

Defra Discussion paper ‘Ensuring the UK’s Food Security in a Changing World’

Response from Garden Organic

1.0 Garden Organic (formerly Henry Doubleday Research Association)

1.1 Garden Organic welcomes Defra’s discussion paper titled ‘Ensuring the UK’s Food Security in a Changing World’ which aims to encourage debate on this important topic.

1.2 Garden Organic is an organisation working to inspire, encourage and support individuals and groups to grow organically. This is achieved through research, demonstration, education and promotional activities and we work with individuals growing on a domestic scale, with groups growing on a community scale and with commercial fruit and vegetable farmers growing for local and national markets. Garden Organic is a membership organisation, with over 40,000 members. Over the last 15 years the organisation has been one of the main research providers for Defra’s Research and Development programme on organic horticulture. The organisation also runs a successful school education programme in over 5,000 schools in the UK

2.0 Summary of Garden Organic’s feedback on the discussion paper

2.1 The role and potential of gardening and home food production needs to be properly recognised within the UK food supply chain. Action and investment is required so that home food production can fulfil its potential.

2.2 Support and investment in the UK organic fruit and vegetable supply sector should be increased.

2.3 There should be increased support and investment for the development of localised and resilient food production systems – systems that depend on the use of renewable energy and are based on the principles and practices of organic agriculture.

2.4 It is Garden Organic’s view that the three points listed above (2.1-2.3) are all important within the debate and that they need to be addressed to ensure food security. In this response however, we have chosen to highlight the role of home food production in particular (2.1).

3.0 Gardening and home food production

3.1 Production of fruit and vegetables in domestic gardens, community gardens, allotments, schools and on other communal land can and should have an important role in ensuring UK food security. Home production needs to be recognised as an important complement to the supply of fruit and vegetables from commercial growers and as an integral part of the UK food supply chain.

3.2 The role and potential of gardening and an active involvement of the public in food production needs to be core in the forthcoming UK food security policy. Home food production can provide an important ‘safety net’ within the UK food system, increasing the resilience of the food chain and increasing food security, by addressing availability, access and affordability of food, fruit and vegetables in particular.

3.3 Apart from helping to ensure food security, encouraging and supporting people to garden and produce some of their own fruit and vegetables will also help to meet other government objectives; environmental and social objectives as well as objectives related to health and well being. Gardening and home food production is important because:

- 3.3.1 Home food production can contribute towards ensuring food security by providing access to affordable food for people.
- 3.3.2 Home food production will help to provide access to affordable fruit and vegetables, increase consumption of fruit and vegetables and enable more people to reach the 5 A DAY target.
- 3.3.3 Organic gardening, including home composting and home food production, will help to tackle climate change by reducing the carbon footprint of UK households.
- 3.3.4 Active engagement in gardening and access to gardens and green spaces will improve health and well being of people and support community cohesion.
- 3.3.5 Organic gardening will provide environmental benefits by maintaining and increasing biodiversity, including the conservation of genetic diversity of food crops, by improving the health of soils and protecting the stores of carbon in garden soils.
- 3.3.6 Use of domestic gardens for diverse plantings will provide areas for infiltration of rainwater and thus help to prevent flooding in urban areas.
- 3.4 In the UK the time is now right for home food production to play its role. As identified in the Defra discussion paper, current trends show that people in the UK are becoming more interested in their food, its quality, where it comes from and where it was produced. Furthermore, increasing numbers of people want to garden organically and grow some of their own fruit and vegetables; retail sales of vegetable seeds have increased sharply as has the demand for allotment sites. Actions are now required at all levels to ensure that people's intentions are mobilised into practical and successful action, so that the potential role of home food production can play its part to ensure food security.
- 3.5 The actions that are required by UK Government for gardening and home food production to fulfil its potential are as follows:
 - 3.5.1 Ensure that gardening and home food production are considered as essential life-skills, with adequate provision of education and training opportunities for children and adults.
 - 3.5.2 Encourage and support people with their gardening and food growing activities, though communication training and provision of resources.
 - 3.5.3 Provide access to land for all people, by ensuring adequate provision of gardens in new housing developments, increased provision of allotment areas and community gardens and support for landowners who want to initiate community supported agricultural schemes.
 - 3.5.4 Invest in research and development activities specifically targeted at gardening and food production at this scale.
- 3.6 Garden Organic encourages Defra to initiate a national campaign to encourage the public to grow fruit and vegetables in their gardens, allotments, in schools and on other communal and public land.

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Dr Margi Lennartsson
Policy Director