



**NATIONAL
PREPAREDNESS
COMMISSION**

Executive Summary of a report to the
National Preparedness Commission

Just in Case: 7 steps to narrow the UK civil food resilience gap

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

How UK society copes with food crises

Since World War II, the UK has experienced what to previous generations would have been a revolution in food. Diets, supply and tastes have changed and become more used to more plentiful, diverse and a-seasonal food. Where the British buy from and what is purchased has changed. So have tastes and expectations. At the same time, access to food has become more dependent on fewer, larger suppliers, while still being subject to the vagaries of unequal incomes and living standards.

This report considers what would be entailed for the public if the status quo were disrupted. What would public reactions be? How prepared for food shocks are the British? Specifically, it sets out a challenge: the necessity to take food shocks more seriously and how to improve civil food resilience (see *Box 1*).

Box 1: Civil food resilience

By 'civil food resilience' we mean the capacity of people in their daily lives to be more aware of risks to food, more skilled in reducing unnecessary risks, and more prepared to act with others to ensure all society is well fed in and after crises. This cannot be left to the people to activate in an *ad hoc* way or on their own. It requires a process of learning, capacity-building and preparation. To be, as government wishes, a response of the 'whole of society' requires infrastructure, guidance and support. The report finds that these are currently lacking but could and should be introduced. It offers proposals as to how.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the key narratives and findings from a larger, more detailed report. That report concludes that what little attention to food resilience there has been focusses on food supply rather than the consumer and public end of the food system. Insofar as the public's role in resilience is considered, this is left vague, generalised and thus insufficiently specific. The public dimension to resilience is thus more likely to become itself a risk in crises. The UK is being slow to address this civil dimension. As the main report shows, other countries offer different and better directions for civil society and the public than the UK presently does. The UK could do better.

The UK does have an official Government Resilience Framework, the latest iteration of an evolving policy, published in 2022.^{2,3} This too has next to no focus on either food or the role of the public in civil food resilience. The 2023 National Risk Register only conceives of one direct food impact, that of food supply contamination.⁴ This is certainly a possibility but by no means the only potential source of food shocks. The omission or downplaying of risks does not match what specialists or the food industries think possible. There appears to be a serious gap in state thinking.

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“Other countries offer different and better directions for civil society and the public than the UK presently does.”

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On 22 May 2024, the morning the recent general election was called, the Deputy Prime Minister gave fleetingly brief advice to the public to store 3 days’ worth of food at home.⁵ Discussion of what this meant and why it was needed was deferred to slightly more information via the Emergency Planning College, the launch of whose ‘Prepare’ website had precipitated the DPM’s advice.⁶

The manner and impact of this intervention leaves much to be desired. It failed to do most of what the present report proposes: the need to explain, to engage with the public and to be context specific. But it did represent a shift into the public sphere, although the advice was thin, falling into the trap of putting the onus on consumers to be prepared, without giving support or requisite infrastructure.

It assumed all consumers are equally able to follow the advice, when they are not. It provided no infrastructure. It made little or no connection with the dynamics of the food system which make the public food insecure. Crucially, too, it appeared to ignore the recognition that even people in business, as well as analysts and scientists, now give to the fragilities built into the food system.

If the UK wants to develop civil food resilience – and there are strong arguments for doing so – giving advice out of the blue is not the way to go about it. Making the UK public more food prepared requires thought.

A more considered, evidence-based strategy for civil food resilience is not only possible but desirable and long overdue.



PURPOSE AND BRIEF FOR THE REPORT

The purpose of the report is to:

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- **assess the state of food resilience in the UK, with an emphasis on:**
 - > societal or civil resilience – is the population prepared? What could make it so?
 - > institutional architecture – are there appropriate structures to aid civil food resilience?
 - > what existing policies are involved – what gaps exist?
 - **consider the possibility and types of disruptions to the food system and public access to food in crises,**
 - **review how existing and improved resilience policy frameworks might apply more closely to food systems, and**
 - **make recommendations for strengthening UK civil food resilience.**
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The work reported here is preliminary in that, to our knowledge, there is nothing like it in the public domain. There is a vast literature on how the food system needs to change to prevent and/or adapt to coming shocks and change, but next to nothing about the public role other than well-meaning advice to change diets and consume more wisely to reduce unfolding damage. Yet we found some countries beginning that engagement, and some UK civil society actions offering important signals for a more resilient society.

This inquiry has considered what would and could be the role of the public in adapting to potential shocks. There are known threats and risks, but existing discourse concentrates overwhelmingly on what government and industry should do. It is almost entirely about supply and pays scant attention to demand and societal dynamics.

By asking ‘what if?’ - about and for the public or civil society - the report reframes policy consideration of food security and resilience. The UK is generally reluctant to consider its own food security as of major political significance. This is a mistake (see Chapters 2 and 3 – note that this and the following references to Chapter numbers refer to the main report) and one which has caught us out in the past. To prevent such mistakes being repeated, and to build on what is known about food and conflict, the report draws on international experience of food vulnerability, and considers what scientists and analysts expect ahead. There is no longer an Empire to feed us, nor a powerful navy with capacity to protect long supply routes. We cannot assume British exceptionalism regarding the need for food, nor vulnerability to food threats, nor the importance of how the public might respond to food crises.

The report is written for the public as well as specialists, policymakers and different sectors of the food system. It outlines key national resilience policies and features that currently apply to resilience planning in general and thus, by implication, to food (see Chapter 4).

Resilience is not a ‘bolt-on’ factor. It has to emerge from the characteristics of the food system. What is reported in the pages that follow is not a simple situation. There are competing interests, understandings and roles. Despite these divergences, the report found coherence in the significance of food risks that can be identified (see Chapter 5). The UK can also learn from what other countries are doing, illustrated by the ten country studies that were conducted (see Chapter 6).

The report concludes that aiming for civil food resilience is not a simple matter of keeping a few tins under the bed. There is much more the public could do and draw upon but there is no quick fix (see Chapters 7, 8 and 9). If civil food resilience is to be taken seriously, the current institutional and policy architecture needs some revision (Chapter 10). There is, however, much that can be built on, and it can be done.

EXISTING POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Parallel but disengaged discourses

If the UK is to create a coherent and integrated position on civil food resilience, it must recognise that that current resilience thinking has to jostle for influence amidst different discourses about food security that **need to be aligned**. One is a top-down approach that sees food security as a matter of trade and supply only. This is seemingly blind to the experience of millions of people already finding household food security a real problem. Food prices are 25% higher than a few years ago. We cannot assume that, providing sufficient supply (from anywhere) is maintained, consumption will also be fine. In this paradigm food resilience is simply a matter of ensuring supply, assuming demand is constant. In fact, people's reactions in food crises cannot be assumed. Nor can social cohesion be: it has to be built.

Meanwhile, confidence that even a rich country such as the UK can maintain supply in all circumstances is weakening. There is increasing awareness of the deepening fissures within the food system. The polycrisis of food being an intersection point for economics, health, environment, geopolitics and societal divisions ruptures confidence that all is well. It is more than likely that the demand on civil food resilience would take different forms in different circumstances.

There is little dialogue between these parallel discourses; there should be. The report therefore points to the need for a significant realignment of policies, institutions and strategies all designed to take the confluence and volatility of food security and resilience more seriously (see *Chapter 4*).

In World Wars I and II, the British public had to be brought into active engagement because supply became stretched and could not be taken for granted. Normal modes of food provision were disrupted and brought under non-market control. Britain produced only about a third of its food and large sections of its population were poorly (i.e. under) fed. With the threat of a food blockade, emergency measures were taken. Rationing, public advice, injection of new skills, new feeding outlets, a 'war on waste', and a massive effort to produce more food based on addressing health and equity ensued, changing the food culture for a generation.

This public engagement was forced by the reality of disruptions to supply. This could easily happen again today in a major food crisis but could be prevented or ameliorated by taking action now. As interviews for this report show, few expect an exact repetition of the past, not least because today's consuming public is very different to that of a century ago. It has new tastes, assumptions of normality, expectations and lifestyles. Shopping and types of foods have changed. Old-style '3-minute warnings' or out-of-the-blue advice to stockpile food sit uncomfortably within this massively changed food system. But the lack of attention to - and clarity about - the civil aspects of food resilience need to be addressed more coherently than it is.

The report provides an overview of **what is meant by resilience** – bouncing back in and after shock (see Chapter 1). It explains **why food resilience is an issue for the UK** (see Chapter 2). It summarises the strands of **official UK resilience thinking** (see Chapter 3). This can be traced back at least to the 1930s. Today, as far as public awareness is concerned, resilience mostly depends on locally provided ‘blue light’ resilience services – the emergency services that provide a response and support in crisis: police, ambulance, firefighters, rescue services. These **emergency services** are co-ordinated for crises by a system of Local Resilience Forums created two decades ago (see Chapters 4 and 10). **They have next to no engagement on food matters** (a situation explored in Chapter 6) but are becoming aware of this gap yet are not being helped to narrow it. The report considers who and what is needed to build civil food resilience.

Food resilience preparation must take account of a variety of problems such as wide inequalities in consumption and health, poor access, cost of living effects, changed skills and expectations, and, above all, a systemic reliance on just-in-time food logistics, a nigh magical belief that food just appears on shelves.

In World War II the national food crisis was addressed by a double push both to produce more food (and waste less) and to ensure all were well fed, underpinned by policies such as rationing and commitments to be equitable and pro-health, taking into account the realities of different capabilities. One cannot expect public engagement unless the public’s realities are taken seriously. This is one reason why the Deputy Prime Minister’s *Prepare* advice seemed simplistic. If it signalled interest in food resilience, that is welcome but much more work is needed.



THE POST-WORLD WAR II MODEL OF FOOD AND SOCIETY IS FRAYING

Post-World War II, UK food security was rebuilt by reinvestment in home agriculture, then by ‘Europeanisation’ and the Common Agricultural Policy. 70 years later, the model that said ‘produce more food and food security will follow’ is under strain from environmental and climate challenges, new diet-related diseases, and changed geopolitics. In 2016 the UK left the EU just when that body was faltering beginning to address what was needed. UK-EU food relations are strained, not least due to trade barriers and delays from the political choice of a ‘hard’ Brexit. Post-EU, the UK still has no coherent food policy - yet nearly a third of its food still comes from Europe, and global supplies have other demands too.

The challenge of **UK civil food resilience now inhabits a new terrain compared to even a few years ago let alone longer**, all just when conventional market forces are looking stretched by price rises, oil and resource dependency, and a locked-in consumer culture – and when business is aware of fragilities in structures it has built up (see the many interviews in the main report). This alone would make for tricky food resilience politics.

In taking stock of where we are, the report distinguishes between ‘chronic’ slow food shocks to society that are being normalised such as obesity and deep inequalities, on the one hand, and ‘acute’ shocks that are now coming to the fore, exemplified in recent events such as the impact of Russia’s invasion of food-exporting Ukraine, the economic disruption from Covid-19, the ‘unexpected’ trade route disruptions, such as the Black Sea being mined or Houthis attacking ships in the Red Sea. The poor weather reducing UK home harvests – the worst figures since 1983 – does not help. More acute disruptions are anticipated, piling pressure on policymakers to resolve chronic problems.

The interplay of the chronic and acute difficulties makes the current lack of policy attention to civil food resilience all the more remarkable.

POLICIES ON FOOD SECURITY AND RESILIENCE

Identifying risks

The UK's approach to food security, risks and resilience is outlined in detail in the main report (see *Chapter 4*). The Labour government inherits weak and uncertain policies on food security and food resilience; they are complacent in parts and apparently in denial of known risks ahead. If an absence of policy is for fear of worrying the public, this is a risky strategy. The public needs to be engaged as part of preparation. The history of how the UK got to where it now stands on food security and resilience involves policies on political economy, society, culture and defence, not just 'security' or 'resilience' as discrete entities (see *Appendix for a Timeline since World War II*).

In the last 15 years, there have been two attempts to steer the UK in a more robust food security direction. In 2010, in the final months of the Labour government, a **Food 2030** strategy was published, after two years of development triggered by the 2007-08 oil price shock.⁷ It was dismantled in as many months after a change of government in 2010. And more recently the **2021 National Food Strategy**, also the result of two years' development and wide consultation, was dismissed and marginalised in as many days.⁸ The **2022 Government Food Strategy** published to fill the gap was no more than a restatement of status quo,⁹ light on coming shocks and silent about known risks and fissures within the UK food economy, such as rising food poverty and inequality.

