



# **REGENERATE NOW: achieving a transition to agroecology and sustainable diets**

2021 Report of UK Progress to 2030 goals



# Contents





# Foreword

Helen Browning, CEO



Summarising a year's activity in food and farming feels more challenging by the year, with so much at stake and such a pace of change. It's only a few months since the COP26 climate conference was held in Glasgow, but it already feels like a distant memory, and this new year promises to confront us with new threats and new opportunities. As I write, previous worries have been subsumed by the horrors of Putin's brutal invasion of Ukraine, which has caused shockwaves across the globe.

For the food system this is particularly significant - Ukraine is the breadbasket of Europe, and produces nearly a quarter of the world's agricultural commodities. The global food system is already under immense pressure, but the war is likely to precipitate a global food crisis which will exacerbate the existing 'cost of living crisis' here in the UK.

I feel ever more deeply concerned by the impacts that this crisis is having on people. It is particularly alarming to see recent evidence suggesting increasing rates of family food insecurity and hunger, especially among children. Rising food prices resulting from extreme weather and increased input costs are key factors here and our reliance on fossil fuels, including fossil fuel-derived fertilisers, looks more unwise than ever.

In such a volatile context, our vision of a 'ten year transition to agroecology and healthy and sustainable diets' feels increasingly urgent and important. We know that agroecological and organic farming systems are better for the climate and for nature, but they also offer increased resilience against shocks and perturbations. Healthy soils fare better in extreme weather, whether too much or too little rainfall. More localised supply chains can be more flexible, responding quickly to changes. If we produced more healthy food for human consumption, instead of for intensive livestock and biofuel, we could begin to support everyone to enjoy a nutritious diet.

Indeed, if we had invested in the 'ten-year transition' a decade ago, we would be in a much better position today. Citizens and farmers might be less exposed now to the spike in fuel, fertiliser, and food prices, and we would be growing more fresh and healthy produce for those who need it the most. We have no more time to waste – we must seize the opportunity to invest in a more resilient future.

In practical terms, this means we need strong political support in the year ahead for a transition to regenerative farming systems across the four nations, beginning with bold targets for nitrogen reduction and support for farmers struggling with rising input costs, helping them to move into agroecological production. Governments across the UK should also commit to upholding and raising food standards in public settings, ensuring every child enjoys at least one healthy and sustainable meal a day, building on the example set by Food for Life, which was praised in England's National Food Strategy and highlighted in the 2021-22 Programme for Government in Scotland as the model to emulate nationally.

There is so much to do. A big thank you to everyone who contributed, directly or indirectly, to building the momentum behind this crucial ten-year transition in 2021, and all hands-on deck for the year ahead.



At a glance: 2021 scorecard

# Ten-year transition to agroecology and sustainable land-use



In 2021, where have we seen positive action?  
Where has progress been made? And where is there still much more to do?



## Soils

2021 was the year soils re-entered the mainstream. The Sustainable Farming Incentive represents a positive starting point for an agroecological transition through its soil standards. And Government has now committed to a Soil Health Action Plan for England, after sustained pressure by us and our partners the Sustainable Soils Alliance during the passage of the Environment Bill.



## Environmental protection

In November the Environment Bill achieved Royal Assent. It was an enormous win for environmental NGOs and the public who ensured the Act includes a legally binding target to reverse species decline by 2030 and forced a Government U-turn on sewage regulations.

The public are increasingly calling for action on nature and climate. Last year we saw the largest event for nature and climate ever in the UK through The Climate Coalition's first 'Big Green Week' which had over 5000 community-led events.



## Scotland

The Scottish Government committed to doubling the amount of land farmed organically in Scotland during this parliament and Ministers further committed to working with the sector to develop an Organic Food and Farming Action Plan.



## Wales

The Welsh Government has agreed to work together for the next three years on key policies affecting rural areas, including farm payments, agricultural pollution, and the post-Brexit Sustainable Farming Scheme. As always, the devil will be in the detail.



## Organic

Defra committed to supporting organic farming in the SFI. Details are still needed, but this is long awaited recognition that organic farming delivers environmental benefits and should be rewarded appropriately. The hard work now begins to ensure this truly delivers for organic farmers.



## Agroecology

The England National Food Strategy (NFS) set out a '3-compartment model' in which most farmers on most land would be farming agroecologically. The buzz at the Groundswell and Oxford Farming Conferences highlighted how many farmers are ready to act. We now need a strong White Paper response - going beyond ELMS - to support this transition.



## Agroforestry

The Land Workers' Alliance released an exciting new report outlining the vast potential of Agroforestry in the UK, providing more evidence to Defra that their decision to support an agroforestry standard in the SFI is the right one. Soil Association have been collaborating with Organic Research Centre (ORC), Woodland Trust, and Abacus Agriculture to understand how farmers learn about and finance Agroforestry through Defra's agroforestry ELM Test project.



