

SUSTAIN RESPONSE TO THE EU HEALTH POLICY CONSULTATION

THE STATUS OF THIS RESPONSE

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the living and working environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 public interest organisations in the UK working at international, national, regional and local level (listed on our website www.sustainweb.org).

We have recently responded to a number of major consultation documents issued by the British Government. These documents covered very similar ground to *Enabling Good Health for all: A reflection process for a new EU Health Strategy*. Thus we thought it would be helpful for the Commission to see copies of our responses to these government consultations. The full range of our official responses can be found at http://www.sustainweb.org/news_consult.asp. Attached to this email is a selection of the most recent and relevant Sustain responses, as follows:

- Taking it on: developing a UK sustainable development strategy together. July 2004
- Choosing health? Choosing a better diet. July 2004
- Putting consumers first: The Food Standards Agency's draft strategic plan 2005-2010. June 2004
- Food Standards Agency – Action plan on food promotions and children's diets. June 2004
- Interim response to the UK DEFRA consultation on the CAP sugar regime (in association with the UK Food Group). January 2004

The principles underlying each of these responses is reproduced below, and we believe these principles should underpin the EU's health policy, as it affects farming and food.

Farming and food policy should incorporate sustainable development, by which we mean, in Brundtland's definition, the capacity to provide for the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability to provide adequately for future generations. This holistic approach encompasses social and economic goals alongside environmental imperatives, as outlined below.

- ❖ Health, by which we mean, using the World Health Organisation's definition, physical and mental well-being, not merely the absence of disease, both for humans and animals. For food policy this means:
 - food uncontaminated by microbiological poisons, toxic residues or other harmful substances;
 - food that does not compromise our resistance to infection, or render ineffective medical treatments;
 - a food supply that is micronutrient-dense, fibre-rich and provides essential fats to reduce the risks of developing cardiovascular diseases, some cancers and other diet-related illnesses. This largely comprises a variety of whole-grain cereals and other starchy

staples, plentiful and varied vegetables and fruit, diverse pulses, nuts and seeds, some dairy produce and, for non-vegetarians, occasional fish and meat;

- access to the best quality food (as outlined above) for the most vulnerable in society, particularly low income groups and, especially, babies and children, elderly people, and those who are ill.

❖ Environmental quality:

- clean air and water to support human, animal and plant life;
- rich natural habitats (both land and water-based) that will support abundant and diverse wildlife;
- natural genetic diversity in farmed plants and animals, to reduce vulnerability to diseases, preserve our heritage and enrich our diets;
- high animal welfare standards, to preserve animal and human dignity and improve animals' resistance to diseases, some of which are zoonotic;
- careful husbandry of non-renewable natural resources, including the soil, to reduce waste and pollution, and allow time to switch to renewable alternatives.

❖ Livelihoods:

- jobs in the farming and food sector, whether private or public, that provide a living wage;
- working conditions that do not endanger health or well-being;
- on and/or off-the-job training that offers opportunities for personal development and acquiring flexible skills;
- adequate state benefits for those who are unable to obtain paid employment.

Underpinning what citizens expect of sustainable development are the following rights and responsibilities:

- to receive adequate food knowledge and skills from the education system, and to use these to make choices that will optimise sustainable development;
- to be thoroughly protected from information about farming and food which is dishonest, illegal and untrue;
- to have a choice of ways to obtain food, and to use these choices to retain diversity;
- to have democratic control over decisions that will affect the farming and food sector, and to take the opportunities offered to participate in these decisions.

In providing this for UK citizens, the food and farming sector should, at worst, not undermine the provision of the same for other countries and, at best, contribute to achieving these goals for other countries, particularly for the poorest.

Sustain would be happy to discuss any of the material in the attached documents if the Commission would find this helpful. We look forward to being kept informed of developments as the reflection process makes progress.

Jeanette Longfield, Co-ordinator
Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming
94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF
Tel: 020-7837-1228 Fax: 020-7837-1141
Email: jeanette@sustainweb.org
Web: www.sustainweb.org

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