



FPC PRESS RELEASE

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SHOULD WE STOP BUYING AIR-FREIGHTED FOOD TO SAVE THE PLANET? FLYING AND FAIR TRADE DEBATED AT PARTY CONFERENCES

'Should we stop buying air-freighted food to save the planet?' was the hot topic for fringe events at both the Labour and Conservative Party conferences. Lively debates at both events concluded that whilst we need to tackle the impacts of climate change, we should keep air freight in perspective.

Around 60% of fruit and vegetables are imported into the UK, providing us with produce outside of the UK season as well as varieties which simply cannot be grown in the UK, said the Fresh Produce Consortium which took part in the debate organised by FlyingMatters, a coalition of organisations that support sustainable growth in air transport.

Speaking at the Conservative Party fringe event, Nigel Jenney, chief executive of FPC said: "We need to tackle the impact of climate change, but let's keep air freight in perspective. Total air freighted imports of fruit and vegetables account for a mere 0.2 per cent of total UK greenhouse gas emissions.

"There is no evidence that fewer aircraft would fly if consumption of imported fruit and vegetables was reduced. At least 60 per cent of air freighted fresh produce is brought to the UK in the bellyhold of passenger aircraft. The Soil Association is pushing to ban air-freighted organic produce unless farmers carry out bureaucratic, expensive, time consuming measures. This would do immense damage to the livelihoods of farmers in developing countries who need fast access to European markets.

"Whilst we need to look at ways of tackling climate change, the concept of food miles is confusing and generates a false sense of eco-security. According to a study of food miles and food choices in America a change in diet can be a more effective means of lowering an average household's food-related climate footprint than 'buying local'. Meat production generates 18 per cent of greenhouse

gas emissions, far more than fresh produce. People could reduce the impact of their greenhouse gas emissions more significantly if they halved their meat consumption than if they halved the use of their car.

“We need to encourage the UK consumer to eat 5-day and to achieve this we need a wide variety of fresh produce regardless of origin or means of transport. Without air freight a large section of the grocery aisle would become out of bounds. Obesity and poor diet among children is a rising epidemic across Europe. In the face of this major health crisis we should not do anything that limits consumer choice.”

“If we want to do something practical to save the planet we could each switch a single one hundred Watt light bulb to a low energy bulb. If everyone in the UK did that we'd reduced carbon dioxide emissions over a year by five times the amount that would result from not buying air-freighted fresh fruit and vegetables from sub-Saharan Africa.”

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Notes for editors:

1. The Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) is the UK's fresh produce trade association and is based in Peterborough. The FPC has represented the fresh produce sector for many years and is recognised across the UK and EU as the voice of the industry.
2. Extensive membership covers the complete spectrum of industry businesses including growers, importers, wholesalers, retailers, distributors, processors, packers, food service companies and other allied organisations.
3. Flying Matters represents a broad coalition of organisations that support sustainable growth in air transport, including trade unions, business, tourism groups, farmers in the developing world, as well as the aviation industry. For more information contact: 020 7091 4502 www.flyingmatters.org.uk
4. Speakers at the Conservative Party fringe event on 29 September were: Nirj Deva MEP; Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones PPC for Chippenham; Nigel Jenney, Fresh Produce Consortium; Dr Tom MacMillan, Food Ethics Council; Benet Northcote, Greenpeace; Rt Hon Brian Wilson, FlyingMatters. The debate was chaired by Iain Dale.
5. Defra statistics on fruit and vegetable imports exclude potatoes.
6. Food-Miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States: C.L.Weber and H. Scott Matthews.

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