SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND DRINK GROUP (SFADG) update – February 2024

GOOD FOOD FOR ALL Michelle Donelan, MP, has met with representatives of the SFADG, Zero Waste and Fairtrade Groups and some food chain businesses. It was a constructive meeting and Michelle will represent our concerns to other Secretaries of State, government departments and Wiltshire Council where appropriate and feedback to us.

LOW ENERGY COOKING APPLIANCES If you would like to try a slow cooker, pressure cooker or air fryer to see if it suits your needs and lifestyle before buying, contact **office@bradfordonavontowncouncil.gov.uk** for details of the short term equipment loan scheme, set up by the TC and CFB.

FOOD SECURITY More farmland in England has been sold to investors and lifestyle buyers than farmers for the first time – figures for last year from the agents Strutt and Parker show that less than half of buyers last year were farmers – that's in comparison with 50 to 60 % in previous years. [This is scary from the point of view of food security.]

FROM MEMBERS:

- Nigel Gerdes: Chris Van Tulleken (author of best seller book Ultra Processed People) gives a Royal Institution lecture **here**. It covers the main content of the book. He is as good a speaker as he is an author.

- Roni Ross: We watched a really great film on Netflix last night called 'Big little farm' about a couple in America who wanted to farm sustainably. It was excellent and full of hope which we lost a bit here but sooo uplifting and shows what is possible with the right people leading.

'LET'S EAT BALANCED' The Let's Eat Balanced website (here) encourages a varied diet for health and the planet, which is plant-rich and can include moderate amounts of meat and dairy produce: **"HOW MUCH RED MEAT CAN I EAT WITHIN GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES?** Red meat, such as beef, lamb and pork, is a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals, and can form part of a balanced diet. The advice on red and processed meat is that if you're eating more than 90g daily (cooked weight), the Department of Health and Social Care recommends scaling back to 70g (equivalent to no more than 500g each week). It's not about deprivation but achieving balance, enjoying meat benefits while embracing plant-rich diversity."

This is consistent with guidelines an many major reports on healthy eating and the environment; and with what the IDDRI research indicates can be produced sustainably in Europe for the projected 2050 population. A vegan diet would take more arable land and need more agrichemicals.

Jeremy Wire, CFB newsletter editor, raised concern earlier this month about the Eat Balanced advertising citing this Desmog article (**here**). I have not seen the advertising, however, it should also be borne in mind that the NHS is now seeing more and more people (and hospital admissions) with dietary deficiencies, partly through food poverty and partly through dietary choices, including many that could easily be avoided by the inclusion of some meat in the diet.

The Food Programme on Radio 4 on 14th Jan - Eating for Two? – on diet and pregnancy, included reference to case studies showing that vegetarian and vegan diets without sufficient supplementation before and during pregnancy can lead to brain atrophy in babies (this even occurred in women who had a strong sense of their own ability to achieve a good dietary status whilst excluding meat or animal-sourced products) and a range of other problems for mother and baby, which can persist in the DNA. Dietary inadequacy in men can also be passed to the DNA of offspring and persist through life.

These are highly serious issues. So, highlighting the important range of certain nutrients that meat contains, that is more nutritionally complete and readily available to the body than from plant sources, is probably overdue. The advice is that meat and dairy can be eaten in moderation.

Prof Alice Stanton, professor of cardiovascular pharmacology at the Royal College of Surgeons, and a group of other academics, supported by the World Cancer Research Fund and the Academy of Nutrition Scientists, **challenged the authors of the Global Burden of Disease Report (GBD 2019**), **who had indicated that 0% consumption of red meat was without health risks,** to be transparent in their workings in identifying health risks associated with unprocessed red meat. After repeated requests, **in Oct 2022, the authors finally published in Nature Medicine a 'Burden of Proof Study' saying there is "NO OR VERY WEAK EVIDENCE THAT UNPROCESSED RED MEAT IS ASSOCIATED WITH ANY RISK**. The evidence is insufficient to make any strong or conclusive recommendations (up to 200g per day)." Stanton makes the point that this level is too high and would be an unbalanced diet and endorses the current government guidelines (see above) and refers to clear research benefits to eating red meat a minimum of twice a week (250g cooked weight).

Unfortunately, the original GBD study has been cited over 2,000 times (although not all citations pertain to red meat). Their data and analyses are quoted and influence:

- the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation
- World Health Organisation
- European Commission – Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system
- National Food Strategy (Jonathan Dimbleby) (England, but collaboration with Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland)
- Willet W et al. Food in the Anthropocene: EAT-*Lancet* Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems

People can eat what they choose. However, whatever your dietary preference, I strongly recommend watching this **WEBINAR**, where Pasture for Life invited Prof Stanton to give a presentation (about 40 mins).

