



Who is making food policy in **England**



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Food Policy**
Shaping an effective food system

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National government responsibilities for food policy-making in England



Overall strategy and policy oversight
Policy coordination (e.g. Childhood Obesity Plan)
Coordination of Sector Security and Resilience Plans (include food as part of Critical National Infrastructure)

Planning policy, including development and housing provision (affecting food access)
Urban regeneration / revitalisation of high streets (affecting food access)
Liaison with Local Authorities on resilience and emergencies, including food supply

Overall control of government and departmental spending
Imposition of taxes, including on foods and food businesses
Imposition of trade tariffs (export and import taxes)

Administration of the rule of law (including food safety, animal welfare and employment law) through courts and penalty system
Prison catering

Food-related research and agricultural support for developing countries
Support for export of UK agri-tech innovation
Assistance in humanitarian crises, including famine
Building overseas food system resilience
Support for Sustainable Development Goals

Standards for school food
Free School Meals
Healthy Schools ratings scheme
Support for school milk and fruit-and-veg schemes
Food in National Curriculum

Climate change, including agriculture and food-related aspects
UK strategy to develop agricultural technology
Support for food system science, research & innovation
Industrial Strategy, including ambitions on food
National Minimum Wage, relevant to food workers
Groceries Code Adjudicator (regulates major retailers' direct supply chains)
Competition policy, including in the food industry

Post-Brexit trade, potentially affecting food standards, production and prices

Development of agriculture, fisheries and environment policies
Food and agriculture-related climate change policy
Natural resources relevant to food system
Farm animal welfare
Food and food packaging waste
Aspects of food labelling
Oversight of Public Procurement of food and catering services
Support for school milk and fruit-and-veg schemes
Leads on National Food Strategy, food in Security and Resilience planning, UK input to Codex Alimentarius

Nutritional aspects of public health
Support for Childhood Obesity Plan
Advice to government and stakeholders on diet-related health
Production of UK's Eatwell dietary guidelines (PHE soon to be replaced by the National Institute for Health Protection)

Diet-related public health
Obesity, including Childhood Obesity Plan
Food assistance (Healthy Start Vouchers, free vitamins)
Some aspects of food labelling
Anti-microbial resistance (AMR) (linked to intensive livestock production)
Nutritional standards for Public Food Procurement

Advertising, including restrictions on promotion of certain foods
Role in Childhood Obesity Plan through regulation of advertising
Digital infrastructure (important to food businesses and consumers, especially in rural areas)

Regulation and administration of social security payments relevant to tackling food insecurity and diet-related ill-health
Regulation of health and safety at work, including for food workers

Labour, including migrant labour relevant to food production, hospitality, etc
Licensing of food chain labour via Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority
Exposure of 'modern slavery' in food supply chains

Strategic policy for / investment in transport infrastructure (road, rail, aviation, maritime), relevant to food transportation, worker transport and food access
Driver licensing, including for food haulage drivers

Oversight of food and feed safety regulation
Support for Local Authority enforcement of food regulations
Direct responsibility for safety of meat, dairy, wine
Guidance for stakeholders on food safety and hygiene
Scientific advice to government on food
Aspects of food labelling
Oversight of National Food Crime Unit
Food surveillance (alerts on contamination, etc)



Who is making food policy in England

In England, at the level of national government¹, policy that affects the food system is made by at least 16 departments and public bodies.

Central to these is the **Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs** (DEFRA), the main policy-making department for farming, fisheries and the environment, which is supported by 33 agencies and public bodies. DEFRA is responsible for devising the policies that will replace the Common Agricultural Policy and Common Fisheries Policy, the frameworks which the UK shared with the European Union (EU) until Brexit. A flagship DEFRA policy has been the National Food Strategy, initiated in 2019 and due to make its final report in 2021, to be followed by a government policy paper.

