City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Hawkes, C. & Parsons, K. (2019). Brief 1: Tackling Food Systems Challenges: The Role of Food Policy. London: Centre for Food Policy.

This is the published version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/22793/

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to City Research Online policy.

City Research Online: http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/ publications@citystgeorges.ac.uk

Academic excellence for business and the professions

CITY
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
EST 1894

Centre for Food Policy
Educating, researching & influencing for integrated and inclusive food policy

Rethinking Food Policy:
A Fresh Approach to Policy and Practice

Brief 1: Tackling food systems challenges: the role of food policy

What is the problem?

Food systems are at the heart of many of the major challenges facing the world today. A fresh approach to food policy is needed to provide real solutions to these challenges. The purpose of this series of Briefs is to suggest ways forward for doing food policy differently in the 21st century.

Poor diet causes more ill health and mortality than any other risk factor; using antibiotics in food-producing animals presents a major threat to the ability to fight human infection; over 800 million people face chronic food deprivation; food production generates around one-third of the greenhouse gases that cause climate change; in major conflicts, food becomes a weapon of war; many millions of people working in food systems are badly paid and poorly treated, despite the wealth food systems generate.

Food is implicated in the most important health, environmental, economic, social and political challenges of our time.

The role of food policy in tackling these problems is gaining traction at many levels, but the persistence of food-related problems – and increasing pressures on the food system – makes clear that better policy is needed. If inadequately addressed, these problems will only get much worse.

Food policy: what it is and why it matters

The challenges facing the food system are shaped by numerous decisions, made by numerous people.

These decisions include those made by institutions of the state. For example, agricultural policies influence what the fishing and farming industries produce. Policies on agricultural land affect who farms. Animal welfare policy influences how animals reared for food are treated.

Food trade policies have bearing on what is imported and exported, as well as on transport costs, tariffs and the global competitiveness of national food businesses. Food aid policies affect the type and effectiveness of assistance to countries experiencing conflict and instability, and food safety policies establish the mechanisms for reducing food contamination. Food waste policies have implications for environmental resources. Policies on food education impact on people's cooking skills. Food labelling guidance affects consumers' knowledge about what they eat. Nutrition policies can influence the standards of food on sale and food advertising.

Beyond policies that are obviously about food, like agricultural or nutrition policy, many wider government decisions also affect food indirectly. Social policy can limit how much money people have for food. Policies on labour influence how much time and energy people have to shop for and prepare meals. Rules on occupational health direct how farms and food businesses support the health of their staff. Energy policy affects land use and the cost of fuel for food production. Policies on migration determine who works where in the food system. Exchange rate policy affects the profitability of food imports and exports. Planning and tax rules can encourage or discourage investments by farmers. Government investment in research influences food industry innovation.

These policies act on different parts of the food system in different ways. Most of them affect the private sector – the input suppliers, farmers, fishers, horticulturalists, agribusinesses, distributors, traders, manufacturers, entrepreneurs, retailers and food service businesses in the food supply chain and all the businesses they rely on – that make up so much of the food system. As the state itself does not produce food, the public sector often relies on the private sector to implement public policy. In turn, the private sector has a strong influence on policy development, lobbying for or against particular initiatives. The private sector also has its own policies – rules, standards, audits and accountability mechanisms – that affect food.

Taken together, this is food policy: all the policies which influence the food system and what people eat.

Food policy implies the setting of goals for the food system, such as production, environmental impact and nutrition, and "determining the processes of achieving these goals".[1] Like any field of policy, food policy can be delivered at multiple levels from the local to the global. It can be highly specific, such as a rule on the use of a particular pesticide, or a general overarching approach, such as an "urban food policy" (see page 3). It spans a complex web of institutions, infrastructure, people and processes and is subject to the influences and interests of countless parties, all of whom compete for a role in shaping it. It takes many forms, including action plans, strategies, framework legislation, statutes, bills, laws, court decisions, licensing, approvals, directives, regulations, guidelines, standards, codes of practice, specific programmes or voluntary initiatives. It also includes policies which attempt to integrate different elements of the food system.

Collectively, food policy (or in some cases its absence) shapes who eats what, when, where and at what cost.[2] It affects our nutrition and health, our livelihoods and communities, our cities and countryside, our nature and climate – now and for future generations. Food policy concerns the people whose jobs involve growing, moving, processing and selling food. Because everybody eats, food policy affects everyone: it matters.