There are GHG emissions associated with all of our food production – methane is a particular issue with ruminant meat. Specialist crop production is associated with serious degradation of soil health globally and most arable soils have lost 40-60% of their organic carbon. Much is grown in agrichemical-dependent monocultures, hostile to biodiversity below and above ground. Too great a percentage of these crops is used to feed livestock, mainly poultry and pigs, but much is also for direct human consumption. **The carbon calculator metrics are not currently fit for purpose to guide our dietary choices. Both our crops and animal-sourced food need to be produced to high environmental and ethical standards.**

LORD DEBEN, **until recently chair of the Climate Change Committee**, who is very critical of the government back-tracking on climate pledges, says that veganism is not the solution to climate change. He has encouraged specialist arable farmers to reintroduce grazed temporary pasture into their rotations. He says that we have made it more difficult to take up carbon: sea and soil are less able to sequester carbon than they were; chemicals; crops without return of biomass to soils; deforestation. He says we need to make the present system work. Complete system change will not come quickly enough to avoid the major climate impacts and rescue us (eg hydrogen energy). **Regenerative farming is absolutely vital; integrate nature**. COP hasn't dealt in the past with shipping, aviation or agriculture.

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'EATING OUR WAY TO EXTINCTION' here, shown at Melksham recently, is being extolled by some Wiltshire Climate Alliance members, who want it to be shown widely. I can see that this film can be powerfully influential. However, I question the conclusions. Some points that might be considered:

- production of commodity crop in vast agrichemical mono-cultures with associated problems produce plant foods not just used for animal feed, but also for direct human consumption
- a govt doc on food security describes how modern crop production methods create a hostile environment for biodiversity
- there are powerful vested interests promoting/lobbying for plant-based products (from cheap industrialised mono-cultures at a big mark-up), as well as those for animal-sourced products
- in the UK grasslands are a net carbon sink, arable land is a net source (ONS). This does not even take into account that specialist croplands are running on low with 40-60% loss of organic carbon content (notice the soil cloud behind machinery these days as the land is worked).
- most beef consumed in UK is produced here and fed mainly on grass and grass products (very different to feed lot system); the rest mainly comes from the EU. South American beef mainly eaten there or exported to the Far East.
- considerable amounts of soy meal are imported to UK, mainly as poultry and pig feed and for dairy cattle, not so much to beef cattle. It is the residue after the soy is pressed for oil for vegetable oil, or biofuel. However, it is this animal feed co-product which has tended to drive expansion of soy cultivation most of the time. So decreasing intensive poultry, pig and dairy consumption indicated.
- Lord Deben, until recently Chair of the CCC, is highly critical of the govt's failure to take strong enough measures on climate change. He does not think that veganism is a solution to the food and farming problems and has urged specialist arable farmers to adopt regenerative soil management including reintroducing grazing livestock in the rotation.
- Springmann's study, that he himself refers to in the film, points consumers towards a vegan diet. It uses the most common functional unit used to assess carbon footprint, which is emissions per Kg of product. However, clearly the nutritional content can be very different between products. The metrics are not fit for purpose at present. See 'Measuring sustainable environment-food system interactions' https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pn-0702/ Research Briefing. Published Monday, 24 July, 2023
- 'Surge in number of people in hospital with nutrient deficiencies, NHS figures show' - see **here**. Hospital data for England and Wales, obtained by the Guardian, reveals a startling rise in diagnoses linked to poor diet in the past decade, with nearly half a million admissions of patients with iron deficiencies, hundreds of thousands suffering from vitamin deficiencies and more than 10,000 cases of malnutrition last year.
- Prof Alice Stanton and a group of other academics, supported by World Cancer Research and WWF, challenged the authors of the Global Burden of Disease Report (2019) to be transparent in their workings in identifying health risks associated with unprocessed red meat. In Oct 2022, the authors finally published in Nature Medicine a Burden of Proof Study saying there is "No or very weak evidence that unprocessed red meat is associated with any risk." Unfortunately, their original study has been cited over 2,000 times (although not all citations pertain to red meat), including in the National Food Strategy. Prof Stanton indicates that there are positive benefits to health in eating at least 2 portions of red meat a week and it can be up to 500g or 70g per day. This is consistent with what the IDDRI research indicates can be produced sustainably in Europe. A vegan diet would take more arable land.
- only about1% of water extraction in the UK is used for agriculture mainly in the arable/horticultural south east.
- the film shows crop failures due to climate extremes - this is forecast to increase in the future - grazing livestock, which are not grain dependent increase food security
- good that issues over farmed fish highlighted
- support a plant-rich diet and well-produced plant and animal-sourced foods, rather than "plant-based" (vegan)
- methane levels continued to rise rapidly during about 3 years (around 2018?) when global ruminant numbers were decreasing - cause poorly understood. Are eg. gas leaks a much bigger issue than currently identified/admitted by energy companies?

Ros Edwards