

Chairs Clive Lewis MP and Liz Saville Roberts MP, ladies and gentleman

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence to this APPG.

My name is Sofia Parente, I am the Sustainable Food Places Policy and Campaigns Coordinator and I work for the food and farming charity Sustain.

When we talk about a Green New Deal we are talking about decarbonisation, and about job creation all wrapped up together. You may not be aware that the Food Sector – from farming to processing to retail to hospitality – is responsible for a **1 in 7 jobs in our economy. It is also responsible for 1/3 of all global greenhouse gas emissions.** So we could ask the question – why doesn't every conversation about green new deal consider food at the centre? And that's why I am delighted this one does.

Food is a touchpoint for many issues, and it's important to recognise the context we are operating in. **9.7M adults experiencing food insecurity (18.4% of the population).** Health inequalities, where diet plays a key role, mean that the difference in life expectancy between the least and most deprived areas in England is **9.4 years and difference in healthy life expectancy is 19 years** – almost two decades of life in good health lost.

Prioritising action on food means that we can address multiple issues simultaneously, which is especially important when local and national budgets are squeezed.

The Sustainable Food Places programme does just that, we bring together a network of over 80 local food partnerships across the UK which work on all aspects of the food system.

The programme is led by Sustain, Soil Association and Food Matters with the financial support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the National Lottery Community Fund. It's a voluntary approach but it works and that's why the network is growing rapidly.

Food partnerships bring together key stakeholders at a local level, from the local authority, university and public sector bodies to growers, retailers and the hospitality sector. Through working together, each partnership drives local activity to create a more resilient and sustainable food system.

The Government Food Strategy published last June, recognises the key role of food partnerships in delivering its objectives. Under section 2.2, 'Encouraging healthier and more sustainable dietary choices', the Government Food Strategy includes:

"Local Food Partnerships have already brought together councils and partners from the public sector, voluntary and community groups, and businesses to reduce diet-related ill health and inequality, while supporting a prosperous local food economy. We will learn from their approaches..."

We'd love to work with Government and follow up on this and ensure there's a food partnership and food strategy in every local area in England.

Tackling the climate and nature emergency through food and farming

There is a double gap in policy at the moment: we don't have targets for what should be the contribution of food and farming in achieving Net Zero. And secondly, we don't have a clear directive for what should be the contribution of local areas to the New Zero target. So, it's no wonder food is lost in this process.

In a Sustain report launching later this week, we studied how UK councils are tackling the climate and nature emergency through food. With an **annual procurement spend of over £69 billion, and as owners of up to 1.3 million acres of land**, UK councils have an enormous opportunity to reduce emissions from the food system, support farmers, and help citizens eat better diets. And my colleague Vic will illustrate what action means from the brilliant BHFP.

We studied actions around governance, farming and food growing, food waste and procurement. We found that councils scored on average just **32 per cent of available points. For 59 per cent of councils, no significant or meaningful actions to address the climate impact of food** were found. But councils with food partnerships in place scored on average **11 per cent more than those without**. In our interviews with high performing councils, collaborative working through partnerships was frequently mentioned as key to developing and implementing an effective local food strategy. Councils that collaborate across the public, private and third sector and take a whole-system approach to food have

enacted much more ambitious policies on food and climate than those without a food partnership.

This 'joining the dots' is what food partnerships do well and it has impact in other areas.

For example, at the start of the covid pandemic, when statutory authorities were still developing mechanisms to cope with the scale of the food emergency, many food partnerships provided a key source of leadership, drawing upon their insight into multiple aspects of the food system and experience of **collaboration between public, private and third sector agencies**. This generated a much more **effective and coordinated response** to the food emergency.

Creating a sustainable food economy

In the job creation agenda, I would very quickly like to emphasize the role of local food and SMEs but I will leave to my friends at Regather, who host the food partnership for Sheffield, to illustrate what they are doing in Sheffield.

In the food sector, SMEs account for 78% of businesses, 26% of employment and 17% of turnover. For every pound of turnover, local food businesses create roughly 3 times as many jobs as a supermarket. If the market share of local, SME food retailers increased to 10%, this would create 200,000 new jobs across the UK. For every £1 spent in a veg box or farmers' market there is £3.70 in economic, social and environmental returns (based on Growing Communities example).

A greater proportion of local food is associated with agroecological production than produce sold through other outlets.

We need investment in local food infrastructure if we are serious about a Green New Deal.

Scaling up the approach

I was also asked to address how this approach might be scaled out and better supported by Westminster government. Food partnerships and local action are brilliant but we really need national leadership.

We can get a lot of inspiration from what's happening close to home in the other nations.

Scotland's **Good Food Nation Bill** passed in June, sets a brilliant example. This approach will create links between policy at the national and local levels, with Government, local authorities and health boards all creating good food nation plans. Those plans will set out clear outcomes, indicators, and policies across a range of areas relating to food including the environment, health and the economy. In Scotland, half of the local authority areas already have food partnerships members of SFP with the other half being prospect members. SFP partner Nourish Scotland is doing a stellar work to support this network.

In Wales, a **private members Bill** was tabled last year to *'establish a more sustainable food system in Wales to strengthen food security, improve Wales's socioeconomic well-being, and enhance consumer choice'*. It went to public consultation earlier this year. It will put a duty on Welsh Ministers to produce a Food Strategy, to establish a Wales Food Commission and for local authorities and other public services to develop community food plans to strengthen public procurement. The **Welsh Minister of Social Justice announced £3 million of Welsh Government funding** in July to support the development of cross-sector food partnerships in response to the cost of living. Half of all local authority areas in Wales already have food partnerships members of SFP and they will soon achieve full coverage. SFP's Welsh partner, Food sense Wales, is co-designing and supporting this initiative.

In Northern Ireland, 5 out of 11 local authority areas already have food partnerships members of SFP and more prospects on the way.

Unlike the other nations, whilst sustainable food places is a growing movement we are far from full coverage in England and we are lacking a unifying food bill. Support from Westminster would rapidly accelerate expansion of the network – a relatively small amount of support could roll this approach to every local authority area in England to match the rapid growth in the other nations.

In England, we'd love to work with Government departments in the co-design & delivery of a support programme to food partnerships, with the aim of producing place-based food plans that reflect the priorities of the Government Food Strategy and other government policy.