## Pesticides

Defra announced that an Integrated Pest Management standard will be developed within the SFI, which could be a key part of incentivising farmers to move towards a whole farm approach. Our Pesticide Collaboration partners were instrumental in securing an unprecedented public response to the Pesticide National Action consultation, which we hope will be published in the Spring of 2022.



## Wales

Whilst it's good news that the Senedd passed a motion to declare a nature emergency, Wales still has no firm timetable for its promised Environment Bill and environmental oversight body. This must be reversed in 2022.



## Supply chains

The supply chain crisis, driven by a shortage in workers, from seasonal fruit pickers, abattoir staff and lorry drivers, resulted in huge problems for farmers across the UK and highlighted the lack of resilience in our food system.



## Trade arrangements

The recent trade deal with Australia, a country placing bottom of a UN league table for taking action on climate, betrays farmers and citizens and cuts across the Government's domestic environmental ambitions.



## Action on climate

The CCC also highlighted low levels of preparedness and wide gaps between commitments and delivery in two separate reports on progress to net zero and climate adaptation in England. Additionally, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) highlighted agriculture and land use as a weakness in the Government's Net Zero Strategy, calling urgently for a combined decarbonisation strategy for agriculture and land use.



## Scotland

A progress report from the UK (CCC) published in November highlighted an 'urgent' need for ambitious post-Common Agricultural Policy in Scotland and a 'clear plan for healthy and low-carbon diets'. It also highlighted the increasing gap that exists between commitments and delivery.



## Wales

A new report from WWF and Size of Wales found that demand for overseas commodities in Wales is having a catastrophic effect on the world's forests and critical habitats. At the same time, there is a growing concern that carbon offsetting is having a devastating impact on Welsh farming communities.



At a glance: 2021 scorecard

# Ten-year transition to healthy and sustainable diets



## Public procurement

The National Food Strategy recommends harnessing public procurement to strengthen the local economy and ensure food is healthy and sustainable. A consultation to improve the Government Buying Standards for Food is expected in line with the launch of the White Paper on food in the Spring.



## Deforestation in commodity supply chains

At COP26 we saw the global deforestation pledge, with 100 leaders pledging to end deforestation by 2030. And in the UK, the Environment Act includes legislation aiming to end illegal overseas deforestation associated with the use of commodities.



## Demand for organic

Building on 2020's success, 2021 saw even greater growth of the organic food and drink sector.



## Wales

The Senedd has supported a proposal for a Food Bill, which aims to establish a more sustainable food system to strengthen food security, improve Wales' socio-economic wellbeing and enhance consumer choice.



## Scotland

Scottish ministers have introduced a Good Food Nation Bill which is now working its way through Parliament. The Bill will require ministers to produce a national food plan and for local authorities and health boards to produce local food plans.





## Scotland

### Local Food

A consultation has been held on a Local Food Strategy and local food is being championed in the Good Food Nation Bill.

### School Meals

The Scottish Government pledged to extend free school meals to all primary school pupils and to extend Food for Life accreditation to all councils in Scotland, meaning that every child would have access to a healthy and sustainable meal each school day.



### Healthy diets

Ultra-processed food makes up 54% of the UK diet but there are still no plans to reduce it. France has introduced a percentage reduction target for UPFs in the national diet, and other governments are exploring labelling options. With the evidence of negative health and environmental impacts of UPFs mounting action must be taken.



### Free school meals

Although the UK Government did promise funding for the holiday activities and food programme, they did not back the NFS recommendations to increase eligibility for free school meals, a missed opportunity.



### Childhood obesity

Rates of obesity are still continuing to rise and this jumped during the pandemic. Research this year found that obesity policy has been failing to lead to the changes we need.



### School food standards

Inflation, supply problems and staffing issues continue to affect caterers. There is a risk that food quality across the public sector might drop, but Food for Life teams are supporting caterers, helping them maintain their standards, including meeting the School Food Standards.







## Agroecology and regenerative forestry

By transitioning to nature-friendly farming, land management and forestry, in 2030 we want to see:

### Nature-friendly farming, with

- At least a 50% reduction in pesticides and artificial nitrogen, and a 90% reduction in antibiotic use
- 25% of farmed land being organic, mirroring aims in the EU farm to fork strategy
- 10% of farmland set aside for nature

### More trees, with

- All UK woodland sustainably managed
- Farm woodland on target to double by 2050
- 50% of farms using agroforestry systems

## Good lives and meaningful livelihoods for

- A great diversity of people, through careers in agroecological farming, food and forestry
- Farm animals through high welfare practice and sustainable diets

## Markets that work to respect the Earth, with

- Food producers getting a fairer deal
- Doubled market share for seasonal UK fruit, veg, pulses and nuts
- Responsible trade, with no offshoring our environmental impacts

## Healthy and sustainable diets

By transitioning to good food and sustainable living, and reducing our environmental footprint, in 2030 we will enjoy:

### Wholesome meals for children, with

- Every child enjoying at least one healthy and sustainable meal a day
- Every child connecting with where their food comes from, and with nature

