

Sustain's General Election Manifesto 2024



Sustain's General Election Manifesto

One in seven workers in the UK is employed in the food system, which contributes over £120 billion to the UK economy. Food and farming are critical for our national security. However, the way our food is produced currently creates multiple problems, when it could be driving solutions.

Actively supporting farmers to secure a fair deal and produce food in a sustainable way could improve the health of our people, reduce inequalities, clean up our rivers, reverse species and nature decline, help tackle climate change and put more money into our rural economies. A healthier population also underpins happier lives and a stronger, more productive economy.

The Sustain alliance advocates for healthier food, climate- and nature-friendly farming and better routes to market. Food producers should receive a fair price, workers the real living wage, and all citizens access to affordable healthy food. We support good food jobs to help keep our high streets alive and support the local community.

But the facts tell a different story.

- A quarter of people in the UK now live with obesity.
- Fifteen percent of UK households experienced food insecurity (data from January 2024).
- Almost half of fruit and veg farmers fear going out of business next year.
- A quarter of food workers experienced food insecurity this year.
- Our food is responsible for nearly a third of the emissions creating dangerous climate change.
- Agriculture is the leading cause of river pollution and loss of nature in England.
- A fifth of pollinators such as bees, on which our food supply depends, have disappeared.

At the moment, our diets are bad for our health and the planet, containing too much meat and unhealthy processed foods, and not enough fruit and vegetables, pulses and wholegrains, and oily fish. Our diets aren't just about personal choice - the food we eat depends on the options presented to us every day, how much they cost, and how well distributed and marketed they are. Our leaders, national and local, have an enormous opportunity to shape the food we eat and how it is produced – for example, by serving healthy, climate and nature friendly food in schools and hospitals, and setting high standards for food businesses.

Sustain is an alliance of food and farming organisations. We believe healthy, sustainable diets should be accessible and affordable to all. We want to see this principle upheld in law through the Right to Food, which would allocate responsibilities, resources, structures and accountability at local and national level to make this happen. Currently, 8.4 million adults in the UK struggle to afford enough to eat, and 20% of households with children are experiencing food insecurity. People experiencing food poverty need adequate incomes, a cash-first approach and a decent nutritional safety net.

At Sustain we also believe that no child should be too hungry to learn, yet in England alone 900,000 children living in poverty miss out on free school meals. Evidence shows that school meals boost attainment, improve diets and can provide a return on investment of £1.71 for every pound. Like desks and teachers, school meals should be free for all. Furthermore, we need to champion our children's health by switching the spotlight away from unhealthy food advertising.

The food system provides employment opportunities, shapes our landscape and affects our health and wellbeing. Food drives our culture and communities, sits at the centre of our celebrations and nourishes us. We all deserve better.

Rather than start from scratch, we recommend that any new government administration revisit the independent National Food Strategy. The strategy authors spent two years researching and gathering evidence from hundreds of experts. It is comprehensive and has actionable policies that have the widespread support of the sector.

Here are the things we want to see in all of the political party manifestos for the July 2024 General Election.

Sustainable farming

We advocate for an accelerated transition to agroecological farming and better routes to market for farmers and fishers. Both the public sector and the market should reward farmers and food producers for the work they do to provide our food in a nature- and climate-friendly way.

We want all political parties and candidates in the General Election to commit to:

- **Sensible land-use policy.** Develop, publish and implement a long-promised land-use framework that guides sensible land-use decisions and supports resilient rural economies, farm landscapes and restoration of nature.
- **Funding for agroecological farming.** Provide sufficient funding for the Environmental Land Management (ELM) farm payment schemes, which are needed to support farmers to transition quickly and confidently to climate- and nature-friendly farming systems.
- **Support for local food and shorter supply chains.** Support more food hubs, a food partnership and a food plan in every local authority, and a Local Food Enterprise Fund worth between £300-500 million per year.
- **Support for farmer cooperatives.** Allocate resources to establish and grow farmer cooperatives, to empower smaller-scale farmers to negotiate better prices and terms when marketing their produce. Such investment will foster collaboration, improve market access, and create more resilient local food systems.
- **Fairer supply chains.** Reinforce the Groceries Code Adjudicator to protect farmers and be empowered to take a more effective and deterrent-based approach against unfair practices by supermarkets and food manufacturers. The GCA's remit should also be expanded to include businesses with a turnover of over £500,000.
- **Horticulture strategy.** Develop a cross-departmental, long-term horticulture strategy to increase agroecological production, and consumption, of domestic fruit, vegetable, grain (with more of this going into wholegrain food), pulses/legumes.
- **Maintain UK food and farming standards in trade deals.** Commit to upholding Core Standards for food safety and quality, farm antibiotics, pesticides, animal welfare, biodiversity protection and climate change in all international trade deals, to uphold the high standards that citizens expect for their food, and to protect British farmers from unfair competition from lower standard produce.