The **Food Standards Agency** (a non-ministerial department) is responsible for regulating the safety and hygiene of food and animal feed; for food surveillance (alerting businesses and consumers to food hazards); and for monitoring food crime. The **Department for Health and Social Care** (DHSC) has responsibilities for nutritional aspects of health, which include the government's main policy to combat obesity, the Childhood Obesity Plan (which involves cross-working with other departments). DHSC also sets the nutritional standards for Public Sector Procurement of food and catering. **Public Health England** (PHE), an executive agency of DHSC, is responsible for providing scientific evidence, advice and professional expertise in support of the diet-related aspects of health policy. This includes technical advice to

government on nutrients, public campaigns on healthy eating, and the Eatwell Guide, which sets out the government's recommended healthy diet. In August 2020 it was announced that PHE was to be replaced by a new agency, the **National Institute for Health Protection**, but it was not made clear where diet-related public health responsibilities would reside after this change. The **Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport** plays a part in food policy through its regulation of advertising (including restrictions on promotion of certain foods, part of the Childhood Obesity Plan), and through its responsibility for digital infrastructure, increasingly important to food businesses and food consumers.

The **Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy** (BEIS) has a key role, with food the UK's largest manufacturing sector and accounting for a significant number of businesses in production, retail and hospitality. BEIS is responsible for industrial strategy, for championing UK food-related research and innovation, and for climate change policy (where the food system is both a driver and a mitigator). BEIS also administers the National Minimum Wage (which affects many food sector workers) and oversees the work of the Groceries Code Adjudicator, which regulates the major supermarkets' treatment of their direct suppliers. As of September 2020, support to developing countries in the areas of food aid and agriculture is provided by the **Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office**, into which the former **Department for International Development** has been merged. Food is pivotal to its work on meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. The **Department for International Trade**, formed in 2016 to prepare the UK for trading as an independent nation after Brexit, is likely to have a growing impact on food policy, with trade agreements potentially affecting domestic food standards, production practices, availability and prices.

The **Department for Education** is responsible for standards for food eaten in schools; for supporting schemes to boost nutrition (e.g. by providing free milk or fruit and veg for selected age groups); and for providing school meals to children in lower-income families via Free School Meal vouchers. Schools are also responsible for delivering food education as part of the National Curriculum.

The **Home Office** is responsible for migration, which affects the food system because large numbers of migrants work on farms, in food processing plants and in the hospitality sector. Some of this labour is regulated by the **Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority**, a Home Office agency. The **Department for Work and Pensions** (DWP) is responsible for social security payments, which affect both recipients' ability to access enough food and also the quality of their diet. DWP also has responsibility for health and safety at food-related workplaces, through its agency the **Health and Safety Executive**. The **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government** is responsible for planning policy and urban regeneration, both of which can affect access to food shops and markets, and for liaising with Local Authorities in emergencies, when food supplies need to be protected. The **Department for Transport** looks after transport infrastructure of all kinds, on which food distribution depends. The **Ministry of Justice** underpins the food system by administering the rule of law, and is also responsible for prison catering.

Finally, the **Cabinet Office** has an overarching role in coordinating policy across government. **Her Majesty's Treasury** also has a controlling role, in that it oversees government and departmental spending.

¹ As distinct from the three Devolved Administrations (DAs) of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, or the local level. Agriculture, fisheries, food safety and standards, and health are devolved competences in all three DAs, so governance may differ from England's in these policy areas. Some food-related responsibilities are also devolved to Local Authorities in England.

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About us

The Centre for Food Policy at City, University of London, is an interdisciplinary unit working to shape food systems that improve the health of people, society, the environment and the economy.

We engage with people across the food system to uncover how it really works in practice. We use these insights to educate, influence, and to inform effective, joined-up food policy.



Food Research Collaboration

This Brief is based on the Food Research Collaboration publication *Who makes food policy in England? A map of government actors and activities*, by Kelly Parsons. London: Food Research Collaboration, 2019.

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