### More good food available, with

- Sustainable food strategies being applied by all UK cities and authorities
- Healthy and environmentally-friendly menus across the public sector, with more than 50% of food sourced being organic

### Balanced diets for all, with

- Less than 15% ultra-processed food in UK diets, with more fresh food
- A 50% reduction in meat eating overall, with high welfare meat and dairy being the norm

### Everyone protecting Earth's resources, with

- All citizens engaged with food issues, initiatives and system change
- Everyone taking steps to live within their fair share, reducing their food, fashion and forest footprints



# Ten things we learned this year



**1 Public pressure can sway politics. It can often be easy to forget, but when large numbers of people mobilise, come together and demand to be heard, we can create change.** The public campaign around sewage during the passage of the Environment Bill demonstrated this, when pressure from the public, spearheaded by Surfers Against Sewage, forced a U-turn from Government that led to a strengthening of the Bill. We need to build this level of support for nature-friendly farming and demand the change we want to see.

**2 An agroecological transition in Europe could better contribute to global food security.** A study by the French thinktank IDDRI has shown that if implemented alongside dietary shifts, an agroecological transition could move the EU from a net importer to a net exporter of agricultural goods to the global market. This finding helps alleviate concerns that an agroecological transition might offshore environmental impacts overseas and instead finds that the EU could improve its provision of calories and proteins to the world market, whilst also restoring biodiversity and natural resources as well as reducing GHG emissions from agriculture.<sup>1</sup>

**3 There is an overwhelming desire for a food system that benefits everyone, supports our health and protects the planet.** Alongside the publication of the National Food Strategy, researchers asked the public what they thought about food system change and what needed to happen to improve it. Acknowledging the

complexities of the system, the consensus was that we, including Government and food businesses, need to be brave and act now. Citizens were supportive of food system change, even though they know that it won't be easy.<sup>2</sup>

**4 It's doubtful we can just reformulate our way out of the junk food cycle.** The reformulation agenda is favoured by the UK Government and featured strongly in the UN Food Systems Summit. Reformulation generally aims to reduce unhealthy fat, salt and sugar in processed food while looking to include higher levels of beneficial elements such as fibre, vitamins, and minerals. This might be supported through fiscal measures, like taxes, and they can be effective (as shown through evidence from the Soft Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL)). However, reformulation must be set in a wider context of improving overall diet quality if we're to really improve health, and this means eating more fresh produce and far less ultra-processed foods.<sup>3,4,5</sup>





**5 The existing supermarket business model risks unbalancing the rest of the food system.** A new report from the Food Research Collaboration has thrown into question the stability of major supermarkets, finding their business models are 'balanced on a knife edge'. The low prices, wide choice, expert marketing, and slim margins used by supermarkets has led to a false economy of scale characterised by over-purchasing, over-eating, over-production and waste. Changing this system in effect asks supermarkets to 'unsupermarket' themselves.<sup>6</sup>

**6 We can't meet conservation targets without a transition to sustainable farming.** A German-wide field study that examined flying insects in conservation areas adjacent to agricultural land found that these insects were contaminated with, on average, 17 different types of pesticides. The study concluded that a drastic pesticide reduction in large buffers around nature conservation areas is necessary to avoid contamination of their insect fauna. As we move towards the Biodiversity COP in Kunming later this year, it is critical that we recognise we will not meet our conservation targets without a truly sustainable transition in agriculture.<sup>7</sup>

**7 The Net Zero agenda is going to create significant tensions over land use.** A report by Oxfam drew attention to the tensions over competing interests for land as we aim to meet net zero targets. They calculated that the total amount of land required for planned carbon removal could be five times the size of India- that's the equivalent to all the farmland on the planet.<sup>8</sup> In Wales and Scotland, we're increasingly seeing this play out with companies buying up swathes of

land for offsetting, with knock-on effects for local farming communities. It is vital that decisions around land use are taken with the input of the local community and in the context of an overall land use strategy for climate, nature and healthy food production.

**8 Ultra-processed food isn't just bad for us, it's also bad for the planet.** Researchers found that diets in Brazil that were lower in UPF had lower greenhouse gas, water and ecological footprints<sup>9</sup>, as highlighted in our Ultra Processed Planet report.<sup>10</sup>

**9 Small farms will be a critical part of our future.** A paper published in Nature challenges assumptions about small and organic farms globally through a meta-analysis on agricultural data globally found that small farms tend to be more species rich and provide higher yields than larger ones.<sup>11</sup> Not only this, but new research from the University of Sussex has shown that urban allotments could be as productive as farms and an additional study has found that green urban spaces could grow almost 40% of the fruit and vegetables that we consume.<sup>12,13</sup>



**10**

**We'll need land sharing, land sparing and dietary change to reduce pressures on land and move to a more sustainable food system.** A landmark Chatham House report on food system drivers for biodiversity loss concluded that reversing biodiversity loss requires both nature-friendly farming AND protected areas for nature, and that only dietary change and food waste reduction can reduce land pressure to achieve this. Intensification and yield increase fail to spare land for nature in practice as they lead to cheaper commodity crops, higher animal feed demand and higher levels of obesity and food waste.