Climate change and nature

A new government will need to revise their climate change plan within 12 months, recognising that agriculture and diets are currently areas identified by the UK's Climate Change Committee as lacking credible emissions reductions policies. We want to see government recognise that industrial, intensive meat production and consumption

is a leading cause of river pollution, wildlife collapse and the climate crisis, and to take determined action to address this. For example, we want to see public sector food leading a transition to planetary health diets and supporting nature-friendly farming systems through mandatory standards. We'd also like to see the next government deliver policies to make recommended reductions in meat and dairy accessible and affordable.

We want all political parties and candidates in the General Election to commit to:

- **Planetary health diets.** Publish a dietary transition plan, to improve the affordability and accessibility of sustainable and healthy food. This should follow the Eating Better Alliance's roadmap to a 50% reduction in meat and dairy production and consumption by 2030, including mandatory emissions reduction reporting and targets for large food businesses.
- **Better public sector food.** Set robust standards for food in public institutions. We would like to see new, legally binding standards set for food served in schools, hospitals, care homes, government, local authorities and the armed forces, supporting nature-friendly farmers and British food standards, and see these monitored to ensure compliance.
- **Clean rivers.** Introduce a moratorium on new intensive livestock units in catchments where nutrient loads are exceeded, or rivers are in unfavourable condition.
- **Planning for the planet.** Make our planning system work for the planet and communities. Climate and environmental impact assessments should be mandatory for planning applications for industrial livestock units. Planning permission and an environmental permit should be required for all intensive livestock units, as well as intensive dairy units.
- **Ensuring compliance.** Properly fund our environmental protection bodies. The Environment Agency's funding has been cut by half since 2010. Environmental

regulations need to be properly resourced, monitored and enforced.

- **Re-setting the law.** Introduce a new Business, Human Rights and Environment Act to require UK companies to carry out due diligence to prevent environmental harm and human rights abuses in their supply chains.

Education

Healthy school meals boost attainment and attendance, increase a child's lifetime earnings, improve food security, help families save on food costs, improve diet quality and help combat childhood obesity, saving the NHS money in the long term.

We want all political parties and candidates in the General Election to commit to:

- **School Food For All.** Commit to reviewing quality, funding and access for school meals, including working towards progressively ending school meal means-testing and providing comprehensively funded, nutritious school food for all children by 2030, from nursery to sixth form college.
- **Include more children.** Uplift the threshold and introduce auto-enrolment for free school meals. While we wait for healthy school meals for all, children urgently need an uplift of the eligibility threshold, which currently sees more than 900,000 school children in England excluded, even though they are living in poverty. All eligible children should be auto-enrolled for free school meals.
- **School fruit and veg.** Expand the School Fruit and Veg Scheme to all 4.7 million state-funded primary school children and prioritise seasonal, sustainable UK produce.
- **Real Bread.** Ensure there is Real Bread on the menu of every school. We want every child to have the chance to choose additive-free bread, made in-house or by a local bakery.

Health

All children should be able to live healthily and access healthy food, no matter where they live.

