Meeting with the Rt Hon Brian Mathew, MP, on October 12th 2024

Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon - Sustainable Food and Drink

Good Food for All

A global study by 400 scientists from different disciplines over 4 years (IAASTD, 2008) into how to feed the projected 2050 population sustainably, recommended a central role for agroecology in environmental sustainability, integrating food production with restoration of nature.

Question 1: Will you please ask the government, on our behalf, to support the adoption of better tools for a standardised assessment of sustainability in the food and farming sectors? Please, particularly consider supporting:

- **the Soil Association Exchange** - so that farmers and other businesses can use a single tool to calculate their carbon impacts. It is an assessment tool based on the GFM framework (see below).
- **adoption of the Global Farm Metric (GFM)** as a common framework of metrics for monitoring whole farm sustainability. Currently being tested in 11 countries around the world.
- **CLEAR** (Consortium of Labelling for the Environment, Animal Welfare and Regenerative Farming) representing over 50 businesses and organisations, to support better labelling for food system change



Background

Nutritious, sustainably-produced food includes benefits for: learning and behaviour; short and long-term physical and mental health; restoration of nature; and reduction in the impacts of climate change.

Progress in achieving a sustainable food system is impeded by the polarisation of views regarding what constitutes an environmentally-friendly farming system and dietary intake. This polarisation is fuelled by carbon calculators which only measure what can be easily captured statistically. Derived from use in industry, these metrics have become 'drivers' of intensive farming (on a 'more for less basis'), such as intensive crop and poultry farming. They are not a measure of sustainability.

In a correspondence with Foodsteps in May 2022, the view was expressed to me that they, as an industry [carbon calculators], tend to count the easy things to measure, and that this undoubtedly creates some unintended outcomes and distortions (such as favouring scale).

Carbon calculators point consumers in the direction of dietary exclusions; they divorce people from the reality of farming and food production and mire discussion in perplexity. For example, these metrics separate co-products and give them different values, such as dairy produce and dairy beef – however, the UN says that "this meat production is a biologically inevitable co-product of the dairy production". Most of our plant foods are grown globally in intensive, agri-chemical-dependent mono-cultures, with thinning, carbon and biodiversity-depleted soils: this is not reflected in the carbon footprint of food.

The carbon footprint of different food types is widely calculated by the emissions per unit of weight of product. However, the nutrients in a kilo of carrots are very different from in, for example, a kilo of cheese or meat. A UN report (2023) concludes that "Efforts are underway to develop metrics that account for nutrient density

when measuring the impacts of [animal-sourced foods] and other foods, and this may present a different picture with respect to dietary recommendations for planetary health".

Climate change makes widespread global crop failures an increasing possibility in the future, according to the Met Office and the UN. (This year is now reported to be the second worst UK harvest on record.) Valuing our grassland foods increases food security. Lord Deben, as Chair of the Climate Change Committee, urged specialist arable farmers to reintegrate livestock grazing into their rotations. Scientists from Rothamsted Research, and elsewhere, are increasingly discovering the importance of mixed farming for soil health, carbon sequestration, soil hydrology, resilience to drought and flooding, nutrient transfer to crops and reduction of use of fossil fuel-based agri-chemicals.

Currently, there are a range of on-farm carbon calculator tools which can give contradictory assessment results. Researchers and farmers tell us better tools are needed, which take more aspects of sustainability into account; and standardisation is needed to make true comparisons and analysis possible.

In view of the present inadequate state of the metrics, it seems vital that food sections of carbon calculators are removed in their present form as a matter of urgency, as they are misleading. For better outcomes, we ask you to urge the Government to embrace the work of the 3 organisations at the top of this document and develop standardised measures. These issues need to be at the forefront of the thinking in national policies.

Additional information:

- An interesting interview with Prof Rudolf Hans Herren, Co-Chair of the IAASTD, can be found at Global Agriculture 'Agriculture at a crossroads IAASTD findings and recommendations for future farming' pp. 48-49 – see here.
- Soil Association's newly launched Soil Exchange, supported by Lloyd's Bank, is reported in the Farmers Weekly (7th Oct 2024) - see here.
- Global Farm Metric: the latest framework can be found here.
- CLEAR – see here. Labelling needs to indicate how food is produced. The Chair, Fidelity Weston, gave a very good talk for CFBoA in February.
- Please see our CFBoA document 'Environmental Impacts of Our Food And Drink: The Misleading Metrics' here (there are links to our two earlier discussion documents at the end).
- Please see here a highly relevant Parliamentary POST (July 24th 2023) on the challenges of developing reliable metrics in the food and farming system.

Question 2: Please will you ask the government to deliver on pre-election pledges to require that a minimum of 50% of food procured for Public Sector Catering is produced locally or to higher environmental standards, whilst ensuring fair returns to farmers and growers here and abroad, and addressing food poverty?

Question 3: **Please will you ask the government to do more to enable agro-ecological fruit and veg production (large and small-scale) to become viable across the country?** Horticulture is in dire straits at present. Our wonderful local growers request that you ask the Govt to adopt recommendations in Henry Dimbleby's National Food Strategy; and also, support the Land Workers Alliance suggestions for rural planning reform detailed here.

It would be good to have an opportunity to talk more with you about sustainable food and drink issues, when you can find time.

Many thanks,

Ros Edwards Chair of the CFBoA Sustainable Food and Drink Group October 2024
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