm business survey indicates that farm income in the UK is heavily influenced by agricultural support payments – without these payments many producers and growers would not make a positive farm income.\textsuperscript{10} SDG2 places an emphasis on small-scale farms and food producers for their positive contribution to family incomes and economic development. However, in a developed and industrialised food and agricultural system like the UK’s, large farms produce the majority of food; compared to other European countries the UK is more reliant on them.\textsuperscript{11} Even in the UK, however, small farms have an important role to play in that they typically promote shorter food supply chains in which citizens are more closely linked to where their food comes from, and a host of other benefits. These include a smaller agro-ecological footprint, reductions in refrigeration and packaging and a stronger connection and trust between people and the produce they are eating. There is also some evidence that crop yields from small farms can compete with larger farms, particularly where more intricate or delicate production and harvesting methods are required.\textsuperscript{12}

The UK’s progress on biodiversity and sustainable agricultural production is mixed (Target 2.4, Target 2.5), with a number of measures improving but a number of them deteriorating as well. Agriculture is the largest contributor to biodiversity loss in the UK. Though “direct pressures” on biodiversity and sustainability are improving, there have been long-term declines in many species of wild plants and animals associated with farmland. To give just one example, farmland bird species have declined 56% since 1970.\textsuperscript{13} However, plant genetic resource collections in the UK have increased significantly since the 1960s.\textsuperscript{14}

Many of the SDG2 targets related to agriculture and biodiversity are currently incorporated into UK policy through EU policy, including the Common Agriculture Policy. As the UK prepares to leave the EU many of these policies will need to be renegotiated in the UK. This presents both significant challenges and opportunities related to SDG2. Agriculture policy affects agricultural productivity, producer livelihoods, sustainability and biodiversity (Targets 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5) and impacts on food production and therefore on nutrition outcomes (Targets 2.1 and 2.2). Given the challenges facing the UK in terms of obesity, food insecurity, and sustainable food production, urgent action is needed to create a coherent agriculture policy if the UK Government is to meet the Targets under SDG2.

Synergies and coherence

Poverty and inequalities are major underlying factors in the nutrition targets of SDG2 (Targets 2.1 and 2.2); achieving a reduction in poverty (SDG1) would also help in achieving the targets on malnutrition in all its forms. Addressing the food supply chain to make diverse, healthier food more accessible and affordable will be necessary to reduce malnutrition in all its forms, and this can potentially be a result of action taken to improve biodiversity (Target 2.5). The obesity issue also links closely to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) covered by SDG3; addressing the nutritional risk factors for becoming overweight will also help to alleviate the burden of diet-related NCDs.
Increasing the productivity of British farms (Target 2.3) could potentially impact on the UK’s performance on conserving and improving water resources (SDG6), on climate action (SDG13) and on biodiversity and habitat conservation (SDG15) if productivity gains are achieved through environmentally unsustainable methods. Achieving an increase in average farm income and increasing the amount of viable small farms (Target 2.3) could help in reducing poverty (SDG1). Local food production from small scale farms can provide an opportunity to link with local communities experiencing food insecurity (Targets 2.2 and 2.1) – for example through a voucher or prescription scheme – and thus could help in reducing malnutrition in all forms (Target 2.2).

Local to international dimension

The UK policies and programmes that affect SDG2 are largely devolved matters, including the measurement of key indicators. Though this poses challenges, particularly in terms of data comparability and policy coherence, it also presents opportunities for the UK nations to tailor their approaches. Internationally, the productivity of UK farms could have potential impacts on the global food and commodity market if increased UK production meant fewer imports. However, currently only 49% of the food consumed in the UK is produced in the UK, and total agricultural outputs fell 5% between 2015 and 2016. Fruits and vegetables are the food group with the largest proportion of imports, and this could be affected by trade deals post-EU exit. Any resulting tariffs and changes in the value of the pound could affect the affordability of fruit and vegetables in the UK, thereby threatening progress on the malnutrition targets.

Recommended actions

1. Establish a coherent agricultural policy that addresses and seeks to improve the multiple impacts of agricultural production (environmental sustainability, livelihoods and nutrition/health outcomes) and drives up consumption of safe, high quality, sustainable and healthy food particularly among low-income populations

2. Institute robust and long-term measurement of food insecurity to the level of an official National Statistic

3. Assess the causes of rising food insecurity in the UK, including the potential impact of recent benefit changes

4. Strengthen policy responses to childhood obesity and ensure they are accompanied by robust monitoring and enforcement

5. Support small and medium enterprise food producers, particularly new entrant farmers, to be productive, sustainable and financially viable

6. Establish an agreed plan to enhance and build UK agricultural diversity, including the means of food production and the types of food produced

7. Invest and support research on UK food systems in order to develop a baseline against which to define sustainable nutrition policies for the UK
Neighbourly’s surplus food scheme

SDG TARGETS: 2.1, 2.2, 12.3

Neighbourly’s surplus food scheme connects local charities that can distribute surplus supermarket food to local stores, including the branches of two major food retailers, M&S and Lidl. Since it was set up, Neighbourly’s scheme has provided over 2.7 million meals and has been so successful that they’ve now extended to other products that households may require, such as toiletries or cleaning products.

Local charities using the scheme include:

- The community café at the Central Community Centre in Scunthorpe, which offers decent and nutritious meals at a low cost to residents in the local area.

- Middle Part Community Centre in Eltham, London, which caters for over 60 children every school day, providing them with a nutritious breakfast to start their day and help them learn. The centre also provides meals for elderly residents in the local area four days a week.

www.neighbourly.com/aboutsurplus
Endnotes


2 Royal College of Physicians and Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. (2016). Every breath we take: The lifelong impact of air pollution.


14 Joint Nature Conservation Committee. (2017). UK Biodiversity Indicators. www.jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4231
