

Research Project Fact Sheet

UK FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY DURING AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major shock to both UK and global food and nutrition security (FNS) and the full impacts include many unknowns. What we already know is that the pandemic is having serious consequences on the four pillars of FNS: access, availability, utilisation, and stability; at a time when there is also a climate and biodiversity emergency. Post-pandemic crisis recovery programmes need to ensure FNS whilst supporting climate, biodiversity and ecosystem resiliency and mitigation objectives. The pandemic recovery presents opportunities to better align policy responses with improved UK food system resilience, healthy diets and global Sustainable Development Goals. This project will provide government, business, and decision makers with evidence to help develop robust food systems that deliver FNS and which are better placed to respond to the current pandemic and future risks and opportunities.

This Economic and Social Research Council funded one-year rapid response project will assess the impacts and likely consequences on the UK's FNS during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It will assess the wide range of impacts in the UK and globally, in terms of food supply and socio-economics, and how these impacts cascade through the food system affecting the UK's FNS. The project will also evaluate options for improving the resilience of the UK agricultural sector to build sustainable production and consumption and help ensure that pandemic responses also address the climate and biodiversity challenges.



The key objectives of the project are as follows:

1. Assess the immediate response of post-pandemic global food systems.
2. Assess UK food system responses and vulnerabilities.
3. Assess cascading causation of further impacts within a common framework of differing plausible scenarios.
4. Develop scenarios for alternative UK agricultural land use, land management and supply / value chain relationships to better understand the consequences for food-system resilience and long-term environmental sustainability, both in the UK and overseas.
5. Identify spatial environmental consequences of pandemic responses and opportunities for improved FNS and food system resilience through sustainable agriculture.
6. Review lessons learned from the pandemic for adapting the food system to help achieve climate change and biodiversity goals.
7. Provide evidence-based recommendations to inform policy development to increase food system resilience and sustainability.

To achieve this, the project will:

- Undertake a rapid assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 on the global and UK food systems and evaluate how they are responding.
- Conduct stakeholder and expert interviews and surveys.
- Develop plausible scenarios to look at the immediate future whilst considering lessons learned from the pandemic and what this teaches us about continuing threats from climate change, ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss.
- Assess cascading risks through the food system and how this impacts UK FNS, as well as how changes in the UK may impact other countries.
- Assess land use and management options to increase resilience and develop sustainable production systems.
- Conduct spatial analysis to identify potential for the UK to build greater self-reliance to meet of its own food and nutritional needs for a healthy diet.

Some useful background

- The UK imports approximately c. 45% of its food (£47 billion annually).
- The UK exports £22.5 billion of food annually (2018).
- The food sector contributes approximately £111 billion a year to the UK economy and accounts for over 13% of national employment. It is the UK's largest manufacturing sector.
- Household expenditure on food and drink was £128 billion in 2018. Average household spend on food is about 10.6% of total expenditure, but for poorer households this is 15.2% (2017/18).
- Over 70% of people working in the UK food sector earn less than £10/hour despite being 'key' workers. Food bank dependence was up 89-175% year-on-year in April, but had been increasing for the past five years. A month after lockdown, there were c. 5 million people living in households with children under 18 experiencing food insecurity.
- UN World Food Programme estimates the number of people globally facing acute hunger will double this year to 265 million.

The study is led by Dr Mike Rivington from The James Hutton Institute, and operates in full collaboration with Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs) and Cranfield University.

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