Neither the **Agriculture Act 2020**¹⁰ nor the **Environment Act 2021**¹¹ addressed food. One could read those Acts and infer that the main point of land is protection of nature - as though food production cannot be woven into nature protection, and as though nature protection does not provide security and sustainability for food. The Environment Act created an Office for Protection of the Environment, but the Agriculture Act created no equivalent for food. It was the House of Lords that brought about a commitment to publish a triennial **Food Security Report**.¹² The first in 2021 made no comment on whether more food should be produced. The second provided more detail but also no prognosis or future indications. That is not its purpose.

The 2022 Government Resilience Framework (UKGRF), though inexplicably silent on food, does have sound principles that could apply usefully to food. These include support for a 'whole of society' approach and a 'prevention is better than cure' desire to protect society and prevent difficulties. This is a good public health principle for the protection of the people. The Framework acknowledges in a footnote that **food is one of 13 Critical National Infrastructure sectors**, but the first annual **Implementation Update** in December 2023 failed to add anything of significance about food bar noting that a 'Farm to Fork' Summit had occurred.¹³

It is significant, however, that food is recognised as one of **13 Critical National Infrastructure** (CNI) sectors.¹⁴ A 14th, data centres, was added in 2024. These are all deemed essential for the functioning of society and economy. Why then is food apparently left to normal business dynamics when other CNIs receive specific strategic attention and funding? The National Cyber Security Strategy, for example, addressing another CNI, has a budget of £2 bn a year to reduce risks and threats, and is specifically set up to protect and work with the both the public and business.¹⁵ Defra's farming subsidies are now almost entirely focussed on nature-support, not food resilience.

The 2023 **National Risk Register** (the latest in a line of such risk assessments since the 2000s) identifies 89 risks threatening UK society and economy.¹⁶ Of the 89, the only one identified as food-related was food supply contamination (*risk No. 40*). Others in the 89 are food-relevant, such as antimicrobial resistance, made more likely by over- and misuse of antibiotics in farm animal rearing. In particular, chemical, nuclear, radiological or biological (CBRN) contamination could also radically affect availability of food to consumers. Defra acknowledges contamination could lead to “some consumer loss of confidence in food” (*NRR 2023 pp 127-8*). This is an understatement.

Our report summarises the known state of public trust in food and government (*see Chapter 7*). A government survey, inspired by New Zealand¹⁷ rather than its own concerns, is due. Pending such work, the report explores how current food system dynamics could become threat amplifiers. A UK-specific study of food risks and resilience for the people is sorely needed.

The infrastructure for developing resilience policy is on its own resilience journey. The **Civil Contingencies Act 2004**¹⁸ replaced the system of Civil Defence, which had its roots in the 1930s and was of key value to the public in the 1940s. The 2004 Act recognised that potential threats to national infrastructure require defence protection as well as civil preparation. It was reviewed in 2022.¹⁹ Until recently, the Cabinet Office had a Civil Contingencies Secretariat, but this was recently split into two functions: the **Resilience Directorate**, responsible for enabling resilience and the UKGRF,²⁰ and the **Cabinet Office Briefing (COBR) Unit**, which focuses on response and includes a new National Situation Centre. There are plans to create a Resilience Academy “built out of” the existing Emergency Planning College.²¹

Coming closer to the public, at the time of writing, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) formerly **Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)** co-ordinates **42 Local Resilience Forums** (LRFs) for England and Wales, with Scotland and Northern Ireland having a different system of **regional resilience partnerships**. These LRF bodies are the local face of resilience preparation. They are of variable form and capacity, not helped by uncertain and insufficient funding. LRFs mostly co-ordinate Category 1 responders (‘blue light’ emergency services of police, fire brigade, ambulance etc) to local crises. In 2021, the LRF system was given £22 m extra funding for their work until 2024. A survey conducted for the present report suggests that, although LRFs currently have little involvement in food matters, they are becoming aware of its coming importance.

Why is public food dependence not taken more seriously? What could and should be done to increase public food resilience? And is anyone thinking about the scale of potential food shocks?



If the UK accepts that its people deserve to be well-fed before, during and after crises, more effort into preventing food crises and protecting the public now is required. Civil food resilience will not magically appear. The connection between risks and prevention can be drawn, and the public should be included in this process.



Box 2: The default UK assumption that others will feed us

There is a danger of the UK repeating past mistakes, assuming others will always feed us and that the state has the military and logistics capacity to maintain food normality. It might not. The extensive (and anonymised) expert and food industry interviews conducted for this report were sober about lack of preparedness for shock. This is not helped by the absence of an integrated and coherent food policy. This gap should be a matter of national concern.



TAPPING INTO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Outside the machinery of Whitehall, a process of democratic experimentation with food challenges is underway, with food structures and civil engagement emerging across society over recent years, filling a gap left by central government disengagement and uncertainty. Cities, regions and devolved administrations are nurturing civil food resilience efforts but lack much-needed support and resources from central government. Organisations, civil society groups and social enterprises are often better placed to engage with the big security and resilience agenda and relate it to local needs than are central bodies. They deserve support and could provide a new production-to-consumption ‘whole of society’ approach to civil food resilience. The main report recommends enhancing and accelerating such resilience.

The role of **local authorities, cities and regions** is also important. Case studies in the report conducted in the UK and abroad show it is possible to improve food resilience and to engage the public in different ways. Such initiatives, some 15 years old, offer routes to public support, self-help and more community-based capacity to protect and prevent food disruptions ahead. None of this ‘bottom-up’ activity features in official food security thinking, which persists in being conceived ‘top down’. This is a missed opportunity on a national scale.



FOOD SYSTEM DYNAMICS HAVE RESHAPED CIVIL VULNERABILITIES

To understand the realities and potential of civil / consumer food resilience, the report presents an **overview of the UK food system** (see Chapter 3) and how its changed dynamics pose new risks (see Chapter 5). The ‘food system’ is a term used to indicate that food is not simply a matter of harvesting from land (farming) or sea (seafood). Food ingredients go along complex, lengthy and sometimes tortuous routes before the public eats. That complexity raises new challenges for resilience analysis and planning. To understand public options, we need to consider: how food flows through currently; how, what and who currently feeds the people of the UK; and where current risks and hotspots lie.

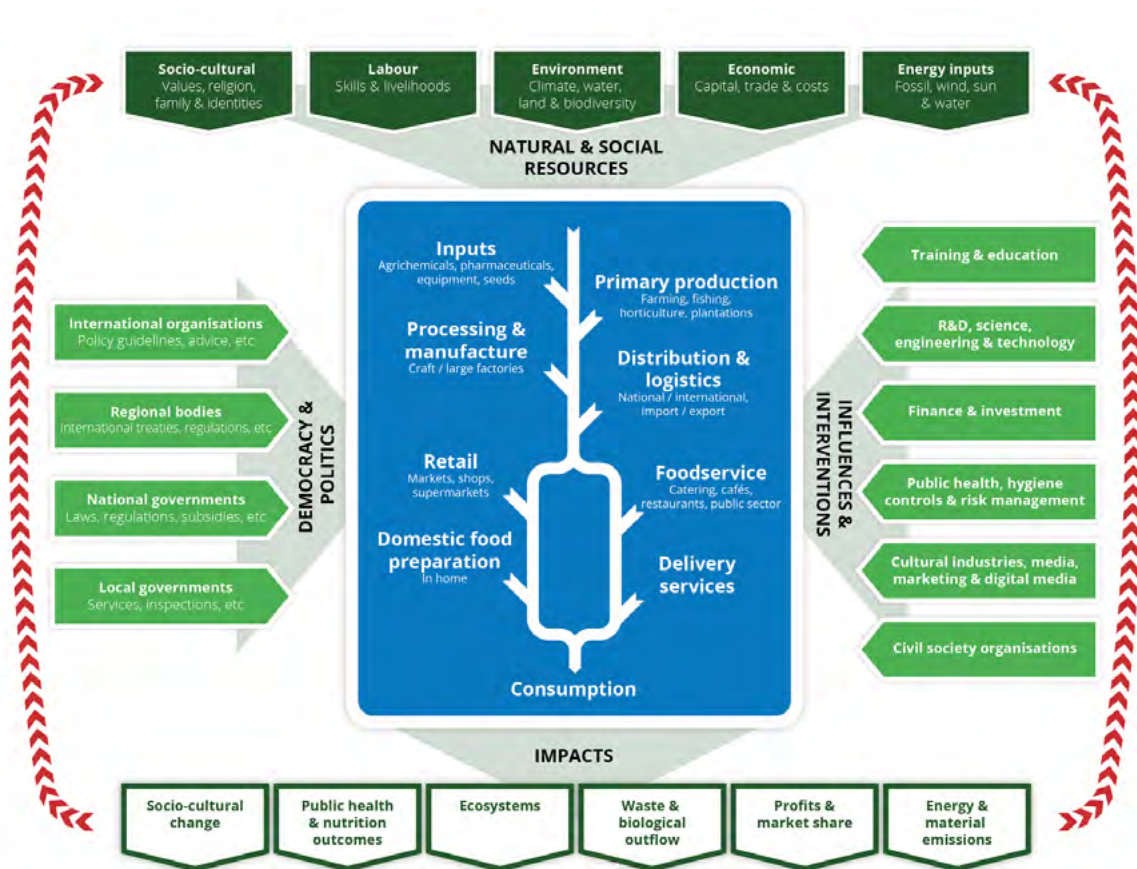
At its simplest, Figure 1 represents a food system composed of primary production (farmers, growers, fishing); processors and manufacturers; distributors (logistics); retailers; caterers; consumers. This is represented as the central flow in the blue rectangle at the centre of Figure 1.

Food flows in the system draw on natural and social resources such as the environment, culture, economy, labour (people) and available energy presented at the top of the Figure. The system is dynamic.

The central dynamic is also affected from each side by government actions from local to global (on the left) and by influences and interventions from others possible interventions (on the right) including science and technology, education, finance capital, hygiene controls, cultural industries such as media and marketing. The mix of actions and engagement can affect for better or worse the impacts represented at the bottom such as food’s role in public health, waste, market power, culture, ecosystems and emissions. These feed back to the natural and social resources on which food primary production draws at the top.

The food system is the UK’s largest employer (4.1 m jobs). In 2023 consumers spent £245.5 bn on food and non-alcoholic drink, of which food was £146.7 bn. This was 6.5% of national gross value added (GVA) in the economy as a whole. To some political thinkers, this suggests food is unimportant. They are wrong. Without food, existing societal and economic normality fragments. Some food system sectors are hidden from consumers’ view, but their resilience depends on countless contracts, arrangements, influences, decisions and interests across what is a multi-sector system. Even if one sector is secure, another might not be. **Disruptions can cascade** from one sector to others.

Figure 1: The Food System map



Source: T Lang / graphic: G Wren

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“Resilience depends on countless contracts, arrangements, influences, decisions and interests across what is a multi-sector system. Lack of resilience increases the likelihood of disruptions cascading from one sector to others.”

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The report identifies a ‘working list’ of 20 **threat conditions that could affect UK civil food resilience** (see Table 1). These risks could cascade or interact and vary in intensity. It is not certain that these will happen but that they could happen, and thus become new dynamics that test the state of civil food resilience. The report recommends that a special National Risk Register study should be conducted into possible food threats. The only report in the public domain that treats food as Critical National Infrastructure dates to 2017.²² It gives no attention to public reactions or dynamics. If there is one more recent, it should be published.