We want all political parties and candidates in the General Election to commit to:

- **Reduce childhood obesity.** Recommit to halving childhood obesity by 2030, urgently put stalled measures into place like limits on 'buy one get one free' marketing and introducing a 9pm watershed for unhealthy food advertising on TV and a total restriction online. Also bringing in comprehensive measures to restrict unhealthy food adverts across all locations such as our streets and transport networks.
- **Drive food reformulation.** Commit to introducing a new levy to help make our food healthier, while raising revenue that can be invested back into child health. £77.9 billion could be saved by the NHS with a new industry salt and sugar levy, over 25 years. Over two-thirds of the public support extension to the existing Soft Drinks Industry Levy if the money raised went to children's health programmes.
- **Secure a Healthy Start.** Implement auto-enrolment for Healthy Start fruit, veg and milk vouchers for low-income families with young children, to address persistent low uptake, with an inflation-linked increase in the Healthy Start allowance. We also want to see the scheme expanded to five-year-olds to close the gap between eligibility to Healthy Start (up to age four) and Free School Meals (from age 5) and to all families on Universal Credit or equivalent social security benefits, and people with the status of 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF).
- **Curb energy drinks.** Introduce regulation to prevent direct sales of high-caffeine energy drinks to under-16s, and require clearer warning labels on the drinks.

Children should not be consuming high-caffeine energy drinks, as is already stated on the drinks themselves.

- **Build strong, healthy, local communities.** Reverse real-term cuts to the public health grant to local authorities, increase the powers of local authorities to tackle unhealthy food and drink advertising and update planning rules to enable local authorities to reduce the prevalence of unhealthy food outlets. Strengthen national planning policies and guidance to support the development of healthy food environments.

Support for local action and food citizenship

Sustain's General Election Manifesto focuses on what we want the national political parties to deliver. Sustain also works with over 90 food partnerships in towns, cities and regions across the UK, involving local authorities, civil society groups and businesses. Wherever it is in their ability and powers to do so, we want local authorities to take action on the matters covered here. We also want national government to enable them to do so by setting the expectation of there being a food partnership and plan in every local area, enabling this to happen through powers, policies and resources, and requiring local authorities to report on progress. There is now ample evidence of the benefits this would bring, built up over the past decade through the Sustainable Food Places network. This policy could be mandated by Good Food Nation Acts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, following the lead set by the inspirational Good Food Nation Act in Scotland.

More election calls from our projects and organisations in the Sustain alliance and wider network

If you're interested in...

- **Children's Food Campaign** - parents' manifesto for healthy children's food: <https://www.sustainweb.org/news/apr24-parents-manifesto/>
- **Obesity Health Alliance** – action on obesity: <https://obesityhealthalliance.org.uk/2023/05/23/manifesto/>
- **Food Foundation** – Nourishing the Nation: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/election-2024-nourishing-nation>
- **School Food Matters** – standards for school food: <https://www.schoolfoodmatters.org/what-we-do/campiagns/food-policy/school-food-review>
- **Real Bread Campaign** – support small independent bakers: <https://www.sustainweb.org/news/mar24-real-bread-manifesto/>
- **Nature Friendly Farming Network** – sustainable farming: <https://www.nffn.org.uk/resources/nffns-uk-manifesto-launch-high-stakes-for-food-and-farming-in-an-election-year>
- **Soil Association** – sustainable farming: <https://www.soilassociation.org/causes-campaigns/soil-association-manifesto/>
- **Pesticide Action Network (and Pesticide Collaboration)** – action to reduce pesticides: <https://www.pan-uk.org/general-election-2024-what-are-we-calling-for/>
- **River Action** – action for clean rivers: <https://riveractionuk.com/charter-for-rivers/>
- **Wildlife & Countryside Link** – Nature 2030 policy asks for nature restoration: <https://www.wcl.org.uk/nature-2030-minifestos.asp>
- **Wildlife Trusts** – policies for wildlife and the natural environment: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/general-election-2024-our-priorities>
- **Friends of the Earth** – comparison of green policies across the main political parties: <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/system-change/green-policies-and-general-election-who-leads-pack>
- **Green Alliance** – tracking environmental policy and politics: <https://greenallianceblog.org.uk/tag/general-election-2024/>

Sustain is a powerful alliance of organisations and communities working together for a better system of food, farming and fishing. The Sustain alliance brings together around 100 organisations nationally – and hundreds more at local and regional level – cultivating the movement for change. We campaign for a healthy and sustainable food and farming system that is publicly accountable and socially and environmentally responsible.