

## **Food Security - Background Information**

### **What is Food Security and why does it matter?**

There are many definitions of Food Security, a widely used one being the 1996 World Food Summit definition, which describes Food Security as “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” (FAO, 2006) This encompasses aspects like whether food can reach consumers, whether households can afford it, and whether it is safe.

Food Resilience refers to the extent to which whole food systems can prepare for disruptions, can continue providing accessible and affordable food throughout, and can recover in the aftermath of these shocks. Recent global disruptions that have increased food insecurity include COVID-19 and its impact on the food supply chain, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and increasingly extreme weather conditions. COVID-19, especially, showed how quickly food systems can be affected by large-scale shocks (Lang & Lindgren, 2023).

Therefore, weak food security and a lack of food resilience can mean that in times of disruption, which are happening increasingly more often, households within the UK can struggle to access safe and nutritious food.

### **Current Threats to Food Security in the UK**

Weather is a large and unpredictable threat to food security in the UK. Changes in temperature and rainfall can reduce agricultural yields, and the UK is experiencing this firsthand. The United Kingdom Food Security Report 2024 reported that in 2019, UK cereal production was the highest this century; however, only one year later, cereal production was the second lowest, mainly due to bad weather (DEFRA, 2024).

The UK’s dependence on importers for food reduces UK food resilience, as it makes the UK reliant on countries that are subject to their own climate-related challenges that are out of the UK’s control. For example, while domestic production of fresh fruit has doubled since 2003, it is still only at 16% (DEFRA, 2024)

Food security has strong social elements, and national food availability does not automatically equal household food security. Food price inflation spiked to 45-year highs in 2022 and 2023, and subsequently, the percentage of food-secure households went from 92% in 2020 to 90% in 2023 (DEFRA, 2024). Furthermore, those from lower-income groups are less likely to meet government dietary recommendations in comparison to those from highest-income groups.

## **UK v.s EU: Advice on household preparedness**

Current UK Government advice on household preparedness with regard to food is limited to recommending the stockpiling of non-perishable foods (Cabinet Office, n.d). Some argue that Government advice on public preparedness for food shocks is lacking (Lang et al., 2025). The UK Government's wider food strategy 2025 (DEFRA, 2025) states the need to establish resilient domestic production, increasing preparedness for supply-chain shocks and making food production more environmentally sustainable. It proposes stronger regional and local food systems and greater involvement with local authorities, food partnerships, and civil society. Lang et al. concluded that to successfully reach civil food resilience, a significant readjustment to the UK food system itself, in government thinking and delivery, is needed.

The EU has similar but clearer advice on keeping emergency food supplies. For example, Finland promotes a 72-hour home preparedness guide that suggests keeping enough food to last the household 72 hours (72 hours, n.d). The European Commission's contingency plan (European Commission, n.d.) to ensure food security focuses on increasing preparedness for threats. The European Food Security Crisis Preparedness and Response Mechanism (EFSCM) brings together experts and stakeholders to identify vulnerabilities and cultivate responses to threats. They also have stronger legislation in place that promotes food security, for example, the EU Green Deal (European Commission, 2019), which integrates environmental objectives into food and agricultural policy.

## **Conclusion**

The UK faces increasing risks to food security and therefore, strengthening food resilience nationally and locally is crucial to the future of the UK. Successful food resilience depends on building a food system in which government, industries, communities and individuals collaborate to become better prepared for the future of food security.

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