Table 1: Threat events and conditions that could affect civil food resilience

Threat event	Threat condition	Potential effect on consumers
Military weaponisation	Extreme aggression e.g. blockade; destruction of food infrastructure	Reduced food capacity; public morale hit; looting
	Attacks on software and satellites	Online ordering reduced or unavailable; food logistics compromised
	Electricity disabled / energy outage	Normal distribution, information and web-dependency collapse
	International trade chokepoints attacked	International trade flow disruption; shortage of long-distance foods
	Key food personnel attacked	Skills are lost on which entire factories or sectors depend
Economic	Food price rise (steady or rapid)	Pressures on more households; worse diet-related ill-health for people on squeezed incomes; wider social discontent and inequalities; shoplifting, pilfering; black markets
	'Normal' breakdown in food logistics	Reduced food supply; competition for supplies; desperation to find alternative ingredients
	Commercial malware and ransomware attack or AI fake information	Disruption; no food or wrong foods in the wrong place; panic buying
	Widening UK food trade financial gap	Macro-economic pressures on amount of income consumers have for food
	Oil / gas price inflation and volatility	Major disruption to gas / energy used for fertilisers or CO2; food prices squeeze on income
	High food sector concentration	Reliance on concentrated markets for particular sectors, services or brands means consumer anxiety if disrupted. Decades of creating big brand loyalty creates risk anxiety
	Ingredient shortage for mass produced foods	Shortages; brand disruption; infant food shortages
	Labour shortage	Causes more specific food shortages; empty shelves
Political	Lack of public trust in authority (low trust in politicians)	Public mistrusts 'official' messages or advice
	Sporadic shortages induce consumer cynicism and black markets	Weakened social cohesion
	Response to crisis is slow or judged to be poor	Public anger (vide Valencia floods 2024)
Health	Pandemic	Reduced availability of food industry and domestic labour
	Zoonoses (disease jumps from farm animals to humans)	Mental as well as medical stress

	Accelerated public health and societal inequalities	People are already in a vulnerable status before any additional 'shock' occurs at which point extreme public response can occur, e.g. food riots
	Infant food shortage	Drop in infant nutrition and parental morale
Environmental	Major flooding events	Food growing capacity is affected even at domestic or community level; food price rises
	Biodiversity crash e.g. pollinator decline	Crop yields affected
	Pollution outbreak e.g. chemical, biotechnology, nuclear	Contamination of food causes panic, and potentially widespread harm
Social	Food waste and misuse	Resilience preparation gap is exposed; blame campaigns
	Low level of public skills to manage food without 'normal' technology	Low resilience capacity for food under low or no cooking conditions
	Disinformation and fake news exposes limited public knowledge	Disruptive behaviour when normality breaks

Source: authors

To take one theme from the Table above, little published attention has been given to the potential dynamics of **consumer mass psychology in crisis**. Interviewees were conscious of the possibility of riots, looting and *ad hoc* stockpiling. Expert analyses also consider such likelihoods.²³ Certainly, a number of national myths should be debunked, including the view that the British are phlegmatic. 'Keep calm and carry on', to take one meme, was never used in World War II, having been judged to be counterproductive. It became a modern myth only when original test posters were rediscovered in 2001. Its value might show when and if deployed in the future, but there is little evidence it applies to the British for modern crises. Research into what messaging 'works' in food crises is needed.

To encourage a more appropriate focus on consumer effects and taking note of the many changes in consumer expectations today (reared on giant supermarkets, the internet, 24-hour shopping, vast choice) compared to the past, a **new typology of vulnerability** is proposed (see Table 2). This identifies different characteristics and features for how food shock might be manifest. These food-specific shocks would come on top of existing vulnerabilities such as poverty or poor health or lack of resources. Some of these are short-term, others long-term. Most importantly, a distinction can be made between **'chronic' vulnerability** (e.g. ill-health as a consequence of already poor diets) and **'acute' vulnerability** (e.g. direct effects from intense immediate impact such as store loss or internet collapse).

Table 2: A typology of food vulnerability

Characteristic	Range of civil manifestation	
	From...	To...
Intensity	Chronic 'long developed' e.g. a population that has been unhealthy for a long time	Acute 'severe and sudden' shock e.g. rapid spread of a disease; or major power outage
Scale	Micro: a household or one food product is affected	Macro: a whole city or region is affected
Duration	Short-term disruption of food supply	Prolonged food blockade
Exposure	Slow food price inflation that steadily extends population's food unaffordability and alters diets	Major and dramatic shock such as extensive pollution incident or dramatic water shortage
Sensitivity	Slow build-up of contamination (e.g. lead)	Immediate systemic poisoning
Capacity	Resource dependency temporarily affects diet	Long-term labour shortage affects social cohesion
Impact	Slight 'hit' to key food lines leads to run on last stocks	Major infrastructure damage ultimately affects entire food supply chains
Socio-economic determinant	Poor quality food / diet consumed by people on low incomes leads to greater vulnerability	General population weakened incomes increases population vulnerability
Expectation and preparedness	Low / no anticipation of likelihood of shock widens the range of possible reactions to shock	High degree of anticipation gives some room for preparation for shock response; training narrows the range of volatility
Maldistribution	Food exists but isn't readily available (wrong place, wrong price etc.)	Systematic maldistribution of food as 'normal' socio-economic inequalities determine access
Resource waste	Food is wasted before the public gets it	Food is wasted at or after the point of consumption

Source: authors



WHAT OPTIONS DOES THE PUBLIC HAVE?

There are theoretical and actual options open to the public to enhance its food resilience. These are contingent on how extensive or localised, how sudden or expected the shock was, and what facilities are to hand. These in turn are shaped by people's circumstances, wealth and other social determinants. Securing access to food in a crisis is not just a matter of stockpiling, important though that may be. It depends on what is stored, where, how and by whom. It may depend on time of year. It also depends considerably on national food flows. A just-in-time food system by definition, does not have much storage capacity. It is a system designed to flow. In a number of country case studies, we show that different societies offer more guidance and different levels of detail to their citizens than does the UK.

Firstly, the actual food. There is no national diet. The UK has a multiplicity of what people consider normal or desirable. A society used to 24-hour, 365-day access does not think about stockpiling even if it is aware of the Emergency Planning College's 2024 *Prepare* advice. A common determinant of both people's diet and ability to stockpile, however, is the matter of money. Why advise people to buy food in advance, and specifically in a form usable when, say, there is a power outage, if they are living hand to mouth?

There are options, however, and policy should create pathways to them if they are being recommended. The main report reviews them. One pathway is to different 'primary' (growing) options for civil food resilience, other than encouraging an impossibility where everyone takes up farming or horticulture. The Welsh Government has been more forthcoming on the range of growing opportunities for citizens than the UK government (see *Table 3*).

Table 3: Different types of growing theoretically available to citizens

Form	What it is	Land requirement
Allotments	Plots of land for gardening in a large space	Statutory sites
Community farms	Usually keeping animals as well as growing; often educational as well as producing	Larger holding than gardens; sometimes even in towns
Community gardens	People collaborating to grow food for themselves	Major and dramatic shock such as extensive pollution incident or dramatic water shortage
Community Supported Agriculture	Partnerships between farmers (or a growing project) and the local community	Usually a grower in countryside but linked to town
Community Orchards	Combining the aesthetics of trees in towns with production	Anywhere
Incredible Edible schemes	Towns or localities agreeing to grow food in or near buildings and unused spots	Urban space
Abundance or fruit harvesting schemes	People coming together to make use of existing sometimes neglected production	Anywhere
Forest gardening	Schemes created to emulate forests by having permanent planting	Anywhere
Garden-sharing	People with gardens not fully used allowing others without to grow food, giving a % to the owner	Urban
'Meanwhile' garden	Temporary use of land awaiting development or other purpose	Local government owned land or land to be developed anywhere (a source proposed by the Right to Grow campaign)
Household garden	Growing food on householder's land in front, behind or around the house	Anywhere
Small holding	These tend to be larger plots either attached to where the grower lives or at a distance; an opportunity to grow at a more significant scale	Mostly now private land; at times, Government has encouraged this e.g. post WWI
Private allotments	Commercial enterprises offering allotments	Willing landowners of private land

Source: adapted and amended from Wales Government 2021²⁵

Locating food resilience at the community level

The main report considers different types of community possibilities. As the welfare state has changed in size and structure in recent years, different strands of resilience and community welfare have emerged. These includes food banks, community cafés, and other forms of ‘social sticking plaster’ support. Interviewees were clear that these often become community resilience mechanisms. Operators of organised food banks are now clear, however, that they want to be phased out – rightly seeing food banks as a crisis response that is not suitable as a permanent part of the long-term solution. The premises and infrastructure could, however, form the basis of food co-ops or alternative social enterprises and become sources of reskilling and employment rather than charitable distribution points.

.....

“Future civil food resilience planning must plan and design for different levels of resilience. Public engagement in that process makes the outcomes more likely to be robust.”

.....

The report identifies a range of skills and organisations that could be deployed at community level in food shocks, including, for example, festival caterers who have skills, equipment and experience that could be harnessed for localised civil food resilience. A national audit of such community food assets is recommended, alongside locally-conducted community audits of food assets.

The report is clear that future civil food resilience planning – which should be included in the Government Resilience Framework – should consider **different levels of resilience** (see Table 4) from individual to household to community and region. This draws upon World Health Organisation advice.

In practice, what can the public do to enhance food resilience? There are multiple actions and pathways that can be envisaged or strengthened, going from the individual or household level to the community and to larger social scale (see Table 5).

Table 4: Different levels of resilience and what they require

Type of resilience	What it is	What it requires	Comment
Individual	Sufficient resources to adapt in face of shock; resolve to adapt and recover	Range of skills; a good level of self-confidence; knowledge of possible outcomes	A sense of ‘entitlement’ and rights are known factors but, long-term, even those can be ground down. Hence the significance of community
Household or social group	Adaptation in face of adversity, trauma, tragedy or threat; and ability to re-cover from shock	Skilled personal attention to be available; family or household relations aware of the possibility of shocks	Confidence-building and preparation at household level; Appropriate skills development and planning; knowledge of roles
Community	Ability of social groups to withstand and recover from unfavourable circumstances	Group support; professional infrastructure; social networks	Sometimes called ‘social capital’, this is actually a social process that strengthens bonds over time, build-ing human networks
Regional (sub-national)	Flexibility across wider region and capacity to put resources where needed	Finance; equipment; facilities; trusted leadership	Clear leadership and social commitment mediating between national and local/ household levels

Source: authors drawing on WHO (2017)¹

**Table 5: What the public could do and the facilitation that would help:
a working checklist**

Type of action	Citizen action		What this requires from 'above'	
	Individual/household	Community	Regional	National
Stockpile	Is there are storage place? Is it affordable. What food is absolutely necessary?	Is there somewhere which can act as a hub?	Steady supplies to enable turnover of stock	Security, funding, policy support
Skill development	Develop key skills for basic food (e.g. can it be prepared without power?)	Conduct community food audits of skills and resources already present or feasible	Skills exchange and regional learning partnerships	Clear direction about diversity of consumer skills, and what skills are needed for crisis food management at different levels
Grow (some) food	Depends on scale so may be symbolic but can diversify main sources and create awareness	Join or campaign for allotments and extension of other forms of access to land	Encourage diverse local sources and skills sharing	A national food policy; planning flexibility to make unused or near urban land available e.g. by a 'right to grow'
Crisis catering	Skills, knowledge, resources to offer in a food crisis	Create community field kitchens for mass provision	Pooled resources e.g. mass catering equipment available at short notice across the region and where needed	A specialist industry and public sector review to assess current preparedness, potential and requirements
Ration food	Prepare to eat differently; follow baseline food appropriate for the household (how long would it last?)	Food swaps; food banks and community buildings become community storage;	NHS regional structures to be alert to public health requirements	Clear leadership from Defra, DHSC, MoD; highly sensitive but clear public messaging
Draw on food specialist advice	Members of food-relevant professional bodies offer services to community food schemes	Community list of relevant expertise, kept and reviewed by proposed Food Resilience Committees or other body designated with that function	Consistent regional level coordination e.g. by public health, community dietitians, food professions, emergency planning	Legal basis to spread trustworthy expert advice; national coordination of food advice and food warning systems
Democracy	Involvement in decision-making; possibilities for feedback	Community networks, participation in awareness building of local food capacities	Clarity about regional leadership in England (Mayors etc); clear multi-level flows of information and warning	Good working relations between UK Prime Minister, Wales First Minister, Scotland First Minister, and relevant Cabinet members

Warning and communication	Each household to have a plan e.g. know where people are, where the food is and what to do in crises	A community checklist e.g. of vulnerable at-risk groups. Clear leadership and wider networking	Simple intelligence, education and communication systems with options not just reliance on websites	A different grade of food warnings, akin to Security Alert system; all designed to provide a Total Food Defence approach where feeding all people is a legal duty
Social networks	Ensure everyone knows their part in household food crisis plan and what to do for the neighbourhood	Develop, maintain and contribute to neighbourhood links	Clarification of local government duties, roles and requirements	Delivery of ‘whole of society approach’; taking it beyond a principle into societal reality
Food-belts	Access to larger land plots inside or outside towns for food growing	Community pressure to release un-used public land for food growing	Reinvigoration of regional structures, particularly for England, with commitment to diversity supply routes	National commitment to protect food-growing land around urban areas, and enhance food growing diversity

Source: authors

How can UK civil food resilience be improved?

No-one thinks the public can build resilience on its own. It should, as Government rightly says, be a ‘whole of society’ process. So, what would that look like?

The government has a **Ten Step Cycle for communication that would operate in a crisis**.²⁶ This is a ‘top-down’ communications plan, not a public engagement strategy. It has not been revised since 2011 and barely recognises the scale of potential food shocks. For communication during a crisis to work, there needs to have been a public engagement strategy in place beforehand. Government-led information flow and public engagement must go hand-in-hand. The latter cannot easily be bolted on after a crisis. It is needed beforehand. Some other countries have begun to do this (see *Chapter 6 in the main report*). To complement a better crisis communication plan, this report proposes **Seven Steps to Civil Food Resilience**.