The many challenges faced (and created) by the food system indicate food policy is not yet fit for purpose. Rethinking food policy presents a major opportunity to improve nutrition and health, protect the planet and contribute to economic and social prosperity, equitably.

Food policies: examples from around the world

Since 2016, Chile has required black warning labels on packaged foods high in energy, sugars, saturated fats and sodium

The Codex Alimentarius ("Food Code") was established in **1963** to set international standards, guidelines and codes around food safety, composition and labelling

In 2007, Copenhagen City Council decided that food served in its public institutions (schools, nurseries, old people's homes) would be 90 per cent organic

In 2017, the European Commission renewed the approval of glyphosate, a herbicide widely used in horticulture and agriculture for a further five years

In 2016, the French government passed a law banning supermarkets from destroying food waste and requiring them to donate it to food aid charities

The Central American Free Trade Agreement signed in **2004** reduces tariffs on US exports of meat parts, snack foods and food-processing equipment to Central America

India's Public Distribution System, established in **1950**, procures food grains from farmers and distributes them at subsidised prices through a network of Fair Price Shops with the goal of improving food security

Indonesia's 2012 Food Law aims to achieve self-sufficiency in production in rice, maize, soy, beef, sugar providing price support and fertiliser subsidies to agricultural producers

In Jamaica, the Banana Export Expansion Programme (2015) provides technical and infrastructure support to enable the expansion of the industry

In 2017, Haiti became the 117th country to mandate that all salt be fortified with iodine

The Urban Agriculture Promotion and Regulation Act (2015) in Nairobi, Kenya, allows food to be grown in the city and sets standards for organic waste management, food safety and environment protection

The Omnibus Investment Act (1987) in the Philippines exempted tax on imports of animal breeding stock and genetic materials for 10 years to encourage investment in livestock production

The Qatar Dietary Guidelines (2015) provide guidance on food choices which benefit both health and the environment

China's National Nutrition Plan (2017–30) includes targets to reduce stunting, obesity, anaemia and folic acid deficiency and increase breastfeeding rates

In 2019, the Mayor of London ruled that advertisements for foods and drinks high in fat, salt and sugar would not be approved for display on the city's public transportation network

In Senegal, the Fisheries Act of 2015 reformed previous policies to manage and protect fish stocks, including introduction of a fishing licence system for artisanal fishers

In 2017, the US Food and Drug Administration issued Guidance for Industry (GFI 213) stating that antibiotics used to treat humans can no longer be administered for growth promotion or feed efficiency in food animals

Throughout the **2000s and 2010s**, the Planning and Building Development Management department of the **City of Cape Town, South Africa**, gave planning permissions that enabled the growth of supermarket food retailing

One hundred and ninety countries have adopted **National Biological Diversity Strategies and Action Plans** as required by Article 6 of the **Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)**, many of which aim to maintain indigenous plant varieties for use as food

Mexico's cash transfer programme, Prospera, was established in **1997**. It provides cash to low-income women, with the requirement they must vaccinate their children, enrol them in school, and participate in a package of health interventions and diet and nutrition education

Food policy: evolution of a concept

The first use of the term "food policy" is not known, but there have been a series of key milestones in its evolution:

1910s The first usage of "food policy" in English appears to have been in journal articles during the first world war. Their emphasis was on the need for an overarching national policy that would enable governments to balance supply and demand. For example, in 1918, the economist Walton H Hamilton advocated in the *Journal of Political Economy* a "national food policy" in wartime, given the "baffling choices between conflicting interests".[3]

1930s In the wake of both the first world war and scientific discoveries in nutrition, Sir John Boyd Orr, a professor and UK government advisor, actively campaigned for a "food policy" to coordinate agricultural and nutritional policies. The Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy was established in the UK and the President of the Royal Society asked, "Is the time yet ripe for the initiation of a comprehensive National Food Policy; one that will endeavour to adjust production, in a qualitative as well as a quantitative sense, to right consumption, and at the same time organise all the details of distribution on national lines?"[4] In 1935, *Nature* published an item about the need for a national food policy, in light of "the interdependence of problems of public health, agriculture and economics".[5]

1945 Boyd Orr became founding head of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and proposed the development of a World Food Policy.[6] It failed to be adopted and there is little evidence that the FAO used the term "food policy" extensively thereafter.

1972-4 International institutions declared a "world food crisis" in the wake of declining food production, falling food stocks, rising prices and famines from the 1940s to the 1960s throughout sub-Saharan Africa and in the Soviet Union, China and India. In 1974 the FAO hosted the first ever World Food Conference at their headquarters in Rome, the same year an estimated 1.5 million people died in a famine in Bangladesh.

