CFBoA SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND DRINK GROUP (SFADG)

Update – January 2026

NUTRIENTS, FOOD SECURITY AND A CHANGE OF NARRATIVE

This interesting article in The Conversation, see here, was brought to my attention by Jeremy Wire (newsletter editor). It describes how increased **climate change** brings about faster plant growth. This is likely to result in our **food containing more calories from greater carbon dioxide uptake, but less essential nutrients**, such as iron, zinc and protein.

Changes in the way food is produced, both at primary production stage (farming) and at processing stage (think ultra-processed foods), have already led to significant declines in nutrient content in some of our foods.

Nutrient-rich food is high on the public agenda at the moment, particularly as the corporate food retailers try to get 'ahead of the game' developing products for the increasing number of people using weight loss drugs.

Eating well-produced food, from farmers and growers who use a **sustainable soil management** approach, is vital for health and the environment. We have plenty of excellent local producers doing their very best to produce good food, whilst caring for the environment and biodiversity.

Food security is also an increasing concern and the Financial Times this week has published an article on how some countries are starting to stockpile food again. These include Sweden, Norway, India and Indonesia which are "holding back increasing quantities of rice, wheat and other staples as insurance against a world they increasingly view as unstable". (From Sustainable Food Trust Daily News Digest 14/01/2026)

Farmgate prices for arable crops such as wheat and oats have been at an historic low this year even though for many it was a very poor harvest. This is due to the global trade in commodities, which had a surplus (the UN and Met Office has warned in the past that there could be widespread global crop failures in the future, associated with climate change). Some UK farmers are having to take a decision whether to plant crops again this year, or whether energy production or biodiversity restoration might give them better returns. **Buying well-produced local/UK food** supports local farmers and producers, rural communities and improves food security.

Hodmedod's (the wholesaler and online retailer that promotes British pulses and grains) has reiterated in their latest newsletter that beans, other than fava beans, are

difficult to grow to the grade required for human consumption in the UK, so they are having to import most other varieties. Fava beans are a great ingredient in many dishes and do not require prior soaking. If thinking of stocking some reserve stores, in case of future food supply disruption, this, and some of their other UK-produced products, seem to me a good choice.

With the climate changing, other crops may become possible. In fact, the first UK commercially-grown olive harvest has taken place in 2025, and a rice paddy has been developed in the Norfolk Broads! However, the climate is not changing in a steady and predictable way and the erratic seasons and extreme weather events are becoming an increasing problem for all food production. What we eat needs to depend partly on what does particularly well in any given year or season.

It should be borne in mind that the carbon footprint of food products is not a measure of sustainability and is not a good guide to environmentally-friendly dietary or product choices. Derived from industrial measures, the flawed metrics used (see UK Parliament POST *Measuring sustainable environment-food system interactions [July 2023]* here and our document on the *Misleading Metrics [2021]* here) have been driving intensive farming and food production, which are often associated with wide-reaching environmental harms. (Climate Change Committee please note!)

Professor Michael Lee, Deputy Vice Chancellor of Harper Adams University (who we were privileged to hear speak at our webinar 'Green Eating and the Land' in 2022), is an expert on sustainable livestock systems (see here). He spoke to the World Meat Congress in November 2025, prior to **COP30**. **He was particularly critical of the dominant sustainability metric: CO_2 equivalence per kg of product. This 'oversimplification' is sowing confusion among consumers and demoralising farmers. He said: "This is a linear metric, and linearity does not define the benefit and role of livestock in a sustainable food system. Circularity defines the role of livestock. We need to stop defining our food system with linear metrics which do not show the true balance."** The circularity of agriculture – ruminants converting land, crops and by-products unsuitable for human consumption into food – was routinely overlooked, as was the sector's social impact… **Nor did weight-based metrics account for nutritional density**… We produce a fantastic, wide array of plant- and animal-sourced foods and they all have different nutritional density.

Prof Lee told the Congress that while farming could never be carbon-free, because 'agriculture is carbon', the industry was making significant progess in balancing emissions against the land's natural capacity to absorb them. Yet current reporting methods failed to reflect this reality.

"**The energy and transportation sectors are decarbonising and removing thermogenic carbon** from their systems" said Prof Lee.**" Nature exemplifies net zero. Nature produces methane, carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide, but balances it with its net removal of these gases. Agriculture is a perfect example of a system targeting net zero." The critical distinction, he argued, was between decarbonisation and net zero – concepts that were being conflated to the detriment of agriculture.** (Reported in the Farmers Guardian, Nov 24th 2025). Also, read here and here.

New [Scottish] toolkit aims to cut through confusion on red meat and nutrition – see here. This article resonates with me as several good friends, previously vegetarian or vegan, have over the last year started including more meat or dairy in their diet because of nutritional deficits. One, who ate a little meat, has increased her intake of red meat as over a long period she had been tired and dizzy and was found to be anaemic. She was given tablets, but is now managing to maintain her iron levels satisfactorily by eating more red meat and is looking and feeling considerably better. Whereas some people do manage their nutritional status satisfactorily, whilst excluding animal—sourced foods, it should be noted that there has been a rise in people needing NHS treatment and hospitalisation due to dietary deficiencies, particularly amongst teenage girls and young women and older people.

The Conversation report (September 2, 2025 – for link see the SFADG entry in the Sept 2025 CFB newsletter) concluded '… a variety of protein sources, plenty of vegetables and fruits, and minimally processed foods, remains the most evidence-based path to optimal health… As nutrition science continues to evolve, **the most prudent approach remains the least dramatic: moderation, variety and balance in all things.'** [This aligns with the UN/Food Climate Research Network 2016 dietary recommendations adopted by CFBoA, see here, and see our handout – Food for Thought - here.]

People can choose what they wish to eat (if they can afford to). Eating meat and dairy should be part of a varied diet, which is plant-rich and includes other protein sources, such as: fish; eggs; nuts; mushrooms; legumes and pulses; grains and seeds.

ENJOY GOOD FOOD AND DRINK

If you wish to be on the SFADG circulation list, please contact Ros Edwards at climatechampions@gmail.com