Step One

Learn from others (lessons from 10 countries)

Ten countries were approached through formal channels such as embassies or other officials to ascertain what - if anything - their countries did for civil food resilience. Introductions led to interviews, exploration of websites, discussions with citizens and, where possible, civil society organisations. This process was not exhaustive and should be taken as preliminary but nevertheless provided sufficient detail and interest to draw some lessons for the UK (*see Chapter 6*).

Actions the UK should emulate include:

- > Providing every household with advice for food shocks
- > Clear community guidelines on stockpiling
- > Instructions and procedures for community and household emergency plans
- > Encouragement to conduct audits of resources
- > Approaches based on social rather than individualised food protection
- > Regular updating of public websites and booklets
- > Food being taken seriously within wider civil protection procedures.

Some countries have fully integrated preparations from the micro-local to local and national structures. Some deliver advice to every household; others put it on websites. Some warn that in extreme crisis such as invasion, little should be expected from Government while it regroups. Countries vary in how much of such advice is actually promulgated.

A number of lessons are drawn from the country studies:

Lesson 1: National (and regional) government should have up-to-date assessments of the resilience of food supply.

Lesson 2: Advice should be given to citizens, taking note of their varied circumstances and capacities but not adding to burdens. This has major financial implications at the household level.

Lesson 3: Consumers should be advised to stockpile food, but more thought is needed on how and what. There is an unhelpful disparity between countries as to how much or for how long; more coherence in governmental advice is essential. Nutrition baseline advice should be created.

Lesson 4: A distinction can be made between short-term and long-term approaches to improving civil food resilience. The UK should undertake both.

Lesson 5: Co-ordination between different levels of government and different sectors is essential.

Step Two

Assess the public’s mood, perceptions and engagement

The report summarises the state of public knowledge and identifies a number of polls and trackers that seek to assess both knowledge and confidence. A more detailed, comprehensive and composite civil food resilience tracker is needed. (HM Government was expected to publish one in 2024.) Those that are extant paint a picture of low public trust in authority.²⁷ Only 35% of the UK population say they trust the national government; this is lower than the OECD average of 41%. Trust in food *per se* rather than its systemic resilience is higher according to the Food Standards Agency. However, if the public is in relative ignorance of coming shocks or how these might affect their circumstances, such trust must be taken as conditional. Lloyd’s Register research indicates that countries that have experienced some kind of shocks to society have greatest fear of the possibility of food shocks. Experience teaches them that shocks can break expectations of normality and underline how, during shocks, food is essential. It is a long time since the UK had such an experience.

There is a danger that UK policymakers are relying on little more than assumptions that food will simply flow. In fact, the research reveals a situation that amounts to asymmetric rationing. Confidence in availability of food is income related. Large numbers of the British population are technically food-insecure according to HM Government’s own measure.²⁸ UK food skills (being able to assemble meals from whatever is available or in difficult circumstances) are patchy and not primed for shock. Much modern consumption is technology-dependent (mobile phones, kitchens, energy, water) and income-related (people on low incomes already cut back and have little to no financial capacity to store food in reserve). The public deserves to be alerted sensibly and coherently to possible risks affecting food supply and availability. The report lists example of where business-oriented bodies provide this kind of alert for commerce. The question then is: why is this not done for and with the public?



“There is a danger that UK policymakers are relying on little more than assumptions that food will simply flow. In fact, the research reveals a situation that amounts to asymmetric rationing.”



Lessons drawn include:

Lesson 6: To address unequal capacity, there must be an emphasis on community support, not an individualised ‘look after yourself’ basis.

Lesson 7: Rationing might be necessary but must be fair, equitable and rational. Everyday market economics have the effect of rationing but do so unfairly, which is why ill-health, diet and costs are unevenly distributed. Post-shock rationing should be based on sound science and in processes that improve rather than worsen social cohesion. They should be planned now.

Lesson 8: Some uncertainty in shock is inevitable; we don't know how UK society will react in different circumstances. The point of improving civil food resilience is in part to reduce uncertainty. This raises the need for the public to take stock of its resources and to ensure some kind of equitable spread of facilities for civil food resilience.

Step Three

Map the community's food assets – 'prepare, share, care'

There is a range of means by which the public might strengthen its food resilience. Much depends upon circumstances such as access to land or the availability of allotments; the level of financial and other resources; timing; collective and community skills; confidence; interests; other-directedness; and the scale of shock to food and its availability. A key issue, raised by many interviewees, is the need to encourage responses that move away from extreme individualism towards socially cohesive collective response. So far, the UK has tapped only slightly into US-style extreme 'prepper' behaviour. In the USA it is a sizeable economic market, but our interviewees stressed that it is communities rather than solitary actions that facilitate civil resilience.

Extreme **individualism** can lead to exclusiveness and a retreat from social responsibility. Industry interviewees understood the reflex to **stockpile** but argued it can exacerbate shortages unless better informed, shared and planned at societal level. Resilience must be seen as a multi-level challenge requiring coherence between international, national, sub-national, local, community and household levels. Switzerland, for example, maintains national food stockpiles for emergency use. The USA's Federal Emergency Management Agency includes some food among other more extensive stockpiles (e.g. of petroleum).

The underlying question is not so much whether stockpiling happens but rather who does it and for whose benefit? It can be yet another social divide. Distribution is also a factor. Public stockpiling must be orderly or else it amplifies crisis, looting in extremis. If the UK does not follow Switzerland or the USA in retaining some level of food stocks, and instead relies wholly on market mechanisms, what is the point in advising citizens to keep a stockpile?

The report stresses the case for better multi-level audits of food resources. At the civil and domestic levels, for example, the report points to skills and equipment for **cooking at mass scale** such as field kitchens, community cafés, outside catering, street food, festival and other large-scale catering.

There are some emergency systems through local authority voucher schemes and, now extensively, via charitable food banks. The latter want to see their own demise. Might they become a new form of co-operative retail and community storage?

Facilitating access to land for domestic and community scale primary production (gardening and horticulture) raises the potential of existing peri-urban green belts as opportunities for horticulture and allotments. Examples are reviewed, such as the decline and renaissance of small-scale community-oriented horticulture in Wales. This success has depended on a shared approach between the Welsh Government (which, unlike England, has a horticulture policy), higher and further education skills training, research support, willing entrepreneurs and identity-based marketing.

Various lessons are drawn including:

Lesson 9: A governmental position on stockpiling is needed to reassure the public that there is available supply. A new Government Committee to review and give public advice on stockpiling should be considered; its terms of reference and scope are outlined.

Lesson 10: The English and Welsh governments should note the experience of the Scottish Land Fund and create similar mechanisms for the encouragement of community food growing.

Lesson 11: Improving citizens’ access to land to grow food can improve well-being, social solidarity and diversify sourcing of food. Public access to food-growing land would be enhanced by a Right to Grow on unused public land or private land awaiting development. This could be delivered by amending the 1950 Allotments Act.

Step Four

Local authorities are key to building civil food resilience

There is extensive international and UK experience of how sub-national civil society acts in pursuit of food resilience. What can begin as a desire to act on climate change often quickly broadens. The 2015 Milan Urban Food Policy Pact signed by 100 cities heralded a city-region focus on food policy and is now a network of over 280 cities around the world.³¹ These identify food as a key feature of climate action, social cohesion, work and regeneration. They are increasingly aware of the resilience agenda. Evidence suggests reducing this impact would benefit health and ecosystems, thereby improving sustainability which, in turn, enhances resilience-readiness.

The UK has a vibrant city- and town-based movement around food, partly energised in recent years by and in reaction to a lack of central government policy. This has spawned networks of interested authorities and civil society organisations with active food frameworks. Various UK cities are presented in the main report as case studies of ‘food policy councils’ to illustrate how a new form of sub-national food resilience governance is emerging. Three are considered in some depth: London, Birmingham and Bristol. The role of England’s 10 metro mayors is now significant in supporting this city regional food focus despite severe financial cuts. Yorkshire is taking this one step further, with three mayors approving an emerging inter-mayoral regional food collaboration. This could herald a bottom-up regionalism for food resilience. Across Wales, 22 food partnerships already exist.



“Interviewees stressed that, where there are blocks, they tend to be due not to political partisanship but to resources and legal powers. New legislative powers are recommended to support this active local food resilience.”



This regional activity echoes international experience. The cities of Liège, Ghent and Leuven in Belgium are reviewed, with particular attention to Liège - a de-industrialised city that 15 years ago started developing an integrated food policy that has now turned into a major annual festival, a reinvigoration of peri-urban agriculture providing food for city schools and restaurants, and an active city food council. Peer-to-peer learning in the Wallonia region of Belgium suggests that Yorkshire might be on track to be a pioneer of a UK regional civil food resilience. Parts of Wales, too, are developing food resilience as part of local identity. Similar experience in France is summarised (and the role of legal support given in Chapter 6).

In all these cases, interviewees stressed that, where there are blocks, they tend to be due not to political partisanship but to resources and legal powers. New legislative powers are recommended to support this active local food resilience.

Various lessons are drawn including:

Lesson 12: Local Authorities (even big cities) lack legal powers to tackle food resilience at the scale they will need for large-scale food shocks.

Lesson 13: Neighbourhoods and community resilience requires more attention; while some areas have strong community networks, this is not always the case. National resilience requires encouragement for those that have, and resources and leadership to build it where it is lacking.

Lesson 14: New urban-rural food connections are desirable (noting the French and Belgian experience), beginning to build shorter food routes, a more bio-regional approach and less reliance upon a few big retailer-dominated and over-centralised food distributors.

Lesson 15: A new horticulture strategy is urgently required, beginning to address the risks of climate change by, for example, moving what horticulture remains ‘uphill’ and distributing it nation-wide rather than concentrated in a few low-lying areas vulnerable to flooding.

Step Five

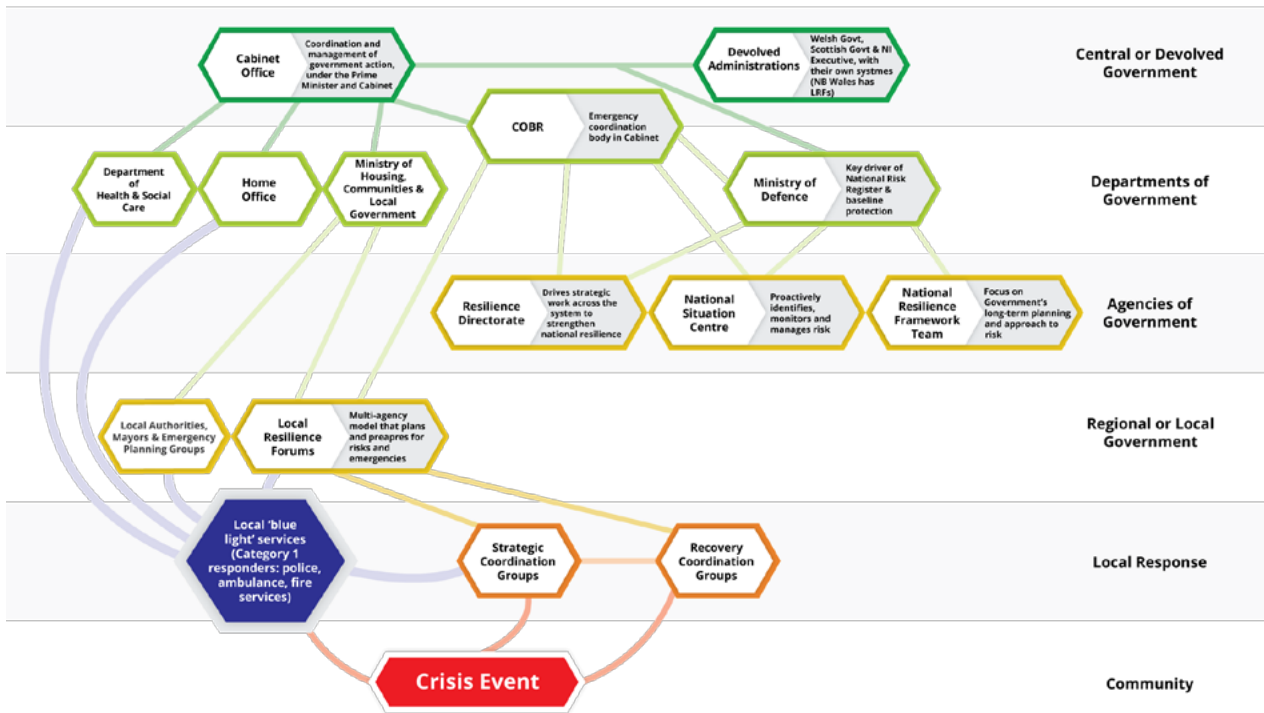
Create local Food Resilience Committees to co-ordinate resilience preparation

A **survey was conducted of Local Resilience Forums (LRFs)** set up under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, asking whether food matters had or might enter their immediate or potential territory of work. Findings are given at length in the report. LRFs noted food coming onto their agenda but disagreed on whether this was their responsibility. Some said this was the responsibility of Defra, as a national body, others that the state of society in their locality meant food emergencies did happen and could worsen so local resilience was needed.