2021 the year in summary:

# Farming and land use



## Action stations

### There is now widespread climate concern

It is, perhaps, not surprising that in the year of COP26, a year in which we've seen and felt first-hand the effects of extreme weather caused by escalating climate change across the globe so tangibly, public concern across the UK for climate change was at its highest level since records began. The short-sighted perspective in the global north that this is a 'them' problem is no longer credible, yet it remains true that the world's poorest and most vulnerable bear the brunt of the impacts we're seeing.

Climate change is here and isn't going anywhere. But the public understand this - just look at the 100,000 people who marched for climate action in Glasgow at COP. We must seize on public support for action in 2022.

### We know what we need to do

In England, we now have a genuinely transformative and joined-up vision for food and farming through the National Food Strategy.<sup>14</sup> In 2022, Government has a golden opportunity to be bold and pledge to implement these proposals through its White Paper and ensure England's Agricultural Transition Plan delivers for climate nature and health.<sup>15</sup>

And the brand-new Environment Act, whilst not perfect, provides the foundations for reversing biodiversity loss. Most significantly the Act places a duty on Government to halt species decline in England by 2030.

Scotland will bring forward its own Natural Environment Bill to Parliament due in 2023/4 that will include targets for nature restoration, but Wales need to ensure they expedite their own Environment Bill and oversight body.



**Lucy Bjorck Senior Policy Advisor at RSPB speaks to the critical importance of tackling both climate and nature as one.**

'2021 did change the way we view the climate and nature crises. It's taken a long time, but there is now consensus that a singular focus on climate could result in negative unintended consequences for biodiversity and people.

Whilst the outcomes of COP26 remained weak in some key areas, there were some major wins for nature. Most significantly, nature was recognised in the final text as being critical to limiting temperature rises to 1.5 degrees. There was also acknowledgement of the importance of ecosystem integrity, and that nature delivers ecosystem services, reduced vulnerability, and sustainable livelihoods including for Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Farming too must deliver for both climate and nature, as well as providing food to underpin sustainable and healthy diets and supporting a thriving rural economy. Looking ahead to the Biodiversity COP in Kunming, the UK has an opportunity to show it is a global leader by creating a truly sustainable farming system. We won't meet our conservation targets without a transition to sustainable agriculture which both safeguards priority habitats where nature thrives and makes space for nature in the productive farmed landscape. We must do all this without further exporting our environmental footprint overseas, a huge challenge but one we believe can be overcome with the right policies, investment and knowledge transfer'.





### Adrian Steele, Organic farmer and Organic Development Advisor at the Soil Association speaks about the developments we saw in farming in 2021.'

2021 was a difficult year for many British farmers. The shortage of workers, from seasonal fruit pickers to abattoir staff and lorry drivers caused significant problems. Beef and lamb prices were strong throughout the year, and cereal farmers had reasonable harvest weather. However high energy, feed and fertiliser prices will reduce profit margins in 2022 which are made all the more tricky by the modulation of BPS payments.

So we hoped that published details around England's Agricultural Transition Plan would outline a clear roadmap for farmers to move forward. Unfortunately, the necessary details have not been set out, and it remains difficult for farmers to plan ahead.

It is good news the Sustainable Farming Incentive's (SFI) primary focus has been on soils. This is right if we're to transition to an

agroecological future. However, the published standards won't themselves deliver the changes we drastically need to see to improve soil health.

We were pleased to see long-awaited confirmation from Defra that there will be an Organic Standard in the SFI, rightful acknowledgement of the environmental benefits it delivers, but not coming into effect until 2025. Soil Association and the English Organic Forum are using this timeline as an opportunity to work with Defra to create a joined up organic vision or strategy for England in 2022, in the form of a sector-led Organic Action Plan.

In 2022 we await more details around the Local Nature Recovery scheme of ELM, in particular how organic and agroecological farmers can become involved.'

## Yet the delivery gap remains

Policy proposals and commitments are not enough. Time is running out and this decade must become the decade of delivery.

This was emphasised by the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC), who published progress reports assessing both Scottish and UK-wide emissions reductions. Whilst there have been some genuinely commendable emissions reduction targets set by Governments, across the board the UK is underperforming in its progress on delivering on net zero and adapting to climate change.<sup>16,17</sup>

And food and farming in particular are lagging behind despite a burgeoning interest in sustainable agriculture from farmers on the ground. The UK's

Net Zero Strategy, whilst an important first step in our plans for cutting emissions, highlighted the gap around decarbonisation plans in agriculture.<sup>18</sup> In Scotland the CCC have highlighted an 'urgent' need for ambitious post-CAP agricultural policy and a 'clear plan for healthy and low-carbon diets' and this must be reflected in its Agriculture Bill in 2023. In Wales, the Government's second Low Carbon Plan did not commit to a specific reduction target for agriculture but did announce the introduction of regulatory measures to address agricultural pollution in Wales. 2022 is an opportunity for the Welsh Sustainable Farming Scheme to be further developed when farmers will be encouraged to register and have their say on the design of the scheme in the summer.

