

City St Georges, University of London, Political Economy of Food, Class submission: Soft power: a strategy for UK success

0.1 This written submission is presented to the committee by UK and international students enrolled in the FPM002 Political Economy of Food module, part of the Master's in Food Policy at City, University of London, under the guidance of Dr. Christian Reynolds.

0.2 Throughout this course, students have critically examined various forms of power, including soft power, to explore effective strategies for transforming food systems and value chains.

0.3 The evidence provided below reflects the outcomes of in-depth in-class discussions as part of a discussion led by Dr Ronald Ranta and Dr Christian Reynolds. We focused on two questions 1) *What could the UK do to better promote its food sector/culture through soft power?* and 2) *How could the UK use food in its diplomatic effort?* Each numbered paragraph below has been written by different groups of students.

0.4 The participating students are:

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What could the UK do to better promote its food sector/culture through soft power?

1.1. Food has the power to promote the UK on the world stage, yet to have the biggest possible impact the UK needs to develop a more coherent and considered National Food Story. This story could include:

- Looking back at how the growing and sharing of food was instrumental in our war efforts. It has the power to help us rebuild our social networks which in turn will strengthen our economy (see [Demos report, social capital 2025: the hidden wealth of nations](#)).
- Celebrating cultural diversity in the UK and the ways that immigration has enriched our culinary landscape as reflected in the foods we eat both in restaurants and at home.
- Promoting the wonderful sustainable foods we could (and should) grow much more of in the UK including pulses, fruits and vegetables.

1.2 Celebrate British grown produce and pioneer the pulse revolution. The public are becoming more concerned with sustainability and animal welfare arguments around food

(see [FSA 2022](#)). Focusing on strengthening the national image of food security internationally and domestically only strengthens the UK Government's position to be an effective policy maker and negotiator ([gov.uk 2024](#)). Current high standard UK food production alongside a vibrant UK food culture, gives the UK something to be proud of — rather than a tainted food history — and portrays an image internationally of food security, responsibility and leadership. UK food production and food culture must also be shifted over time to be more “plant forward” and “pulse forward” to match the ambition of [the Seventh Carbon Budget](#). We highlight that a shift towards beans and pulses lowers environmental impacts, enhances biodiversity and local economies, and increases food security ([ECI 2023](#)). This trend is already prominent in the food media with TV programmes, recipe books, and restaurant menus provided by innovative UK chefs and food writers ([Nicholson and Jones 2023](#), [Univarsolutions 2025](#)).

1.3 The diversity of food - Yorkshire pudding, Chicken Tikka Massala, Coronation Chicken, Wimbledon scones, Sunday roasts, Jellied eel, Periwinkles – reflecting the diversity and richness of regional food culture could be captured to show that the UK food is more than just fish and chips. Internal promotion by the UK government to UK people is necessary to develop the lackluster national food identity, after which the individual citizens themselves become advocates of the diverse UK food culture.

1.4 The UK government could design narrative-driven campaigns around the history of a British meal, such as a roast dinner, and the ritual around it, showcasing British farming and produce. Special focus should be paid to low-carbon crops grown in Britain, with an emphasis on “[less-but-better](#)” when it comes to animal-based products.

1.5 The above meal focus could be paired with other soft power caches to increase reach and effectiveness. The UK has a hugely rich cultural history and the soft power held by outputs such as literature, theatre and art is immensely powerful and internationally well-respected. Developing the idea of specific meals (such as the Sunday Roast) as “more than just food” by pairing food culture with other pre-existing soft power caches to create a more positive global opinion of its food and food culture. E.g. literature, theatre and art associated with specific meals can be harnessed to make the Sunday Roast an event and ritual that citizens of other countries take part in abroad or come to the UK to experience. Campaigns would emphasize the purchase of UK products.

How could the UK use food in its diplomatic effort?

2.1 When individuals develop an understanding of the diversity and richness of UK food, they become advocates that contribute to UK's diplomatic and policy efforts. In a micro-context,

this could be introducing an international colleague to the UK food culture, and highlighting where to find UK food, encouraging conversations, exploration and work-place integration.

2.2 In terms of diplomacy, international leaders could be invited for a walk in British countryside/parkland and served a roast dinner on a Sunday afternoon, instead of a traditional state dinner.

2.3 Additionally, by exporting the idea of “authentic” British food being grounded in its history and locale to tourist markets, you could increase visitor numbers.

2.4 The communal aspect of British food could be used to showcase the value in social cohesion food has in the UK, such as dedicating a whole of a Sunday for a Roast (and spending this time with family and friends). Beyond the “traditional” food served (which is delicious), most families will adapt this meal event to their household’s micro-cultures. This is itself a representation of the diversity of UK food culture.