No LRF yet had a specific food element in their work packages but they would welcome advice from central authorities on the matter. They noted that this challenge required work with external partners; food could not be addressed or resolved by LRFs themselves.

The conclusion drawn by this report was that, as local institutions charged to respond for the public, the potential for LRFs to contribute to civil food resilience is being under-delivered. The report gives tables of existing levels of governmental responsibilities. Figure 2 outlines the multi-level nature of current resilience planning, it tends to assume single crises.

Figure 2: Existing multi-level resilience structures



Source: authors / design: Gavin Wren

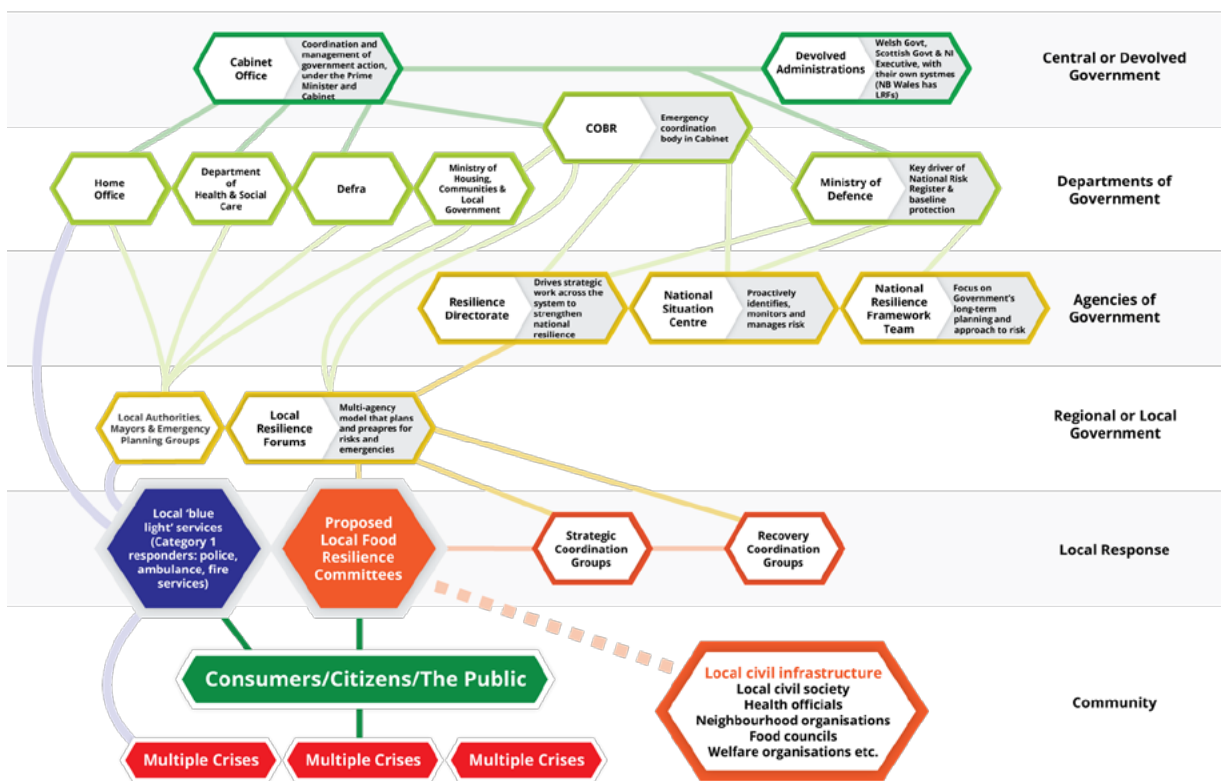
We note that:

- > There is no official food resilience system at the local or sub-national level in this structure;
- > A process of sub-national experimentation and development has occurred during the last 20 years, which now needs and deserves to be grasped;
- > Current LRF structures are geared towards single crises whereas the food system is entering a period of polycrisis.

Interviewees in the main report were clear that improvement in food planning and coordination for shocks was needed to give stability for 'normal' conditions that must prepare for them. National policy would benefit from a new Council of Food Security or some such body to advise and focus this food system realignment. At the local level, the need for coordination was also strongly supported. This would either be a responsibility laid on existing bodies such as mayors (but not all areas have them), local authorities or key relevant professions such as Directors of Public Health or Environmental Services, or else simply be left to *ad hoc* local community organisation. The latter response would almost certainly favour more affluent areas and thus fail the 'whole of society approach' aspiration. Coordination with existing emergency services is essential too.

In whatever form, we recommend that a **new local food crisis coordination system be created nationally, that we call local Food Resilience Committees**. This could draw upon networks of civil society bodies, existing food partnerships and city / town food policy councils (*discussed in the main report Chapters 9 and 10*). These new Food Resilience Committees should be put onto a proper footing in every area of the country. These should be co-terminus with LRFs and local government and would fit into UK/England governance as depicted in Figure 3. They should begin the liaison and building of working relationships that would be so necessary in crisis. These would build on existing experience of UK food policy councils or boards (*see case studies in Chapter 9*).

Figure 3: How Food Resilience Committees could fit with LRFs and existing structures



Source: authors / design: Gavin Wren

The new LFRCs (or equivalent) would:

- > map local food supply chains (very few localities actually know where their food comes from, or where vulnerabilities lie);
- > build networks of expertise and trust able to assess food risks in their districts and know where help is needed most;
- > act as an early-warning system for civil society;
- > encourage place-specific resilience building - which will look different in rural, coastal, peri-urban and urban contexts;
- > support citizens actions for food resilience.

Membership of these new FRCs could include: public health expertise (e.g. Directors of Public Health), environmental and trading expertise (Environmental Health, Trading Standards), representatives of local food businesses (large/SME; from production to consumption), local civil society organisations knowledgeable of at-risk groups (e.g. food banks, CAB, family support charities, neighbourhood watch, community councils, tenants associations), local academic / education institutions, and other relevant bodies with local knowledge (e.g. faith groups).

Figure 4 depicts how the proposed Food Resilience Committee could involve relevant knowledge and work at the local level.

Then Figure 5 depicts how this new structure would look through the eyes of the public / citizens in and for crises – showing the difference it would make.

Figure 6 presents how the proposed local Food Resilience Committee would fit into existing multi-level national resilience structures.

The final figure (Figure 7) addresses the issue of devolved powers. Wales, for example, has a line of direct political accountability over resilience, public health and agri-food into which the proposed system of Local Food Resilience Committees would fit well. The First Minister chairs its existing four LRFs, and there is growing liaison with 22 existing Food Partnerships across Wales (nine of which are active members of the Sustainable Food Places network, for example). The proposed new Food Resilience Committees would fit well into these structures.

Figure 4: Food Resilience Committee at the local level



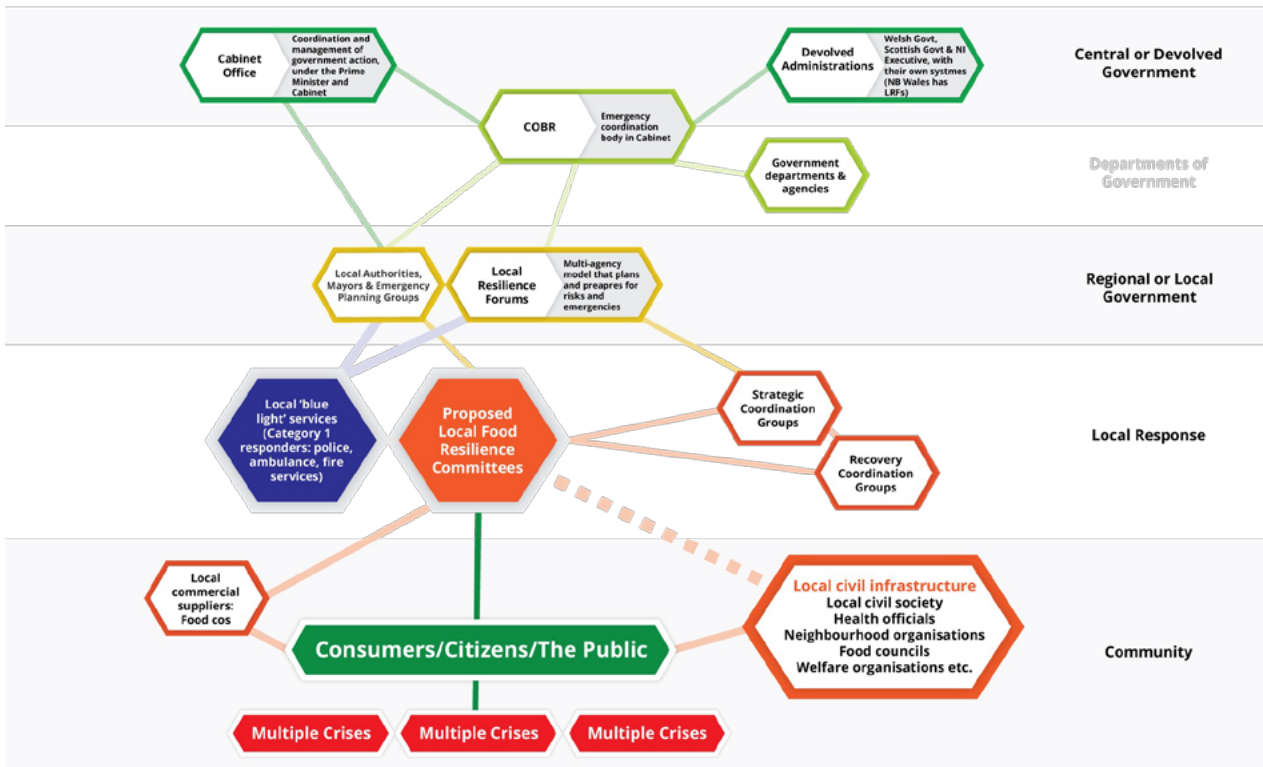
Source: authors / design: Gavin Wren

Figure 5: Food resilient citizens in communities



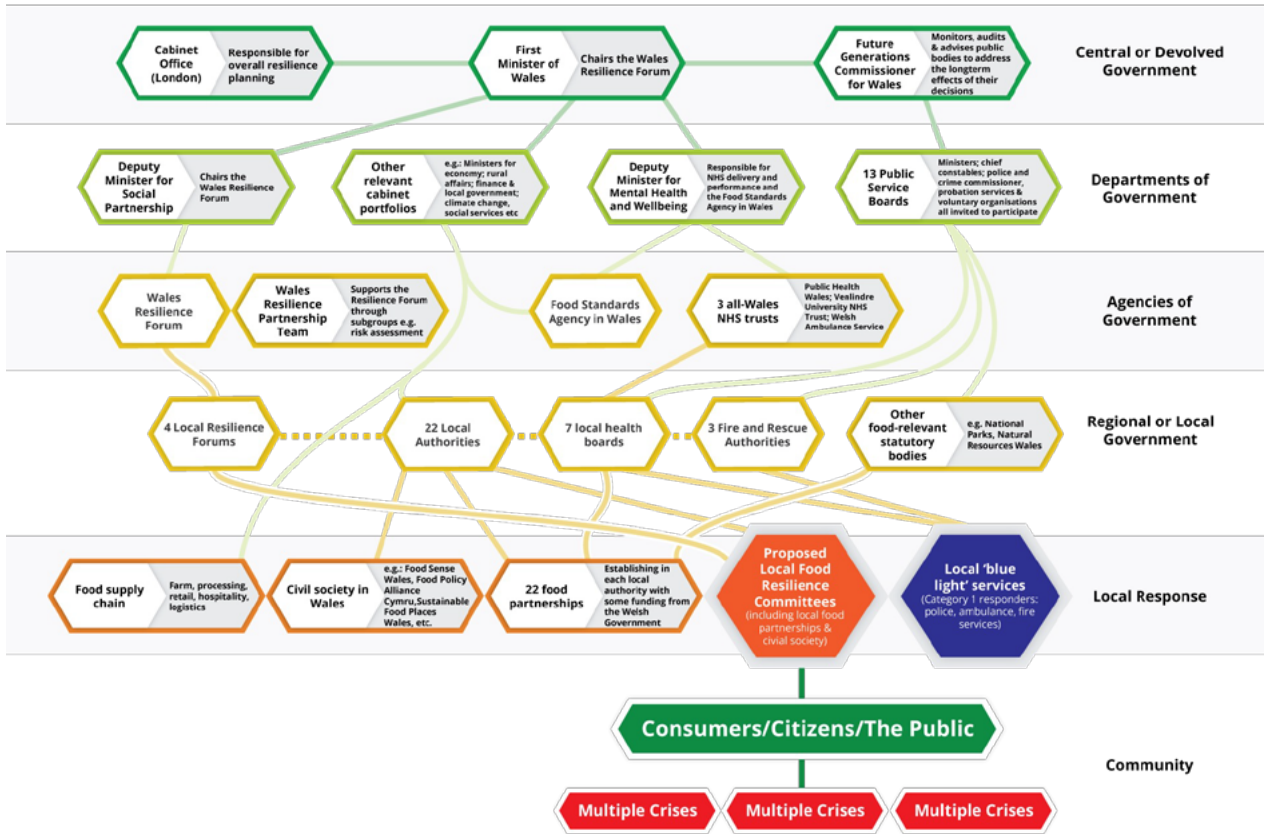
Source: authors / design: Gavin Wren

Figure 6: Proposed UK food resilience governance providing requisite focus on the public



