

11 March 2021

The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, COP26 President
House of Commons
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CC. Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park
House of Lords
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Ms Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs
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Edwin Poots, Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
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Mr Henry Dibleby, lead non-executive board member
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Dear Mr Sharma

Food Systems at COP26

We welcome the UK's leading role in G7 and COP26 this year and have high expectations both of the UK's leadership role and of the Conference's potential to mark a decisive transition towards accelerated global action on climate.

We note the priority themes set out by the UK Government and recognise that by definition the number of priorities is limited. However, **we are writing to ask you to elevate food systems as a more explicit element within the theme of nature and the theme of cities and to make space available within the blue and green zones for high-level discussions and events focussed on food systems.**

As is well documented, the production, distribution, loss and waste of food accounts for around 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Our current food systems are by far the most significant single driver of biodiversity loss, deforestation and freshwater scarcity, threatening the extinction of thousands of species. From a human perspective, malnutrition is a key risk factor for both hunger and non-communicable diseases, with globally one in two people expected to have some form of malnutrition by 2025.

Stakeholders across civil society, the food industry, the finance and health sectors and, not least, a growing number of citizens are recognising the urgent need for food systems transformation. Changing the way we grow food is a key part of the solution - but must be integrated with a step-change in what we eat and how much we waste if agriculture and aquaculture are to provide the food we need while mitigating and adapting to climate change and supporting resilient ecosystems.

Many studies show that we cannot meet the Paris targets without a reduction in global consumption of meat and dairy. That said, regenerative livestock systems can contribute to climate mitigation by sequestering carbon in soils and trees. A joined-up approach to consumption, production, food loss and waste and food system resilience is needed so that globally we and future generations can enjoy a healthy sustainable diet. Tim Benton and colleagues recently demonstrated that it is not possible to deliver globally on nature-based solutions to tackle the climate and nature emergencies without food system change. In fact, a simplistic approach to nature-based solutions could lead to further offshoring of emissions by national food systems.

The UK is convening the Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade Dialogue on sustainable supply chains and is also a global leader in food waste, having reduced food waste by 27% across the whole supply chain. It is taking an integrated approach to food policy with its national food strategy for England and has made a commitment in the current NDC to healthy diets supported by a sustainable food system.

Across its four nations, the UK has an opportunity to show global leadership on the transition to sustainable food systems. Northern Ireland is developing a new food and farming policy and have committed to developing climate legislation under the New Decade New Approach Agreement. The Welsh Government has launched its Agriculture (Wales) Bill White Paper which includes the key strategic objectives of sustainable food production, taking action to respond to the climate emergency and help reverse the decline in biodiversity. The Scottish Government is an early signatory to the Glasgow Declaration on food and climate, a commitment by subnational governments to adopt and implement integrated food policies to tackle climate change.

The Edinburgh Declaration has elevated the role of sub-national governments in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Now is an opportunity to elevate cities and regions who lead on food system sustainability at COP26.

We see a valuable opportunity for COP26 to build on the work of the UN Food Systems Summit and to support the Nutrition for Growth Summit. By giving a focus to food systems, COP26 can drive change in policy, know-how and investment. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you to raise the profile of food and food systems in the climate talks.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Dangour, Centre on Climate Change and Planetary Health, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

Brighton & Hove City Council

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership

Bristol Food Network

Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance

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City of Glasgow
City of Lyon
Cecília Delgado, Alimentar Cidades Sustentáveis / Quercus
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Délice Network
EAT Foundation
Eating Better
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Food and Drink Federation Scotland
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