CASE STUDY



a 'living clover mulch' continues to build fertility in the soil and can be grazed immediately afterwards.

### Innovation in the field- Growing a 'living mulch'

An Innovative Farmer's Field Lab, with six farmers working with AHDB and Organic Research Centre is trialling whether it is possible to direct-drill cereal crops into permanent living clover.

The innovative trial offers a glimpse of what might be possible if we prioritise the right research on-farm by working with farmers through a collaborative process. By ensuring both species survive together farmers can take a cereal crop at harvest and still have a 'living clover mulch' that continues to build fertility in the soil and can be grazed immediately afterwards.

The approach removes the need for ploughing and brings with it benefits for biodiversity and carbon sequestration. Although there are yield penalties, this might be worth it if at the farm scale productivity increases, and future trials will explore how to reduce the yield gap. There's so much more to be learnt through collaborative innovation- we're just at the beginning.

## New research- Farming for Change

New research from the French thinktank IDDRI, commissioned by the Food Farming and Countryside Commission, has shown that an agroecological future really is possible in the UK. The modelling builds on a Europe-wide study from 2018 and sketches an ambitious scenario for the future of farming that phases out synthetic pesticides, mineral fertilisers and minimises protein imports. It shows that with the widespread adoption of healthier diets (with fewer animal

products and more fruit and vegetables) emissions from production could be reduced by 55-70%, 10% of current agricultural land could be released for nature and on-farm biodiversity and resilience could be improved. A food system in which we use agroecological farming methods, place the community at the heart of decision making and prioritise local supply chains has the potential to transform our society for the better.<sup>19</sup>



## The UK in a global context

### COP26: one small step, but a giant leap still required

In November the world's attention turned to Glasgow where the COP26 negotiations took place. We did take a tentative step forward in the right direction, with progress on coal, nature, deforestation, and a commitment to ensuring year on year ratcheting of emissions reduction targets. On the whole though, farming and diets largely remained off the agenda, and, although there were some important commitments, the elephant in the room remains our reluctance to tackle intensive livestock production head on.

And so, we still wait for that giant leap. Unfortunately, critics agree this was a rich nations COP, and there was more than a little truth to Greta Thunberg's assessment that it was simply a 'global north greenwash festival' despite more than 100,000 people marching in Glasgow to demand more action. People in the global south were severely let down, with poor outcomes for finance and loss and damage commitments. It needn't be this way, and COP27 is the perfect opportunity to embrace and deliver climate justice.

### Regressive trade deals

It was disheartening to see the UK sign a regressive trade deal with Australia, despite research demonstrating that consumers believe it's important that the UK maintains existing food standards.<sup>20</sup> The deal reduces levies on agricultural products from Australia, despite the country placing bottom of a UN league table of 193 member nations for acting on climate and continuing to deforest for agriculture. This arguably contravenes the Government's manifesto commitment to uphold environmental and welfare standards in trade deals. Core standards for food trade are urgently needed before further trade precedents are set, in line with recommendations set out by the Trade and Agriculture Commission.



Jyoti Fernandes is an agroecological farmer and Policy and Campaigns Coordinator at the Landworkers' Alliance. She was part of the farmer's constituency and represented agroecological and small and family farms at COP26 in Glasgow. She reflects on how agroecology featured at the negotiations.

'COP26 was rightly billed as our final opportunity to keep global warming within 1.5 degrees. Whether or not it has remains to be seen, but what is crystal clear is that the global south, and indeed agroecological farmers around the world were severely let down.

One important success was that through a coalition with other constituencies we ensured that the concepts of human rights, just transition and climate justice were included in the final text. However, given this recognition it was disappointing to see the global north shirk its responsibilities so overtly.

It was outrageous that agroecology featured so little at the COP. Ultimately this omission is symptomatic of us again prioritising the wrong things. Agroecological farming is a necessary part of a just transition and can nurture biodiversity, sequester carbon and regenerate the planet by looking after our soil, creating habitat and planting trees. It should be seen as the solution at the heart of our actions.'



Agroecological farming is a necessary part of a just transition and can nurture biodiversity, sequester carbon and regenerate the planet by looking after our soil, creating habitat and planting trees. It should be seen as the solution at the heart of our actions.

Jyoti Fernandes





2021 the year in summary:

# Healthy and sustainable diets



## Support of system change – National Food Strategy and Food Bills

It might just be that we look back at 2021 as the year that the dial finally shifted for food and diets. This year has demonstrated more than ever that we're beginning to realise our food system is an interconnected part of the climate, nature and health crises and must be tackled as exactly that: a system. The UN Food System Summit, although mired in controversies, was clear that the health of our food systems profoundly affects the health of our bodies, our environment, our economies and our cultures.

