

Written response to EFRA Committee on Food Supply and COVID-19

*The Government must move quickly to shore up the diets of the most deprived children using existing, proven mechanisms.*¹ Henry Dimbleby, The National Food Strategy

COVID-19 has highlighted the significant inequalities in children's lives^{2 3} and has heightened our awareness of the importance of food security.

The Country Trust⁴ supports the call for all children to have access to sufficient good quality food as a basic right⁵ and to protect children's food security in future pandemics and emergencies.

If we are to tackle these issues in a meaningful way and become more resilient to face future crises, we must also ensure that high quality food, farming and countryside education, particularly for our most persistently disadvantaged children, is a priority for government and part of a comprehensive children's recovery plan.

High quality food education

- We know that those with food knowledge, including cooking skills and an understanding of what is required for a healthy diet, are **more resilient to emergencies such as COVID-19**⁶.
- In response to recommendations in part one of the **National Food Strategy**, and as part of a comprehensive **children's recovery plan**, we urge Government to support the implementation of a wide-ranging **food education strategy** that is part of a national '**catch up plan**' for our most disadvantaged children.
- Charities, such as The Country Trust⁷, can connect persistently disadvantaged children, and their families with the knowledge and the first-hand experience essential for their health and wellbeing.
- We can also support their engagement with learning, food confidence, and their ability to connect with others.
- Through our Food Discovery programme⁸ we have worked with some of the most vulnerable families in the UK and seen the impact that food education in its broadest sense has on their lives, from healthier, more affordable diets to improved physical and mental well-being.

"We are confident that children who have learnt to cook and grow through Food Discovery, and

¹ <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/>

² <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/tackling-the-disadvantage-gap-during-the-covid-19-crisis/>

³ <http://www.se-ed.co.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Nature%20Childhood%20and%20Health%20iCES%20Occ%20Paper%202009-2%20FINAL.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.countrytrust.org.uk/about/vision-and-mission>

⁵ <https://endchildfoodpoverty.org/>

<https://www.childrensright2food.co.uk/>

⁶ <https://www.countrytrust.org.uk/uploads/files/2020-Food-Discovery-Evaluation-Report.pdf>

some parents who have been involved too, will have been able to put their skills to good use during the current crisis, with positive benefits for their health and wellbeing.” Stuart Allen, Head Teacher, Mile Cross⁹

Joining up

“As well as keeping us alive and healthy, food plays a central role in our culture and our national life. The threats from climate change, biodiversity loss and the need to deliver safe and affordable food gives rise to new challenges we must address.” Theresa Villiers

*“When it comes to demographics, something that we saw very clearly was that there is a high correlation between a level of education and belief in the climate emergency. The more educated you are, the more likely you are to believe that there is a climate emergency And this is really, really powerful, because it doesn't matter where you're from, it doesn't matter your age, education really, really is important.”*¹⁰ Cassie Flynn UNDP

Now more than ever, the opportunity exists for us to join together to tackle food security, health inequalities and the climate emergency.

- We believe that Government should take a **joined-up approach** to tackling food security, health inequalities, wellbeing and the climate emergency.
- This requires a **national plan** involving local authorities and civil societies in delivering **‘place-based’ strategies**.
- As well as a **reset of education** to include the most **important issues** of our lives and our time as core.
- This should include **first-hand experience** of **climate change in relation to food** production, land management our own health and the health of the planet.

We are already experiencing demand from teachers for our programmes to **re-engage children with learning**, support **wellbeing** and offer **experiences that have been missed** due to COVID-19.

There are many organisations doing excellent work in this field, together we are ideally placed to help shape and deliver a children’s **recovery plan** and **food education strategy**.

Some of us are already delivering successful place-based projects (e.g. Sustainable Food Places¹¹) tackling food security, health inequalities and the climate emergency. In order to draw on this expertise we suggest a **food round table** of expert delivery organisations to help plan how food education is delivered as part of the national catch- up plan.

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⁹ <https://www.countrytrust.org.uk/uploads/files/2020-Food-Discovery-Evaluation-Report.pdf>

¹⁰ Results from the People’s Climate Vote organised by UNDP and Oxford University

¹¹ <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/about/>