1975 An important year for the concept of food policy on several fronts:

- The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) was set up, following calls in the "Report of the World Food Conference 1974" for more information to deliver effective policies on food production and markets in developing countries.[7] IFPRI viewed food policy as mainly about agriculture, prices and trade and was largely staffed by agricultural economists.
- The academic journal *Food Policy* was launched. Its focus was on policy across the food system and its key goal was to unite different disciplines working on food.
- Norway published a Food and Nutrition Policy, aiming to achieve both agricultural self-sufficiency and improved nutrition and health.[8] Recent scientific developments on the link between food, especially fats, and health were among the stimuli.

1981 The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defined food policy as "a strategy that views the food economy and policies relating to it in an integrated way and in a broad economic and political context".[9]

1982 The first Food Policy Council was established in North America in Knoxville, Tennessee, shortly followed by Hartford, Connecticut, and Toronto, Canada. These councils brought together diverse stakeholders to examine how the food system operates and recommend improvements.

1983 *Food Policy Analysis* published. This book defined food policy as "the collective efforts of governments to influence the decision-making environment of food producers, food consumers, and food marketing agents in order to further social objectives".[10] It focused on the role of food policy as a requirement for developing countries to ensure efficient growth in agricultural sectors, improve income distribution, provide adequate food security and nutrition, and insure against uncertainty in food supplies and prices. It referred to "food policy analysts" as economists.

1993 The city of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, created a Municipal Secretariat for Food Supply to coordinate efforts to redress inequality and improve citizens' access to sufficient, healthy and nutritious food.[11] This enduring initiative set a model for other cities around the world.

1994 Centre for Food Policy established in London, UK, amid concerns that government was pursuing too narrow an approach to food policy. It saw food policy as critical for the UK and other rich countries, not just the "developing world", and advanced the concept of "joined-up food policy" to examine a range of different, but interconnected, problems. A decade on, *Food Wars*, a book by the Centre's founder, defined food policy as "the decision-making that shapes the way the world of food operates and is controlled".[12]

2000s The term food policy became much more widely used in North America in the context of both the development of local food systems initiatives[13] and greater focus on the role of national government and the food industry in the American diet.[14] After slow but steady growth, the number of Food Policy Councils ballooned in the mid-2000s, reaching 329 in 2016.[15] A publication on food policy councils published in 2009 defined food policy as "any policy that addresses, shapes or regulates the food system".[16]

2005 The Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity was established in the United States, a sign of the health community's greater awareness of the importance of food policy. Its initial emphasis was on policies such as restrictions on food marketing to children.

2008 *Case Studies in Food Policy for Developing Countries*[17] was published, covering a wide range of countries and issues, including domestic production, markets, environment, international trade, health, nutrition and poverty, and calling upon the "wisdom of disciplines including economics, nutrition, sociology, anthropology, environmental science, medicine, and geography to create a holistic picture of the state of the world's food systems today".[18]

2013 Both India and South Africa adopted major new food security policies, notable in that they shared a rights-based approach. India's National Food Security Act brought together one country's programmes to improve food security within such an approach. South Africa's National Policy of Food and Nutrition Security was developed as an "overarching guiding framework to maximise synergy between the different strategies and programmes of government and civil society". The role of the Right to Food to "democratise food security policies" was also emphasised by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, who called for wider participation of farmers and those affected by hunger and malnutrition in policy-making processes.[19]

2015 Two related events in 2015 were significant in the continuing development of the concept of food policy:

- Around one hundred cities worldwide signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. The pact explicitly calls on food policy-makers to address the full range of challenges in the food system, including lack of access to food, unhealthy diets, food waste, environmental change and sustainable livelihoods for marginalised populations.
- The UN's 193 member countries adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global development agenda. While the terms "food policy" and "food system" do not appear in the SDG document, the integrated vision of the SDGs aligns with a vision of a more joined-up approach to food policy to achieve multiple goals.

The term food policy now has greater currency than ever before and its use continues to develop. For example, in 2017, the Canadian Government initiated a Food Policy for Canada as a holistic strategy which included widespread consultations with Canadians.[20] In the health field, the European Heart Network published "Transforming European Food and Drink Policies for Cardiovascular Health".[21] For developing countries, IFPRI launched its new strategy in 2018, focused on the need to "reshape food systems".[22] In 2019, the Independent International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) proposed a Common Food Policy for the EU. At city level, the network of cities across low-, middle- and high-income countries in the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact continued to grow.

