



Policy Insight Report

EDITION 8

OVERVIEW

- The Government announces major expansion of free school meals alongside new NHS guidance on commercial baby foods, whilst the Spending Review protects environmental schemes but reduces farming budgets.
- Former military leaders call for widened national security definitions to include food systems, following Strategic Defence Review.

POLITICAL INSIGHTS

- Free school meals expansion announced for all children in England from households on Universal Credit starting 2026/27, benefitting 500,000+ additional children. Both England and Wales have launched reviews of School Food Standards. Scotland is piloting secondary school meal expansion for S1-S3 in 60 schools across eight local authorities from August.
- The NHS has issued new guidance on the use of commercial baby foods, warning parents against relying on shop-bought baby food pouches as everyday meals.
- Spending Review reduces DEFRA budgets by 2.7% annually, whilst largely protecting ELMS. Household Support Fund has transitioned to a multi-year Crisis & Resilience Fund, with funding of £1bn per year. NFU has criticised £100 million reduction in farming and countryside programmes, including SFI and Countryside Stewardship.
- New National Diet & Nutrition Survey data shows children consuming double the recommended sugar levels whilst fruit, vegetable and fibre intakes all fall short.
- Former military leaders urge the Government to widen its definition of national security to include food, climate, water and energy, following Strategic Defence Review.
- Government will require all large food companies to report on the healthiness of their food sales by the end of parliamentary term. Seven major retailers plus the Food and Drink Federation have recently backed mandatory reporting on food health.
- Government launched review of the Grocery Code Adjudicator’s effectiveness at ensuring fairness in supply chains.
- New Consumer Council research shows food shopping represents the biggest proportion of households’ “basic spending” in Northern Ireland.

MEDIA INSIGHTS

- Dr. Clive Black, former Head of Food Policy at the NFU, has called for a Minister for the Food System.
- Sir David Omand, former UK intelligence chief, warns that UK governments should seek to prepare in the event of a food shock.
- Department for Health and Social Care ruled out a ban on alcohol advertising but said “partial restrictions are being considered” after Sky TV reported seeing a leaked chapter of the new 10-year Health Plan.
- Almost 200 dairy farmers have left the sector in the past 12 months, according to the latest figures from AHDB reported in Farmers Weekly.

CIVIL SOCIETY UPDATES

- The Food Foundation podcast on junk food advertising discussed the impact of the latest Government delay in TV and online advertising restrictions.
- Sustain launched Good Food Local, a national benchmarking platform for councils to drive meaningful progress in food systems.
- High Steaks report shows young men 16-24 consume most meat and resist cutting back due to factors including protein myths and online misinformation.