The publication of the National Food Strategy for England was emblematic of this, through its integrated approach to climate, nature and health and focus on transformation of the system involving local communities.

And like with climate and nature, the public understand and care deeply about this. British citizens, NGOs and even businesses are overwhelmingly against imports of food produced to lower standards.<sup>21</sup>

The Scottish Parliament have now declared a commitment to a better food system through their Good Food Nation Bill, now working its way through Parliament. The Bill requires Scottish ministers to produce a national food plan and for local authorities and health boards to produce local food plans. Scotland has also launched a Local Food Strategy Consultation aiming to boost local supply chains.<sup>22</sup> And pleasingly, Wales has followed suit with a Food (Wales) Bill introduced to the Senedd.<sup>23</sup> Lots to build on in 2022!



### Sourcing locally in local food hubs

Throughout the pandemic, North Ayrshire Council has been working with community partners to source the food in their larder network largely from local suppliers. The council has been able to tap into their public procurement contracts with food suppliers to benefit the larders using their contracts with local suppliers. Ferguson's Bakery, based in Kilmarnock, now provides a weekly donation of bread rolls to the network, for example.

These larder networks aim to provide food to local communities that need it most. "The money that would have been spent on redistributed surplus food is now spent within building our communities and investing in local businesses that supply the food," explains Laura Taylor, North Ayrshire Council's Community Economic Development Officer.

The council are also exploring how local secondary schools can supply fruit and vegetables into the larders as part of the enterprise and STEM curriculum, with pupils growing produce onsite. A social enterprise bakery is also being piloted in partnership with one of the larder locations, with the aim of growing employability skills locally and supplying fresh baked goods into the network.





**Fresh produce from the community garden is used in cooking or is made available to the community.**

### Diversifying food supplies in community food hubs

There are plenty of opportunities for community food hubs who have taken steps to diversify their food supply too. This might mean growing food onsite, linking up with nearby allotments, or tapping into gleaning projects such as CropDrop, which collect farmgate waste.

Granville Community Kitchen are paving the way here with their substantial growing operation to supplement surplus food received from redistribution charity City Harvest.

Fresh produce from the community garden is used in cooking or is made available to the community. The patchwork farm also provides some food to their solidarity vegbox scheme, the Good Food Box. They are planning to expand to an agroecological farm which would provide much more fresh produce:

"As well as doing the Good Food Box and the food aid, we're now looking at starting a farm so that we would be able to do two main things. One is to grow and process more food in a peri-urban setting, modelling a different food system whilst growing adequate amounts of food to meet the needs of our community. Secondly, we will have an educational site where we can train people from South Kilburn and other areas of inner London to have the relevant skills and knowledge in agroecology that are needed for a new system of farming in London."

CASE STUDY



## Diets and inequality

The everyday reality for UK citizens remains difficult, and the continuing effects of Brexit and the pandemic on supply chains and food production has only widened the inequality gap. We've seen vast labour shortages across the food sector, with severe impacts particularly on those already vulnerable, such as children in receipt of free school meals.<sup>24</sup> Additionally HGV shortages left food banks unfilled while retailers had to throw away vast quantities of food.

Food price increases have disproportionately affected those least well off and the numbers of households reporting concerns around food security continued to rise.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, we're seeing an increasing prevalence of childhood obesity and deteriorating mental health.<sup>26,27,28</sup>

Given the National Food Strategy recommends eligibility extension of free school meals, it is disappointing to see no commitments to this for England in the comprehensive spending review in October. On the other hand, the Scottish and Welsh governments both committed to universal free school meals for all primary school children to be rolled out over the next three years. This is a vital step towards narrowing the inequality gap across the UK. In Scotland this goes even further, with the SNP manifesto looking to expand Food for Life to all local authority areas and provide it with accreditation into the National Care Service, prisons and the NHS - genuinely great news.

