



FPC PRESS RELEASE

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A REALISTIC VISION OF FUTURE FOOD DISTRIBUTION NEEDS TO BE GLOBAL

The Food Ethics Council's report provides a thought-provoking vision of the potential future for UK food distribution. In actual fact fresh produce accounts for just 2.5 per cent of the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions.

UK consumers enjoy high quality fresh produce all year round and have an increasing interest in provenance, and how food is produced. However, the debate about the future of UK food transportation needs to be placed in the wider context of the global market, and the greater priority of encouraging more people to enjoy a healthier diet, says the Fresh Produce Consortium.

The UK is more self-sufficient now than before and after the Second World War, with over 74 per cent self-sufficiency in agricultural produce which we are able to grow in the UK. Yet we cannot produce all our fruit and vegetables in the UK. Around 60 per cent of fruit and vegetables are imported into the UK, providing us with produce outside the UK season, but by far the majority is varieties which simply cannot be grown in the UK.

"It's great to encourage consumers to eat more fruit and vegetables in season," said Nigel Jenney, chief executive of FPC, "but the report does not clearly define what is meant by 'in season'. We should not look to restrict the consumer's choice and potentially deprive the nation of some of its favourite fruit and vegetables like bananas and citrus when there are more constructive ways of reducing our carbon footprint."

With the adoption of new growing techniques UK farmers have extended the season for a number of crops, promoting the availability of more UK produce but, just as importantly, developing a viable and profitable business for themselves. In reality the UK's climate will always limit the range of produce which can be grown here, which is why imported produce is a key component to the nation's healthy eating habits.

It is laudable to encourage 'grow your own' as a healthy lifestyle choice, but this will not have any meaningful impact on the carbon footprint of fresh produce, especially when the cooking process can often account for the majority of the product's carbon footprint.

The UK Government recognises the principle that food security is a global issue and that 'attempting to pursue national food security in isolation from the global context is unlikely to be practicable, sustainable or financially rational.'

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'.

Total air freighted imports of fruit and vegetables account for a mere 0.2 per cent of total UK greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, 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. Air freighted fresh produce on dedicated cargo planes accounts for a mere 0.12 per cent of total UK greenhouse gas emissions.

"To encourage a healthy diet 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; yet if we swapped our red meat for vegetables just one day a week we could achieve more greenhouse gas reduction than buying all our food from local sources," commented Nigel Jenney.

"Obesity and poor diet among children is a rising epidemic. Only 12 per cent of the population currently hits the 5-a-day target, and around 1.9 million less well off people are eating less than one serving of fruit and vegetables a day. In the face of this major health crisis we should not be looking to limit consumer choice. "

Instead of focusing on the means of transporting produce, the carbon footprint of the whole product supply chain should be considered. That way the fresh produce sector can provide consumers with meaningful advice on which to make informed decisions. The Fresh Produce Consortium is working with the Carbon Trust and others to do this, looking at identifying sources of emissions and reducing the carbon footprint of companies and their products.

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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. The Food Ethics Council's report ' Food distribution – an ethical agenda':
<http://www.foodethicscouncil.org/node/401>

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