Source: authors / design: Gavin Wren

Figure 7: Food resilience governance in Wales, with proposed new Local Food Resilience Committee



Source: authors / design: Gavin Wren

Step Six

The UK Central State must create and maintain a coherent food policy

Throughout the research for the report, a lack of clarity about the direction required of the food system was commented upon (and lamented) by interviewees. The report provides detail of two major reviews of national food policy and strategy, both unimplemented for different reasons (see Chapter 1). There is insufficient clarity about what is required from the food system since Brexit. Is it to feed all people well, or to allow the rationing effects of market dynamics? Should the system be more or less proactive? To what extent can we build on existing policy? Is there a land and environment policy, for example, that currently excludes food but could be extended? Could health policy better inform what is desired and delivered (given that diet could prevent much ill-health)?

These are weighty questions, easily resolved in policy and hard to deliver, but essential nonetheless. A national food policy is overdue but urgently needed. This should provide clear goals, guidelines and indicators on many of the issues raised by the report. It should also improve cross-UK and multi-level co-ordination between existing ministries, agencies, regions and local authorities.

Currently, local authorities have no legal obligation to ensure people are fed in crises, yet co-ordination of different ‘actors’ is urgently required to build civil food resilience. The Swedish Government’s 2022-24 Inquiry into food preparedness recommends and outlines new Food Security legislation to build national and local resilience.³² This places a duty on municipal authorities to ensure citizens are fed in crises, and to enrol resources to that effect. Such a duty is discussed in the main report. The UK could consider and adapt such legislation. Table 6 indicates the multi-level nature of authorities relevant to food resilience preparedness, that would benefit from coordination and being given duties in legislation.

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“Co-ordination of different actors is urgently required to build civil food resilience”

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Table 6: Key State bodies with a role in delivering the conditions for civil food resilience

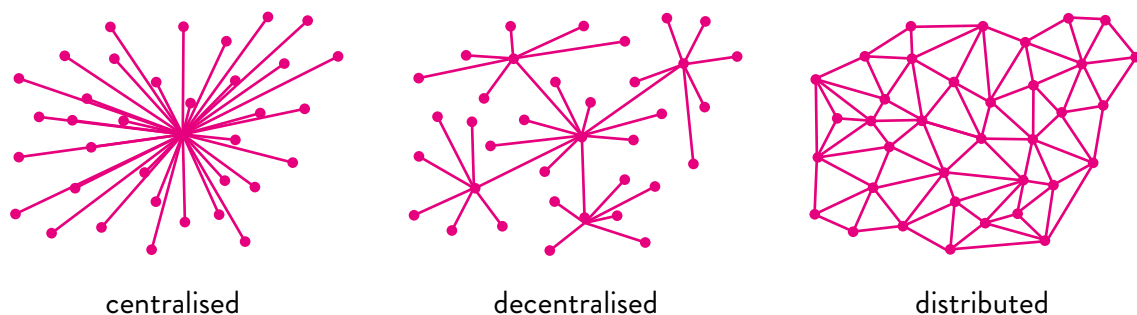
Level	Represented by	Why important
Government of the day	› The Cabinet (elected key officers of state)	› Sets and is responsible for proposals and purpose of the food system, and thus its security and resilience. › Its policies can make civil food resilience weaker or stronger.
Central Government	› Cabinet Office › Resilience Secretariat › Cabinet Office Briefing (COBR) Unit	› Delivers practical ‘command and control’ secretariat to deliver overall strategic direction, and accountability to the Government. Specifically: Implements the Government Resilience Framework; is responsible for the National Risk Register (+ National Security Risk Assessment), CNI food review, etc.
Ministries	› Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs › Department of Health & Social Care › Ministry of Defence › Department for International Trade › Department of Energy and Net Zero › Department for Transport › Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government	› These either lead or help deliver the conditions for food security and resilience › They translate overall strategic direction › They should anticipate barriers to positive outcomes, by ensuring consideration of practical supply issues, health impacts, defence of food infrastructure, trade dependency, climate change actions, transport and logistics, and socio-economic divisions.
Specialist Agencies	› Food Standards Agency › National Cyber Security Centre › Office for Health Improvement & Disparities › Environment Agency › National Infrastructure Commission › Border Force	› Provide specialist intelligence, monitoring and advice to aid policy implementation and threat prevention
Local and regional government	› M10 group of Metro Mayors › Combined Authorities › All other Local Authority bodies e.g. County Councils › Local Resilience Forums	› Provide the local accountability and service delivery e.g. public health, social services, environmental health, food protection, community support and resilience › Provide emergency support

Source: authors

A POLICY RESET TO REBALANCE THE FOOD ECONOMY FROM JUST-IN-TIME TO JUST-IN-CASE

Large food companies are now more nervous about extreme shocks. If these enterprises, on which current UK food supply significantly depends were to be disrupted, our judgement is that SME food enterprises could not scale up easily or quickly. Many argue that the SME sector should be expanded anyway. They would enhance a key ingredient for resilience – a more diversified and ‘distributed’ system in terms first outlined by the Rand Corporation in the 1960s.³³ This argued that lines of supply or decisions all going through single or few ‘hubs’ are intrinsically at risk from attack or disruption (see Figure 8). More decentralised systems are improvements but ultimately the most resilient and adaptive are what Paul Baran for RAND called ‘distributed’ systems. The main report discusses the implications of such thinking for the highly concentrated UK food system, and why more distributed systems (particularly logistics) are desirable, and thus a degree of bio-regionalism. Modern food logistics are both lengthy and complex, but they mostly go through highly centralised systems of command and supply chain management. With so few companies responsible for high percentages of UK food retail, manufacturing and distribution, policymakers should take the case for diversification and appropriate regionalisation more seriously for resilience reasons. Reliance on relatively few hubs is intrinsically risk generating.

Figure 8: Centralised, decentralised and distributed flow systems



Source: Baran / RAND Corporation (1962)³⁴

Even mighty retailers will be constrained by climate change and if food weaponisation occurs closer to the UK. Existing ‘food defence’ thinking is almost wholly focused at the company level, encouraging them to protect and defend their particular rather than sectoral or societal interests. The latter are assumed to follow from corporate self-protection. Government and agencies provide such food defence advice, with little apparent thought to the public’s dynamics.³⁵ Until the May 22 2024 recommendation to store 3 days’ food, Government provided no advice to the public.³⁶ Protecting supply (understandable though that is) is not the same thing as the public being protected. There is excessive governmental reliance on the assumption that if supply is maintained, civil resilience will follow. This is a loaded assumption.



“There is excessive reliance in the Government’s approach to the assumption that if supply is maintained, civil resilience will follow. This is a loaded assumption.”



A particular risk to the food economy is the Just-in-Time system of logistics. In some respects, it is the jewel of late 20th century efficiency. It delivers rapid, apparently seamless connections that shift food from anywhere to here. Yet it is run by the internet of things, a potential cyber nightmare. Food’s reliance on software, satellites and systems planning means disruption to key hubs such as retailer Regional Distribution Centres (RDCs) can have wide and catastrophic effects. Interviewees inside and outside industry agreed a reorientation to **‘Just-in-Case’ logistics** is needed. The sector is confident that this is possible. With resilience preparedness in mind, a rebalancing of the food economy from Just-in-Time to Just-in-Case is probably overdue. Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine have been early warnings.

This policy reset requires a calm, clear outline of new relations across the national, regional and local levels of food governance architecture (*see the main report for the full list*). This process would be helped by legislative backing (as Sweden has recognised). One legal route would be a new Food Security and Resilience Act that provides the coherence and focus on food resilience currently lacking. The same outcome could be achieved by ensuring food is an explicit responsibility of a more generalised Resilience Act. The case for standalone food legislation is partly that Parliament still needs to fill the post-Brexit legislative gap on food matters, and to provide clear direction for the national food system, existing sectors and civil society.



“Parliament must fill the current legislative gap on food matters, post-Brexit, and provide clear direction for the national food system, existing sectors and civil society.”



Whether in a new Food Security and Resilience Act or within a wider new Resilience Act, new structures are needed to deliver greater public food security and resilience. These include:

- > New local Food Resilience Committees, or local bodies with an equivalent function, that liaise with Local Resilience Forums and provide local food support systems that can work alongside official emergency services in and after shocks;
- > The production of Community Food Risk Registers (or assessments) that take account of local conditions, conduct community audits of food resources, and provide information bases of local circumstances, essential for preparedness planning;
- > A new National Food Security and Resilience Council or similar body to advise government at national level, to provide the needed overview of strategic matters such as targets for food production, regional strengths and weaknesses (e.g. internal distribution chokepoints); to review where civil food vulnerabilities lie; to provide advice on civil food resilience; to build the an evidence base on civil food resilience; to provide a National Food Risk Register to fill the gaps left by the NRR;
- > Requirement to provide up-to-date advice on emergency food stockpiling and planning, taking account of different cultures, dietary requirements and demographics; this to be provided by existing expert bodies (possibly with expanded remits) such as on nutrition, and appointing new ones such as on mass emergency catering;
- > Clarification of food resilience responsibilities at the sub-national level, putting the ‘live’ experience of English regions and metro mayors, Wales’ food partnerships and others onto a proper officially recognised footing; this would deliver the coordination of experience and ‘what works’ that is currently lacking and spread best practice and options for local civil food resilience;
- > Public engagement in civil food resilience preparation, and enhancing understanding of food’s significant role in meeting existing national commitments such as Net Zero, biodiversity enhancement, obesity reduction and a secure society; existing citizens advice, neighbourhood watches, street networks, community councils and many civil society bodies must be included in national civil food resilience; this to provide a local base currently missing in the top-down resilience framework;
- > A governmental commitment to feed all the people in shocks and crises (emulating Sweden’s duty of care in its new Food Security Act);³⁷
- > Duties to statutory bodies (schools, health boards, government grant-aided bodies) to increase provision of locally-sourced food to encourage diversity and sustainability of local food supply;
- > Powers to make available unused land in and around towns (green belt) for food growing under specific circumstances;
- > Create in effect a new civil or ‘total food defence’ system of mass provision of food in large-scale emergencies that actually delivers the principles of the Government Resilience Framework for the public in relation to food.

Step Seven

Re-set the Government Resilience Framework for food

The report found major gaps in government thinking about food resilience, despite promising principles to deliver ‘whole of society’, ‘prevention better than cure’ and ‘shared understanding of risk’ for national resilience. This has not been adequately thought through, as was illustrated by the hurried ‘store 3 days’ food’ advice in May 2024.³⁸ For the UK Government Resilience Framework’s laudable principles to be applied to food, they need to be strengthened institutionally, or success will be left to chance.

On the positive side, our research found many developments and initiatives at the sub-national level that deserve to be recognised as contributing to civil food resilience. They have acted as democratic civil experiments in food resilience and offer ‘early lessons’ as to what works and how civil food resilience could be enhanced. A process of mutual learning, for instance, has developed across the metro mayors, other civil society networks, and internationally. This *ad hoc* pool of knowledge deserves greater recognition and coordination.

These relatively new food partnerships, ‘councils’ and organisations (some 15 years old) are unnecessarily held back by lack of national support, and ways of integrating into official structures and resources. If crises hit, they are assets that would be sorely needed and should be included in resilience planning now, to build the necessary social capital. This is partly the point of the proposal for new local **Food Resilience Committees**. It also lies behind our proposal for a new **National Food Resilience and Security Council**. This should be legally based on the proposed **Food Security and Sustainability Act** or a specific food section of a more **general Resilience Act** and charged to conduct regular reviews of UK food supply, civil resilience and update on potential risks. It would advise Ministers and liaise with new Food Resilience Committees and with existing bodies.