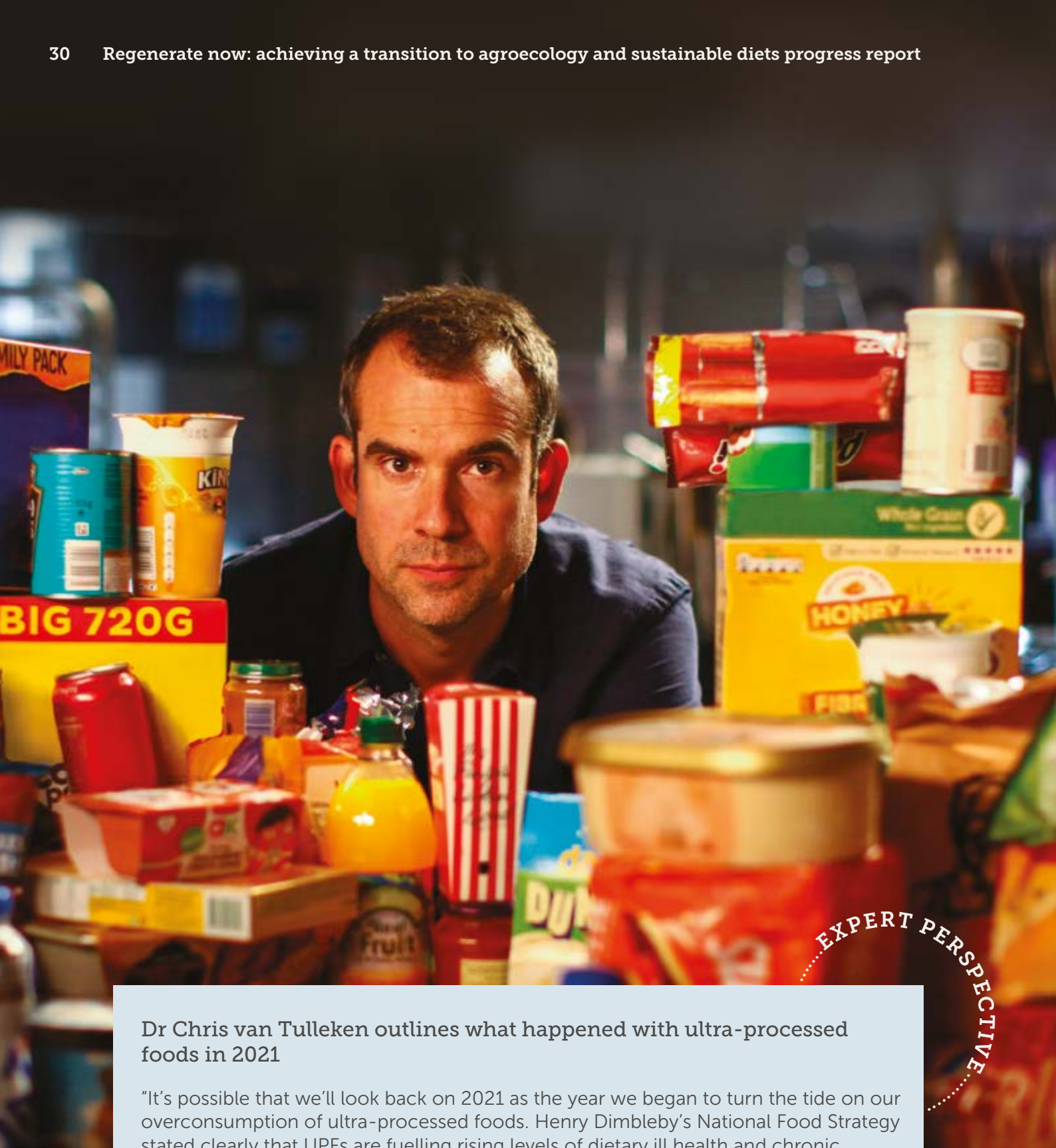
## Transitioning to healthy diets

What's now clear is that to come even close to reaching our climate, nature and health targets, we need to be eating less but better meat and far more fruit, vegetables, nuts and pulses, all sourced from sustainable farming systems.

And the good news is that citizens place immense importance on food quality, animal welfare and sustainability.<sup>29</sup> The Soil Association Out to Lunch campaign found that public pressure and shifting social norms has led to a significant increase in vegetarian options on menus in large restaurant chains since 2019. We've also seen sales in organic increase significantly during the pandemic, with the biggest year-on-year increase in sales in 15 years<sup>30</sup>, but the National Food Strategy showed there remains a gap between those who'd like to buy organic and those who actually do so because of price, availability, lack of transparency and purchasing habits.

Despite this, government seems unwilling to confront the issue of dietary change head on even though the National Food Strategy has put forward strong recommendations for how to improve diets, particularly through public procurement of healthy and sustainable food. At the same time it has proven it is willing to undercut farmers and betray citizens through trade deals that will allow imports of cheap, low standard meat into the UK.





**Dr Chris van Tulleken outlines what happened with ultra-processed foods in 2021**

“It’s possible that we’ll look back on 2021 as the year we began to turn the tide on our overconsumption of ultra-processed foods. Henry Dimbleby’s National Food Strategy stated clearly that UPFs are fuelling rising levels of dietary ill health and chronic disease, partly because of their capacity to interfere with the body’s regulation of appetite and satiety. I discovered this first hand while filming for the BBC, with MRI scanning revealing the effect of UPFs on the wiring of my brain. We should be deeply concerned that children are eating so many of these foods, and at the lack of a policy response. France has introduced a percentage reduction target for UPFs in the national diet, and other governments are exploring labelling options – why not here? We’re a long way from addressing the scourge of UPFs, but in 2021 the scale and urgency of the challenge was at least laid bare.”

EXPERT PERSPECTIVE



Deborah Mbofana, Healthy Food Lead, Northamptonshire Public Health, outlines the challenges faced in the food system from a public health perspective.

