The UK Government’s food policy: from tentative integration to policy confinement

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Where is UK food Policy going?
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UK Food Policy...

• Key features shaped UK Government Food Policy from late 1990s - focus on UK & England

• UK Government formulated more integrated food policy:
  – *Food 2030* vision (2010).

• Identify some of the policy actions of the Coalition Government over last 18 months → move away from policy integration to policy confinement?
Framing of policy reforms late 1990s → late 2000s...

1. **International trade liberalisation** → make UK farming internationally **competitive**
2. Keep **food prices low** – keep inflation low
3. Food supply security through **open and competitive markets**
4. **CAP reform** **environmental/public goods** support for agriculture (WTO “Green Box” compliant)
5. **Consumer advice** focus: food safety & nutrition - **Role of FSA**
6. Re-affirm **trust** in production → “re-connection” producers to consumers
7. External **costs of diet related ill health** emerge & **strategy** evolve
8. **Resilience** of international supply base? **New fundamentals:**
   - **Energy** inputs
   - **Natural resource base** & its long term stability questioned
   - **weather volatility**...

**Production & consumption?**
Background to Food Matters (2008)

- Origins lay in awareness that a **new politics of food** was emerging in civil society “below the policy radar”
- **Health, environmental & ethical concerns**
- **Consumption** end focus for food policy (not production)
- Gordon Brown (2007-2010) 1st PM Strategy Unit study
- **Blue skies** thinking/strategic
- Food **price hikes** 2007/8
- Shift to policy **recommendations** (compromise)
Food Matters (2008) – four strategic food policy objectives

- **Fair prices, choice**, access to food and food security through open and competitive markets
- Continuous improvement in the safety of food
- A further transition to healthier diets
- A more sustainable food chain

and more ‘effective, joined up working’ and ‘stronger arrangements in place to deal with cross cutting issues’.
UK food policy changes post *Food Matters* 2008-10

- **Defra** structural changes:
  - Lead Dept on Food: chair cross govt Cabinet Committee
  - new objective (DSO 7) ‘a sustainable, secure and healthy food supply’
  - Council of Food Policy Advisors set up by Minister Tony Benn
  - Food Policy Unit within Department
  - Climate change moved to Dept Energy & CC (DECC)

- **Food Vision 2030**
  - Underpinned by *Indicators for a sustainable food system*.
  - Revised *assessment*/*indicators* for measuring Food Security

- **UK Cross-Government Food Research & Innovation Strategy**

- FSA-led *Integrated Advice to Consumer* (web) 2009→
Identifying indicators for a secure and sustainable food supply
Food Policy impacts 2008-2010?

• Government examined food sector

• *Food Matters* emphasis on consumption end = public health & sustainability

• + revisited food security & supply

• Strategic **2030 Vision** (Jan 2010)
  – Clearer identification of trends & indicators
  – *Voluntary* initiatives with industry

• Increasing policy awareness of production-consumption links for sustainability
UK Government Foresight
*Future Food & Farming (2011)* challenges

- Balancing future demand & supply sustainably
- Addressing threat of future volatility
- Ending hunger
- Meeting low emissions world
- Maintaining biodiversity & ecosystem services while feeding world
Coalition Government - Con/Lib Dem (June 2010)
Food Policy Redirection - 1

• Focus on production end – support farmers/producers (Defra)

• Give Food industry key role in voluntary “responsibility deals”
  • Nudge not nanny approach to dietary related public health
  • But some Public Health groups & professions stepping away

• Remove Nutrition from FSA → Dept Health
• Closed Integrated Advice to Consumers

• Austerity/budget deficit reduction
  • Remove Consumer Agency
  • Remove policy role of Govt. environmental agencies bring in house to Departments
  • Remove regional policy delivery bodies
Coalition Government Food Policy redirection - 2

- **Defra** = industry sector promotion body
  - promote interests of British producers in “feeding the world”
  - Embrace “**sustainable intensification**” of Royal Society = life sciences led
- **Food Vision** fading away – replaced by **Foresight report Future for Food & Farming** = 2050 time line
- **Green Food Project** = production & environmental impact → 2050 (Natural Environment White Paper)
- **Defra** internal reform
  - Council of Food Policy advisors gone
  - Food Policy Unit reduced
  - Deliver Budget cuts
  - Indicators?
Defra - Structural Reform Plan 2010-11: examples of policy milestones

• **Promote increased UK production**: Government Department Buying Standards:
  – public procurement sustainable food guidelines set June 2011 (weak)

• **Adjudicator** to monitor & enforce **Groceries Supply Code of Practice**
  – suppliers protected against retailers passing on excessive risks/unexpected costs.
  – no teeth?

• Inc. **voluntary** initiative to encourage more information **about origins** of UK foods
  – retailers agreement on meat products late 2010
  – EU regulate 2011 (today) **Food Information Regulation**

• **New animal welfare** regime (EU level)

• **Revise/simplify** EU cross compliance regulations
  – industry led Farming Regulation Task Force report May 2011
Multi level governance remains...

• **EU** is currently over **90% self-sufficient** in agricultural products (farm gate value) (Defra 2010)

• **EU takes 80% of UK food exports** (exports are only c. 1/3rd value of imports)

• **UK food imports from EU in 2006 = 57%** (unprocessed value) or **69%** (added value)

• **EU main regulatory arena** for agri-food sector

• **Regional /local food policy initiatives** emerging...
Debate about policy instruments = how to balance and deploy …

- Regulation – specific & framing
- Target setting
- Voluntary actions
- Financial supports & inducements linked to sustainability standards
- Labelling & information
- Fiscal instruments = limited to date (e.g. taxes)
- R & D & translational research
- Education and skills
Conclusions - where are we?

• Clearer identification of the scope of food policy & its key elements

• Lots of activity but less action but did “have a plan”.

• New Government – some continuity but also signs of political reversal & confinement around policy delivery

• Food Sector & Food Policy needs strategic interventions for the long term
  – E.g. Fruit & Vegetable task force recommendations