

# Joined up approach needed for food security

Some food executives believe a more joined up, thematic approach to food security might achieve more than multiple initiatives, Sean Hargrave finds out

- ▶ **Food security is far more multi-faceted than just producing enough food. It brings in a whole range of environmental, educational, economic, social and agricultural concerns.**



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The complexity of the issue is certainly noted within the Government. With the Food 2030 report, the last administration focussed on the challenge of feeding a growing population and at the same time providing informed consumers with a choice of affordable, healthy, sustainably-produced food provided by UK farmers and food production companies working with trading partners in the EU and beyond who are all committed to supporting developing economies.

Delivering these multiple aims will require many organisations to work together at many different levels believes the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) Director General, Melanie Leech. FDF is the trade body for the UK's food and drink manufacturing industry which is worth £72.8bn per year, making it the largest manufacturing sector in the UK, accounting for 15% of all manufactured products. With food security posing a huge challenge for the future, Leech believes progress should be sought through a single body where multi-layered discussions can be had, rather than the current position of multiple conversations being had with several departments.

"I think all parties would benefit from joined up government where we extend, say, the Cabinet Committee for Food in to a body which allows government, industry and other stakeholders a meeting point to discuss all the issues," says Leech.

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"The problem is that food is such an important issue that you otherwise end up having conversations with the Food Safety Agency and the Department of Health on one hand, then we might talk to Defra about food production and DECC about climate change and the Department for Business about the economic side of food.

"Sometimes the conversations involve getting the balance right between competing demands, such as reducing packaging and getting more labelling on food packaging, so why not do this in one place, as a coalition of government and stakeholders?"

## Themed thinking

The main benefit of this approach would be not just a debate surrounding the many issues involved but also, Leech believes, priorities could be drawn up.

"I think we'd achieve a lot more if the industry and government could agree on themes for each year," she says.

"At the moment there are so many areas where there are initiatives that you can end up confronting consumers with far too much information. If we, for example, said that one year was all about eating a more healthy balanced diet, we could all work toward that goal together and then the next year might be about waste, and we could again work together on cutting food waste in the supply chain as well as educating people to cut down on food waste at home."

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Providing themes to projects is important because, although FDF is a great supporter of appropriate regulation, it does believe its members are often asked by government to go beyond the letter of the law and engage in proactive projects which take important messages to consumers. A classic case is food labelling where Leech points out the latest initiatives, particularly on country of origin, go far beyond regulatory requirements.

If such voluntary additional work were joined up with themed government and industry communication messages each year, then Leech believes consumers could be better informed, helping to make a business case for the voluntary extra investment FDF members put in to such initiatives which is not recouped from higher food prices.

## Five-fold Environmental Ambition

FDF's Five-fold Environmental Ambition underlines the importance of sustainability issues in making natural resources go as far as possible and so help deliver food security in the long term

Its members are on track to reduce carbon emissions by 20% by the end of this year and are aiming for 30% by 2020, compared to 1990 levels. The Federation also reports it is progressing well in its bid to eliminate any food or packaging waste going into landfill, as part of the production process, by 2015. It is also working with government funded organisation Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to reduce packaging on consumer food and drink products.

In addition, FDF members are pledged to reduce water consumption 20% by 2020, compared to 2007, as well reduce the social and environmental impact of food transportation (food miles) by 20% by 2012, compared to 2002.

"It's hugely important that we, as an industry, take steps to improve our environmental performance," says Melanie Leech, Director General of FDF.

"We're not only committed to these goals but we're also using independent evaluation from the likes of Defra and the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD), to prove that we're on course to meet these ambitious targets."