

Transforming UK Food Systems SPF Programme Purpose & Aims

The Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF) has been established to drive an increase in high-quality interdisciplinary research and innovation; and ensure that UKRI's investments link up effectively with Government departments' research priorities and opportunities.

The [Transforming UK Food Systems SPF](#) is an interdisciplinary research programme that will help transform the UK food system within a global context by addressing two overarching questions: 1) If we put healthy people and a healthy natural environment at the heart of the food system, what would we eat, how would we encourage people to eat it, and where would that food come from – what would we grow and manufacture in the UK and what would we need to import? 2) In delivering this transformed food system, what interventions would be needed across government, business and civil society?

This Programme will consider the complex interactions between health, environment, economic and behavioural factors across the food system, while taking into account wider needs for different groups in society. The Programme will foster a joined-up approach linking nutritionally healthy and accessible diets with sustainable food production and supply, delivering coherent evidence to enable concerted action from government, business and civil society to help achieve dietary health, obesity reduction and net zero emission goals.

Any transformation should be safe, fair and economically viable, taking into account livelihoods, financial reward structures and delivery of public goods¹.

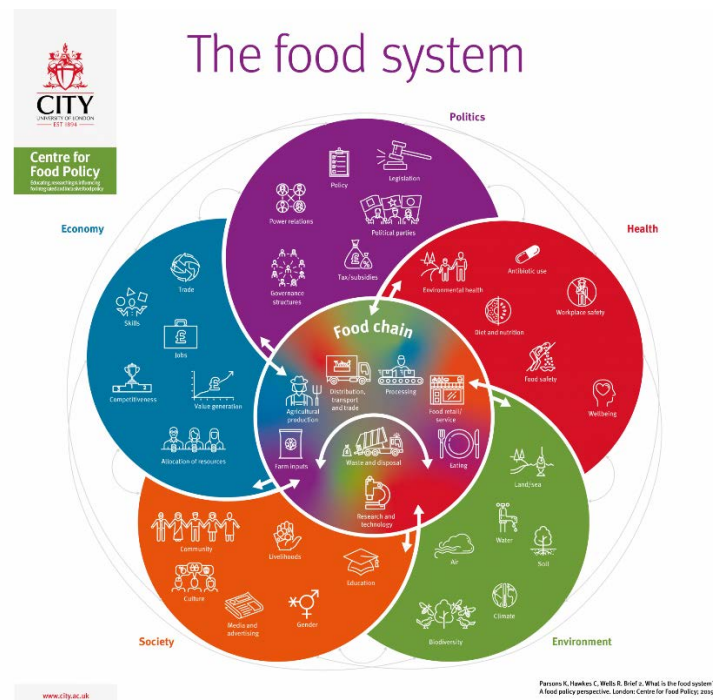


Figure 1. An indicative representation of the food system produced by City University of London. For more information on the food system depicted here, see The Centre for Food Policy Brief²

¹ RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission(2019) Our Future in the Land. Online: file:///C:/Users/fhet11/Downloads/Report-rsa-fcc-our-future-in-the-land.pdf

² Parsons K, Hawkes C, Wells R. Brief 2. What is the food system? A Food policy perspective. In: Rethinking Food Policy: A Fresh Approach to Policy and Practice. London: Centre for Food Policy; 2019' https://www.city.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/471599/7643_Brief-2_What-is-the-food-system-A-food-policy-perspective_WEB_SP.pdf



It is important to frame issues in this systemic, holistic way because the different parts of the overall food system are highly interconnected, and can interact in complex and non-linear ways. A food systems approach avoids unintended consequences from interventions in one part of the system adversely affecting another (for example; simply growing more vegetables for health, without due consideration of demand-side drivers, that end up perishing because people don't want to eat them. Or taxing unhealthy foods which consumers still prioritise due to wider social or cultural factors that lead to reductions in spend on healthy food.)

A food systems approach provides a framework for multifaceted action across the system to inform policy and drive change. In the vegetables example, a systemic approach might involve a combination of the following interventions: education in schools on how to cook with vegetables; growing environmentally sustainable vegetables; making vegetables relevant to how and what people eat (for example increasing the proportion in ready meals); and changing the food environment so there is a greater selection and promotion of affordable, accessible and desirable options.

Research should be shaped and conducted in collaboration with stakeholders which could include government (local/ devolved/ national), business (e.g. farmers, food businesses) or civil society organisations, ensuring two-way knowledge exchange throughout the research process.

The programme is aiming to support a diverse portfolio of projects of varying sizes which address different areas of the UK food system and aiming to address the programmes major themes of 1) Defining a transformed UK food system that places healthy people and a healthy natural environment at its centre; and 2) Delivering food system transformation in the UK.