All of these developments indicate a shift towards a more holistic understanding of what food policy is, what it can do and how it should function.

Ten steps for a fresh approach to food policy

While the food system encompasses multiple challenges, food can offer solutions to many problems. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has shown that food systems offer solutions to each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The world needs to enhance the role of food policy to ensure it works to provide real solutions to food systems challenges. The scale of the current planetary challenge – and past failures – requires a fresh approach. Here are ten steps that decision-makers, advocates, the private sector and all food policy stakeholders can take to make food policy more effective, equitable and efficient. Future Briefs in this Rethinking Food Policy series will present the rationale for each of these Steps in more detail.

1

Take a systems approach. Because all the elements of the food system interconnect, action in one part of it can reverberate throughout, from the local to the global. A systems approach means identifying these interconnections and understanding their impact across historically isolated policy areas. It also entails looking for shared solutions to food system problems. For example, the Lancet Commission on Obesity (2019) applied a systems perspective and found obesity had links to undernutrition and climate change.[23]

2

Understand the connections. A systems approach means recognising that food policy is applied within multiple networks of connections. Connections exist between different parts of the food system itself; they also exist between the challenges produced *by* the system. Similarly, the impact of implementing policy decisions can have knock-on effects on other parts of the system (such as when the decisions of one country impact on another). Getting granular about these connections is essential in order to understand the intended and unintended consequences of policy decisions on what people eat.

> “Rethinking food policy presents a major opportunity to improve nutrition and health, protect the planet and contribute to economic and social prosperity, equitably”

3

Recognise tensions and manage tradeoffs. The many different interests, goals and values in the food system produce numerous tensions. There are ways to make the system work with greater synergy (see Steps 4–10 below), but these require negotiation and hard political choices. Power dynamics are part of the food system. Technical fixes alone cannot solve food policy conflicts.

4

Make policies coherent. Connections offer the potential for synergies as well as conflicts. Yet opportunities to reconcile policy objectives and promote mutually reinforcing policy actions are often missed. Coherent policy is a more efficient way of meeting different objectives and can expand political traction and breadth of support (e.g., nutrition and environmental advocates campaigning for sustainable diets).

5

Embed food in all policies. Food systems challenges are the product of many different policies. Ensuring that policies – even if seemingly unrelated to food – work to deliver food-related goals can be termed "food in all policies" (akin to "health in all policies"). For example, ensuring that social protection programmes are sufficient to enable access to a healthy diet.

6

Join up the process of making food policy. Because it involves people in numerous sectors with different objectives, different aspects of food policy are typically dealt with in a disparate and fragmented manner. Developing a more integrated approach to policy – such as devising a "national food policy", bringing together different ministries with shared interests, or providing an integrated mechanism for private sector engagement – has the potential to help fix the fragments. This will require a new type of governance.

7

Advocate for better governance structures for the food system. Fragmented governance structures perpetuate fragmented policy-making. Lack of any specific place within government to connect food policy means there is little opportunity for crossover.[24] Moreover, lack of transparency over which food-related policy areas are being dealt with by which parts of government means outside stakeholders may have difficulty sharing ideas. Thinking through and implementing a different governance model for food policy will be necessary in order to take Steps 1–6.

8

Use the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework. In 2015, the SDGs adopted by the UN's 193 government members acknowledged the complexity of development and the need for all policy-making to integrate economic, social and environmental considerations. They recognised that development was needed globally, not just in the poorer parts of the world. This integrated and inclusive approach envisioned by the SDGs can be used as the foundation of a more holistic approach to food policy. The SDGs can also be a tool for pushing food higher up the governmental agenda, as food is fundamental to achieving many of the goals.[25]

9

Put people at the heart of policy-making. Food systems challenges matter because they affect people. Currently, most food policy is done *to* people rather than *with* them. Engaging with people's real lives is essential if we are to understand the causes of problems and develop solutions that meet people where they are. There is a tremendous opportunity to design better food policies by listening to unheard voices.[26] This people-centred approach is imperative if we are to address the huge inequity in the food system.

10

Keep focused on finding solutions to specific problems. Food policy is vast in scope and the food system is complex. Staying focused on specific problems and clear goals is vital. Food policy-making should always start with a clear food-related goal designed to improve people's lives and work back to identify solutions. Steps 1–9 provide guidance on how to do so.