“The pandemic has highlighted and brought to wider public attention key public health issues of inequalities, the consequences and impact of being overweight, food insecurity and food poverty. In the last year or so, local communities came together to operationalise a whole systems approach to the pandemic, and we need to capitalise on this connectivity to ensure people and communities can access healthy food and acquire the skills and enthusiasm to grow food and cook from scratch. From education to food procurement and food sustainability, we need to capitalise on, and create, a whole system approach to tackling this challenge, in the same way the system came together to respond to the pandemic.”



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Deborah Mbofana

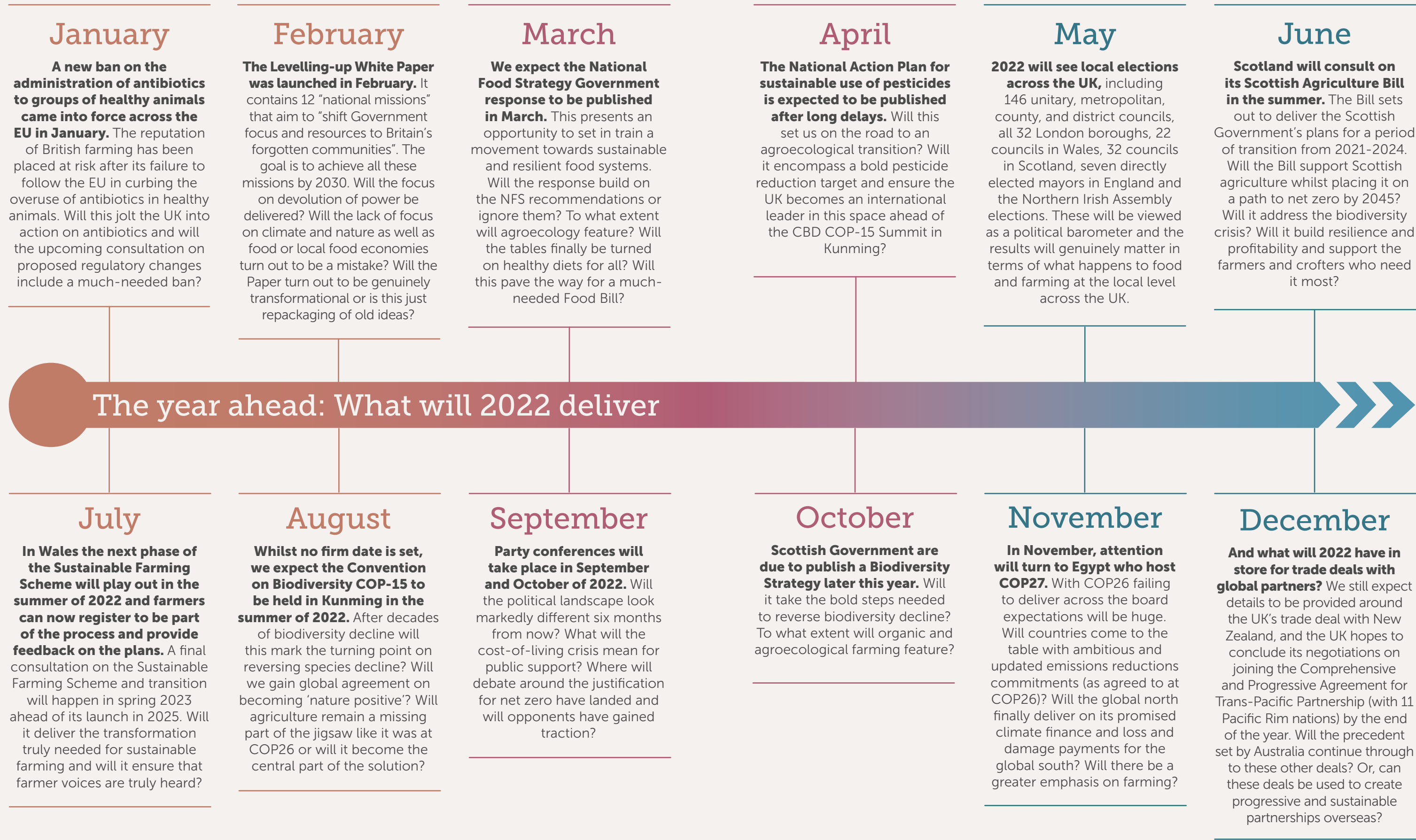


Derek Wright, Catering Services Manager from Blackpool Catering Services gives a perspective on the challenges faced by catering services across the UK.

Over the last few years, Catering Services across the UK have faced many challenges, including Brexit, the pandemic and the cost of ingredients, to name a few. These challenges make us think and work differently to provide healthy, nutritious meals in our communities while using more local supply chains, supporting food and farming system from Farm to Fork

Now more than ever, we have an opportunity to improve health and nutrition via the ingredients we buy and the food we serve. Challenges will continue to face us all in the industry, but we should continue improving food insecurity and providing the very best meals we can.”







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