The authors of this report are confident that most citizens would welcome a process of public information about risks and responsibilities regarding food. Since World War II there has been a period of rapid and mass food behaviour change. It coincided with a winding-down of old-style civil defence. Today we need a new-style civil food defence providing public advice that is trusted.

In discussions before the publication of our report, we noted that our proposal for a National Food Resilience and Security Council (or something like it) should be informed by the experience of the existing Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE).³⁹ There could simply be a Food SAGE. Our view, however, is that what is needed is not just a rapidly convened body in particular crises – they are always possible – but a new standing body. If not a new Council, then a standing Food Resilience Group of interdisciplinary experts to advise on food resilience matters.

In that vein, the official National Risk Register should take threats to the food system more seriously. It currently conflates risk assessment with resilience. The country is not prepared to deal with the scale of shocks experts and industry think possible and likely. Feeding the nation well and sustainably would be a public good as well as a mechanism through which to build resilience.

A major conclusion of the report is that a conceptual upgrade of what is meant by and expected for civil food resilience requires better integration into general food policy.

Figure 9 provides a ‘map’ for this **Resilience Framework** revision. At its centre is the commitment to create the conditions for feeding all people well and sustainably in normal times as well as the exceptional. Rather than seeing ‘resilience’ or ‘security’ as standalone issues, feeding all people well (ie, healthily and sustainably) should be the core national food policy goal. Figure 8 depicts a cycle of links between **F**ood **R**isk assessment (threat identification), food **S**ecurity (stability and coherence for all), food **S**ustainability (long-term low impact, high quality), food **D**emocracy (decision-making and societal / community engagement), food **D**efence (infrastructure protection and enhancement) and food **R**esilience (preparedness to bounce-back from coming shocks) – a new ‘**FRSSDDR**’ approach.

The various functions and tasks that enable this central cycle to operate are presented in the inner and outer circles surrounding that core goal. Preparing the whole of society for food shocks is an extension of what should be core ‘normal’ policy.

Figure 9: Locating Food Resilience in a web of Food Risks, Security, Sustainability, Democracy, Defence and Resilience – the FRSSDDR cycle – centred on feeding people



Source: authors / design: Gavin Wren

CONCLUSIONS

The challenge of civil food resilience is not currently taken adequately seriously by the UK. Yet the research for this inquiry found unexpectedly wide recognition - across 'insider' and 'outsider' interests, and in the state, commerce, civil society and academia - that a significant reorientation in the food system itself, in government thinking, and in delivery would be needed to deliver civil food resilience. Interviewees might differ in the scale of change or priorities they felt were needed but they agreed that the status quo was beyond its sell-by-date. Significant change is needed.

The main report conducted the opening 'critical assessment' of the current state of civil food resilience. This is overdue and begins to fill a gap in public policy analysis. Almost daily, since the research began, its relevance has increased, with the UK's role in today's more volatile and geopolitically uncertain world coming clear. Old alliances, demarcations and assumptions about food security look less certain. The report has reviewed the specifics of the public's preparedness for food shocks or how to ensure satisfactory food supply in the event of disruption and found it wanting.

Central UK Government is too vague about the 'local' level of food resilience. The 2022 UK Government Resilience Framework takes insufficient account of food matters despite food being a daily need. Policy has been silent on risks and threats to Just-in-Time logistics. The context-free advice on 22 May 2024 (hours before the election was called) was ill thought-through even though it indicated a belated recognition that the people and their food might matter in a severe crisis.

On the positive side, the research has found important and alert constituencies of interest already helping build more resilient regional and local food supply. These need to be put on to a proper footing. The public is hardly considered in current official resilience thinking yet has a ghostly presence. The food economy and its powerful actors constantly justify their actions as responding to the public and bowing to consumer sovereignty yet the public has barely been considered in food risk terms. It is almost as though they are feared by politicians when they simply need to be respectfully engaged with, as interviewees reiterated. Public confidence in crisis might well depend on improving this civil engagement. The people should be helped to develop their skills, capacity and confidence in their community's resilience potential, wherever they live.

Matters of agreement

Through interviews, case studies and discussion, a broad agreement on civil food resilience has emerged:

-
- UK civil food resilience gaps should be narrowed
-
- Policy mechanisms to do so exist or can be made
-
- The lack of policy attention to food security and resilience is of national concern
-
- The challenges are known but require multi-level action
-
- Action on civil food resilience is particularly weak at the local level but does not need to be so
-
- The public could and should be more engaged
-
- There are avenues for civil food resilience
-
- Other countries show ways forward
-
- A better mix of multi-level leadership (government, regional and local) and public engagement is possible
-
- Unless better engagement begins now, it is more likely to be forced under crisis conditions later.
-

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considerable change is needed to bring UK food policy into a fit state of preparedness. Enhancing civil food resilience requires collaboration across different levels of society and between different sectors - commerce, civil society, science, education and decision-makers. The main report has a detailed set of 8 policy **Reorientations**, each leading to particular and more specific Recommendations that follow from findings in the main report ('lessons' given in the text of each chapter). These are presented in the main report for government and public attention (*see Chapter 11*).

Key recommendations include that:

1. A new coherent UK food policy is developed and put on a statutory basis, to transform the UK food system to a sustainable footing for 'normal' times; this would improve food security by increasing domestic production, diversifying sources and enhancing regional food systems. Ideally this would be enacted in a new Food Security and Resilience Act, but the other option would be a section in a future Resilience Act or food amendments to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The scale and importance of food, and its post-Brexit lack of direction suggests particular legislation is needed.
2. Legislation should formalise an obligation on the state to ensure the public is fed in crises (as per Sweden) and to allocate responsibilities for preparedness to central and local government, while stipulating the principles for doing so.
3. The current Just-in-Time approach to food distribution and logistics should be altered towards a Just-in-Case approach, planning for food shocks and the case for civil food resilience.
4. Defra should conduct a more realistic assessment of food as a Critical National Infrastructure.
5. A new National Council of Food Security and Resilience should provide clear, evidence-based advice and to provide continuity of such advice.
6. The National and Community Risk Registers and risk assessment processes should take account of local conditions, risks and consequences of shocks to the food system, taking public reactions more centrally in that process. This should include community audits of food assets, knowledge and local infrastructure.
7. The National Infrastructure Commission's terms of reference should include food within its workplans and advice.
8. A review and update of the public communication and messaging on food shocks should be conducted. Food should be addressed more appropriately by the Resilience Academy (incorporating the Emergency Planning College).

9. Research should be conducted into the potential of stockpiling, rationing, incorporating local food service and other food providers into emergency food provision.
10. Civil society organisations should be consulted over improving civil food resilience and public advice for emergencies, leading to a revamped system of public advice for emergencies, replacing the ‘Prepare’ programme, building trust into how the process is run.
11. New Civil Food Resilience Committees should be formed at local level (ideally co-terminus with Local Resilience Forums and such bodies). These should build on and incorporate existing local food policy ‘councils’, ‘boards’ and networks, where possible. They should be chaired by trusted local practitioners and interested parties such as Directors of Public Health, professions with local focus, knowledge and trusted public interest.
12. Land use policy such as England’s National Planning Policy Framework should give higher priority to food production potential in and around urban areas and should accelerate the relocalisation and regionalisation of food production in a more decentralised manner, as appropriate and accounting for commitments on climate, ecosystems, social inequality reduction, and regional priorities, taking account of public access to land for food growing, where possible.
13. Metro mayors, regional bodies and the governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be encouraged to exchange lessons in development of regional food approaches, built on public interest criteria accounting for climate, ecosystems, social needs and regional priorities.
14. UK towns, cities and villages should initiate food resilience learning exchanges city to city, region to region, institution to institution as part of a public interest focus on living within planetary limits as survival.
15. Academics, UKRI and foundations should be asked to research civil food resilience and build the evidence base for different vulnerabilities, types of shocks and demographic groups.



APPENDIX: TIMELINE OF UK FOOD SECURITY AND RESILIENCE POLICIES

This provides snapshots of key moments in UK policy development since World War II on food security and resilience matters. It offers an overview of the ebbs and flows in central state thinking and responsibilities.⁴⁰

1947

Agriculture Act. This was a foundation moment in post WWII food reconstruction. Its intention was to stabilise and increase UK primary production.² It had the express intention of improving national food security by introducing stability for farmers and to deliver lower food prices.

1948

Civil Defence Corps (CDC) created, building on WWII experience and the Civil Defence Department created earlier in 1935 (which had created 12 Civil Emergency Regions in 1938).³ The CDC trained up to 1% of the population, mostly volunteers with some military and 'blue light', according to a US Defense Department review.^{3,4} The CDC was closed down in 1968.

1960/61, 1967 and 1969

The UK applied three times to join the Common Market being forged by six neighbouring Western European nations. France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg signed the Treaty of Rome in 1957 that created the European Economic Community. This committed them to free movement of goods, people and services across their borders, and built on previous shared policies on iron, steel and coal. Agriculture was introduced into the EEC the next year in the 1958 Strega Treaty. The UK application succeeded after President Charles De Gaulle stood down as President of France. He had opposed UK membership for fear it would always side with the USA at key moments.

1973

The UK formally became a member of the European Economic Community, steered by Conservative Prime Minister Ted Heath. The 1947 Agriculture Act's farm subsidy system of deficit payments had to change to align with the Common Agricultural Policy under which deficiencies (gaps) between actual market prices and promises to farmers would be made good by the state. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) guaranteed farm prices, had tariffs at borders and bought up surplus food stocks creating vast stockpiles that then tended to be dumped on world markets, distorting them.

1975

To address dissent in his party, the new Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson held a referendum on whether to remain in the EEC. The UK voted 67% : 33% to confirm EEC membership.⁵ Arguments grew over following years about the vast CAP budget, with consumer organisations arguing it made food unnecessarily expensive and environmentalists decrying the results of farm intensification such as pollution and residues in both water and food.

1992

An expanded internal European Single Market came into existence, piloted by the 1985 Single Market Act. This had been strongly supported by the UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The Single Market was intended to cut through slow regulatory reform and delays to food standards unification, and to allow the benefits of increased internal market food flow. This regulatory consolidation increased food trade flows inside the EU.

1992

The latest of significant reforms of the CAP was implemented. Known as the MacSharry reform this was a response to UK-led criticism of how CAP worked. Subsidies begin to be shifted away from price support and food storage to paying farmers for land ownership.⁶ New payments for 'agri-environment' began as a second pillar under CAP.

1994

A new General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was signed and included agriculture and food for the first time. The GATT process had started in 1947 when 23 countries signed the agreement to reduce tariffs and trade distortions in a number of commodities but not farm produce. Attempts to include agriculture and food in the first GATT (held in London) had been resisted by the USA but half a century later, when a five-year process ('round') of negotiations concluded in 1994, the EU and USA were among nearly a hundred countries agreeing to reduce trade distortions across a considerable section of their economies.

2000

Within the UK, Scottish and Wales devolution began to take shape. Although given different powers and resources, Scotland and Wales began processes of developing their own agriculture and some food policies.

2001

Defra was created. This replaced the post-war Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), criticised for its narrow farm focus. The new Department was formed by merging MAFF with parts of the Department of Environment, Transport and Regions and a small section of the Home Office. The intention was to create a more holistic approach to food and rural matters.

2001

The Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) was created in the Cabinet Office, responsible for emergency planning and to prepare the UK for resilience after disruption. The CCS took emergency planning from the Home Office where it had been since 1971 when the Home Office, in turn, had replaced the Civil Defence Department created back in 1935. The CCS operated the Civil Contingencies Committee known as Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR), the room in which the committee for any crisis meets. If there is a COBR meeting, it's a sign something significant is on.

2004

A new Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) recognised the possibility of disruption to the infrastructure of everyday life.^{7,8} The CCA created Local Resilience Forums (38 in England; 4 in Wales). Scotland has its own system of resilience partnerships and a national centre for resilience.⁹ The CCA is the legal basis for much resilience action, such as the 2023 'Exercise Mighty Oak', an annual review of Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response (EPRR) statutory requirements. There are many such exercises.¹⁰ In 2022 'Programme Yarrow' reviewed the possible effects of a power outage in the national (electricity) grid for the NHS and 'Exercise Mercury' validated Food Standards Agency procedures for food defence. These can include preparing public alert statements. The CCA also became the rationale for a system of Regional Civil Contingencies Committees co-terminus with government regional offices and Regional Operations Centre, to act as conduits between central and regional government. (The English Regions were abolished in 2011 under the Localism Act.)