City, University of London
Northampton Square
London
EC1V 0HB
United Kingdom

Notes

1 Pinstrup-Andersen P, Watson II DD. *Food Policy for Developing Countries: The Role of Government in Global, National, and Local Food Systems.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press; 2011.

2 Lang T, Barling D, Caraher M. *Food Policy: Integrating Health, Environment and Society.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2009.

3 Hamilton WH. The Requisites of a National Food Policy. *Journal of Political Economy.* 1918 Jun 1;26(6):612–37.

4 National Food Policy: British Association discussion on economics of diet. *Nature.* 1935 Oct 19:631–633. Available at: https://www.nature.com/articles/136631a0.pdf

5 Hopkins FG. Address of the President, Sir Frederick Gowland Hopkins O.M., at the Anniversary Meeting, November 30, 1935. London: Royal Society. Available at: https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/pdf/10.1098/rspa.1936.0001

6 Boyd Orr J. *As I Recall: The 1880s to the 1960s.* London: MacGibbon and Kee; 1966.

7 Report of the World Food Conference, Rome, 5–16 November 1974. New York: United Nations; 1975.

8 Milio N. *Nutrition Policy for Food-rich Countries: A Strategic Analysis.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; 1990.

9 Food Policy. Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); 1981.

10 Timmer CP, Falcon WP, Pearson SR. *Food Policy Analysis.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (on behalf of the World Bank); 1983.

11 Hawkes C, Halliday J. What makes urban food policy happen? Insights from five case studies. Brussels: International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems; 2017.

12 Lang T, Heasman M. *Food Wars.* London: Earthscan; 2004.

13 Harper A, Shattuck A, Holt-Giménez E, Alkon A, Lambrick F. Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned. Institute for Food and Development Policy, 2009 Oct:1-63.

14 Nestle M. *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health.* Oakland: University of California Press; 2002.

15 Bassarab K, Santo R, Palmer A. Food Policy Council Report 2018. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Centre for a Livable Future; 2018.

16 Harper A, Shattuck A, Holt-Giménez E, Alkon A, Lambrick F. Food policy councils: Lessons Learned. Institute for Food and Development Policy, 2009 Oct:1-63.

17 Pinstrup-Andersen P, Cheng F (eds.). *Case Studies in Food Policy for Developing Countries.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press; 2008.

18 Cornell University Press. Case Studies in Food Policy for Developing Countries. Ithaca: Cornell University Press [cited 2019 April 16] Available from: http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GCOI=80140100526540

19 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter – Final report: The transformative potential of the right to food. New York: UN General Assembly, 24 January 2014.

20 What We Heard: Consultations on A Food Policy for Canada. Ottawa: Government of Canada; 2018.

21 Transforming European Food and Drink Policies for Cardiovascular Health. Brussels: European Heart Network; 2017.

22 IFPRI Strategy: Refresh 2018-2020. Washington DC: IFPRI; 2018. Available at: https://www.ifpri.org/publication/ifpri-strategy

23 Swinburn BA, Kraak VI, Allender S, Atkins VJ, Baker PI, Bogard JR, Brinsden H, Calvillo A, De Schutter O, Devarajan R, Ezzati M, et al. The Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition, and Climate Change: The Lancet Commission report. London: *The Lancet;* 25 January 2019.

24 Parsons K, Barling D, Lang T. UK Policymaking Institutions and their Implications for Integrated Food Policy. *Advances in Food Security and Sustainability.* 2018 Nov 12;3:211.

25 Food and Agriculture: Key to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Rome: FAO; 2016.

26 Report of the 2018 City Food Symposium: How can evidence of lived experience make food policy more effective and equitable in addressing major food system challenges? London: Centre for Food Policy, City, University of London; 2018. Available at: https://www.city.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/440985/2018-City-Food-Sym-Report-FINAL251018.pdf

This Brief was written by Corinna Hawkes and Kelly Parsons and peer-reviewed by the staff of the Centre for Food Policy.

Hawkes C, Parsons K. Brief 1. Tackling Food Systems Challenges: The Role of Food Policy. In: Rethinking Food Policy: A Fresh Approach to Policy and Practice. London: Centre for Food Policy; 2019.

Funded by the Wellcome Trust

Telephone enquiries
+44 (0) 20 7040 5060

Find out more, visit
www.city.ac.uk/foodpolicy

Follow us on
https://www.facebook.com/foodpolicycity/

Follow us on
twitter.com/foodpolicycity

Watch us on
youtube.com/mycityunilondon

www.city.ac.uk/food-policy