2007

A Centre for the Protection of Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) was created.¹¹ CNIs are national assets deemed "essential for the functioning of society" and to be regularly monitored and maintained. Food is one of the original 13 (now 14) CNIs: Chemicals, Civil Nuclear, Communications, Defence, Emergency Services, Energy, Finance, Food, Government, Health, Space, Transport and Water. In 2024, Data Centres were added as a new CNI.

2007-08

There was a global oil and commodity price crisis when crude oil price rose to over \$100 per barrel, generating the Great Recession. World food prices rocketed (exposing food production's dependency on fossil fuels) and have remained volatile and high ever since. The Prime Minister initiated a Cabinet Office Strategy Unit Food Matters review,¹² and Defra began to develop multiple indicators for UK food security. A Council of Food Policy Advisors was created by the Defra Secretary of State, and a Cabinet sub-committee and civil servant intra-UK liaison on food policy were initiated. The policy process culminated in 2010 with Food 2030, an integrated food systems policy, signed by the Prime Minister, setting multiple goals from production to consumption and health for food security and resilience.^{13,14} The entire package was closed down in 2010 with a change of Government.

2008

The Climate Change Act passed and set binding targets to reduce CO₂e / greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.¹⁵ A statutory Committee on Climate Change was created which advises and monitors on UK performance in meeting the targets. It begins to make what became regular and increasingly urgent calls for dietary as well as land use and agricultural change to lower UK national GHG emissions.^{16,17}

2008

The Cabinet Office initiated a Communities Prepared programme “to explore ways to support communities in becoming resilient to the range of probable emergencies”.¹⁸ Its audience covered communities, business, potential volunteers, in short a broad constituency across society. Updated in 2011 and 2016, by 2018 there was another update (see under 2018).

2009

Cabinet Office issued guidance on *Logistics Operations for Emergency Supplies* to be purchased at national, regional or LRF level in crises.¹⁹ A response to floods in 2007, this listed supplies that authorities could purchase including: Medical supplies, wheelchairs, satellite phones, **food**, nappies, cooking equipment, blankets, buckets, flood barriers, high capacity water pumps. It recommended advice be sought from experts on logistics management; that Regional Offices should facilitate logistic support arrangements; and that “stockpiling of supplies should be a last resort”.

2010

The newly elected Coalition Government shelved Food 2030 and related strategies and closes the Royal Commission on Environmental Protection (then the oldest such statutory advisory body in the Western world) and Sustainable Development Commission. Defra began to work on drafts for proposed new Agricultural and Environment Bills to replace Food 2030 but in fact there were no new policies for a decade until well after Brexit.⁴¹

2010

A new *National Risk Register for Civil Emergencies* (now the *National Risk Register*) was produced, whose purpose was to provide “advice for people and businesses to better prepare for civil emergencies”. Section 4 (pp45-53) gives advice to citizens on protecting “yourself, your family and community for emergencies”.²⁰ This direct advice and focus on citizens on water, electricity, IT, telecommunications, emergencies etc has not (so far) been repeated in later editions, and did not include any food advice.²⁰

2015

The 2015 *National Security Risk Assessment* designated food as in Tier 3 of severity of threats (low risk). Tier 1 includes terrorism, cyber-attacks, public health, etc. Tier 2 includes chemical, biological weapons etc. Food is within Tier 3’s heading of ‘resource insecurity’ impacts.^{21,22}

2016

Brexit referendum. The UK voted 52% : 48% to leave the EU. Uncertainties about the impact on food security began almost immediately, although agri-food hardly featured in the campaign.²³

2016

National Cyber Security Agency formed.²⁴ This incorporated the Centre for Protection of National Infrastructure whose focus is to reduce vulnerability to extreme threats.²⁵

2017

The *National Infrastructure Commission* was created as an independent agency (nominally attached to HM Treasury).²⁶ Food was not included in its responsibility or assessments.⁴²

2018

A toolkit for the *Communities Emergency Plan* was published with only one but portentous mention of food (p 8):²⁷

“In an emergency, your community will require supplies, such as food and water, which may be difficult to obtain. The Community Emergency Group should consider talking with local businesses and suppliers who might be willing to provide these.”

2018

Defra produced a *White Paper Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment* in a Green Brexit. This set out the Government’s vision of land use for ecosystems and climate.²⁸ Food did not feature in this assessment despite being in its sub-title, an omission that sparked comment. Michael Gove, Defra Secretary, asked restaurateur entrepreneur Henry Dimbleby to review national food strategy (for England).

2020

The post-Brexit Agriculture Act was passed,²⁹ replacing EU agricultural policy. Although the CAP was founded to deliver food security, food was largely absent from this new Act. Its focus was mostly on ecosystem enhancement, and the future purpose of any subsidies (which were to reduce from EU levels). This foundation legislation for post Brexit English agriculture introduced schemes such as Environmental Land Management and the Sustainable Farming Initiative to reduce negative impacts and deliver ‘public goods’.³⁰ Food was not accepted to be a public good.

2020

The Covid pandemic spread in January, leading to lockdowns from March, and huge expenditure on furlough schemes. Defra created a *Food Resilience Industry Forum (FRIF)* to tackle the crisis for food, closing it a year later as no longer necessary. Already aware of poor diets and health in low income households, Henry Dimbleby produced an emergency first report to Defra on food poverty, urging government support.³¹ Accelerating food bank use plus campaigning by footballer Marcus Rashford and the Food Foundation, a civil society organisation, highlighted unmet need and that charities could not cope with demand. An emergency Household Support Fund was created in 2021-23 and given £1bn a year, used by local authorities partly for food vouchers and school meals.

2020

Cabinet Office issued an update of its general advice to Local Resilience Forums.³² This did not include food advice. A special House of Lords Committee on Food, Poverty Health and the Environment, chaired by Lord (John) Krebs, “found barriers at all levels of the food system that make it harder for people, particularly those living in poverty, to access a healthy and sustainable diet.”³³ *Hungry for change: fixing the failures* in food recommended an overhaul of food policy to deliver more coherence. The UK food system was estimated to cause the NHS £6.1 bn costs from ill-health due to poor diets and £27 billion to the wider economy.

2021

Preparing for Extreme Risks: Building a Resilient Society, chaired by Lord (James) Arbuthnot report warned of the need to tighten up resilience planning. The pandemic, it said:

“has shown that communities can step up and help ensure national safety. The Government must see our people as an essential building block of any response and as active participants in creating resilience. They must provide them with the support and information to help them prepare for the risks they face.”³⁴

2021

The Food Security Report was published, the first of what was promised to be a triennial publication, agreed by Government under the Agriculture Act 2020 at the insistence of the House of Lords.³⁵ The Report stated the UK is 54% self-sufficient and faces long-term stresses such as climate change. The second report was published in December 2024.

2021

The Government’s *Global Britain in a Competitive Age* (known as the *Integrated Review*) report outlined post-EU strategic framework thinking.³⁶ This was intended as a 10 year forward look at the international contribution of the UK integrating foreign, defence, security and development policies into one strategy. Food barely featured, and only externally as a concern. Two years later a Refresh updated the 2021 document.

2021

Henry Dimbleby’s final report on *National Food Strategy: the Plan* was launched but almost immediately sidelined.³⁷ It made extensive recommendations for tackling externalised costs, specifically to tackle the ‘junk food cycle’ to save burdens to the NHS, to reduce diet-related inequality, and create a long-term shift in food culture. It foresaw threats to food security from “widespread harvest failure caused by climate change” but did not set targets for UK production.

2022

Russia invaded Ukraine in February. Conflict between two major grain exporting countries meant Ukraine exports through the Black Sea were blockaded, causing considerable destabilisation of grain trade to 50+ importing countries, and to world food commodity prices. Food price inflation accelerated.

2022

Scotland's Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act set out a new vision for agri-food in Scotland to achieve healthy diets for all under plans agreed across ministries and local authorities. This became the framework legislation under which civil society, industry and government see Scotland becoming more food resilient.

2022

UK Government published a short (33 page) *Government Food Strategy*,³⁸ responding in part to the already marginalised National Food Strategy. This acknowledged the importance of the food sector and its impact on health and employment in every part of the UK but saw no need for the UK to alter production levels and sought to increase food exports.

2022

UK Government Resilience Framework was published,³⁹ proposing resilience be based on three “fundamental principles”: a “shared understanding of risks”, a need to “focus on protection and prevention”, and recognition that “resilience requires a whole of society approach”.

2022

Department for Business publishes a (very brief) *Guidance on Supply Chain Resilience Framework* mooting the need to consider more ‘stockpiling’ and ‘onshoring’ (producing more in the UK) but little emerges from that for food.⁴⁰

2023

The Integrated Review Refresh 2023,⁴¹ just two years on from the *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, (the Integrated Review), recognised the new multi-polar world and rising tensions, symbolised by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (a food export powerhouse) and tensions between China and the West (e.g. over trade and Taiwan).⁴² Unlike its predecessor, wrapped in the ‘old’ language of competitive globalised capitalism, the Refresh was more sober about conflicts, hence the subtitle ‘responding to a more contested and volatile world’. Food was mentioned fleetingly on three pages (pp 2, 27, 47). It recognised that food is being ‘weaponised’⁴³ or is troubling (e.g. conflict-based famine in Yemen). De facto it confirmed the 2022 Government Food Strategy as delivering UK food security; others did not. Food was seen as a foreign affairs or development problem, not a problem for the UK. Thus, the Yemen should be encouraged to reduce the price of food imports to aid food security, not the UK.

2023

Cabinet Office, National Cyber Security Agency and National Protective Security Agency published a 5-step process for reviewing CNIs to ‘enhance the CNI Knowledge Base’.⁴³ As one of the CNIs, this can be expected for food.

2023

An extensively updated *National Risk Register* increased the number of risks facing the UK to 89.⁴⁴ The 89 only included one specifically on food: the possibility of Food Supply Contamination (affecting public confidence). Food featured also as implicated under the possibility of a pandemic; infectious disease; a major outbreak of an animal or plant disease; chemical, cyber and other attacks; and spread of antimicrobial resistance. A nuclear attack or accident were cited as potentially affecting food.

2023 (December)

A long-awaited *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)* gave little attention to food, other than Footnote 62 on page 52 that read:⁴⁵

“Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. The availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered, alongside the other policies in this Framework, when deciding what sites are most appropriate for development.”

2024 (January)

A new Critical Imports Council was created and its 23 members first met on April 17 with its focus on “medicines and smartphone chips”. Membership was all business bar one academic, with no noticeable food representation.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸

2024 (April)

Defending Britain, another update of national defence strategy committed the UK to an increase in defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2030, £75 bn more over 2024-31 than budget previously.⁴⁹ It envisaged a closer relationship between military and civil Research and Development (R&D). It recognised the need to work:

“with critical sectors to ensure planning for catastrophic scenarios are in place and resilient and will build on this to bring together and exercise a comprehensive National Defence and Resilience Plan (NDRP) for our security, preparedness and resilience as a nation. This will be based on the latest threat assessment and will bring together civil and military planning.”

2024 (May)

Prime Minister Sunak and Defra hosted a one day No 10 Downing Street **Farm and Food Summit**, and launched a **Food Security Index**.⁵⁰ A week later, on the day a General Election is called, the Deputy Prime Minister recommended the public store 3 days food, keep batteries and torches and prepare better.⁵¹ Formal guidance followed in the Emergency Planning College's Prepare website.⁵² The speech signalled concern about civil interests but was less clear about the process by which the advice was given such as its nutritional basis or its practicality for different demographics.

2024 (July)

The Hallet Report produces a sober account of how well prepared the UK was for a pandemic. Baroness Heather Hallett, chair of the Inquiry, concluded that preparedness was "flawed", and recommends a "radical simplification of the civil emergency preparedness and resilience systems" and "a new approach to risk assessment that provides for a better and more comprehensive evaluation of a wider range of actual risks."⁵³

2024 (December)

The second triennial UK Food Security Report confirms high import dependency of UK food system and provides more detailed data on risks facing UK food. The Environment Agency published a new estimate using Met Office modelling estimating that 1 in 4 homes will face flooding by 2050. Besides being a reminder that advice simply to store food warrants 'flood-proofing', this confirmed concerns about vulnerability of food-growing.

2025

A *National Defence and Resilience Plan* is expected to provide details for the promises made in the 2024 *Defending Britain* policy statement. *Defending Britain* specified the need to stockpile armaments but not food.⁴⁹ The new Plan is to be informed by the *Strategic Defence Review* led by Lord (George) Robertson.⁵⁴

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