About Us

UK food and drink is a major national asset and the envy of the world. For Government, feeding the nation is as important a duty as the defence of its citizens. The Food and Drink Federation – FDF – is the voice of the UK’s makers, bakers and bottlers, representing global brands and small businesses across the four nations. FDF is headquartered in London, our sister organisation, FDF Scotland, is based in Edinburgh and we have recently unveiled FDF Cymru.

As the UK’s largest manufacturing sector, we are worth £28.2 billion annually to the economy. Food and drink manufacturers employ 400,000 people in every corner of the country and export goods valued at over £20 billion a year. 96 per cent of firms are micro to medium-sized, with production widely dispersed across the UK.

Food is part of the UK’s Critical National Infrastructure. The UK’s 6,800 food and drink producers sit at the heart of a food supply chain which is worth £110 billion to the economy and employs four million people. We ask the new Government to join us in our shared mission: to continue to provide consumers with safe, affordable and nutritious food and drink and unlock our growth and productivity potential.

Our Manifesto

This document is aimed at policymakers and candidates of all parties across the UK. It sets out the five key policies we want the next Government to implement after 8 June 2017 to ensure the UK’s food and farming sector continues to lead the world.

For a thriving UK food and drink sector, we are calling on the next Government to:

- Secure the best possible Brexit for food and drink, including a transition phase to avoid any “cliff edge”.
- Work in partnership with industry to tackle obesity through a holistic, evidence-based approach, with calorie reduction at its heart.
- Turbocharge sector-specific exports support to help smaller firms take advantage of new opportunities.
- Support our ambition for an industrial strategy sector deal which drives transformational industry growth, so we can continue to provide consumers with great choice and quality products.
- Work with us to develop home-grown talent, boost skills and apprenticeships for a global UK.

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Policies for the new Government to deliver a thriving food and drink industry

1) Secure the best possible Brexit for food and drink, including a transition phase to avoid any “cliff edge”

Food and farming is the sector most impacted by Brexit. Whether it is access to future workforce, the shape of the regulatory regime, our trading relationships, or the all-Ireland agri-food supply chain, the long-term future for UK food and drink is dependent on the deal the next Government secures.

Currency fluctuation has already squeezed many producers, with over 90 per cent of FDF members reporting price rises for essential ingredients and raw materials in our recent survey. As essential partners to the UK’s farmers, primary producers and fishing industry, we are also reliant on a stable and sustainable domestic supply base.

We are a resilient and resourceful sector. Despite the challenges, we are ready to seize new opportunities in exports, domestic sourcing and greater innovation. However, the risk of a disruptive “cliff edge” concerns UK food and drink producers greatly. If the UK were to fall back on World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules for trading with the EU, then we would expect UK food and drink exports and imports to face notably high tariffs.

Based on the work FDF has undertaken with its members since the 23 June 2016 referendum, we call on the next Government to achieve the following:

➢ Transitional arrangements which help our sector to negotiate any change and uncertainty around access to workforce, trade and regulation at a reasonable pace, without risking the current success and long-term investment in the sector.

➢ Immediate action to guarantee the right to remain for valued EU citizens, and in the medium term, access to the skills and talent we need to address our sector’s skills gap.

➢ Agreement that the future trading arrangements can be discussed hand-in-hand with the UK’s exit from the EU. As the largest market for exports and vital imports, we need to secure a special deal with the Republic of Ireland, a bold and ambitious Free Trade Agreement with the EU, and continued frictionless trade across borders via a new customs agreement.

➢ A stable regulatory framework through the Great Repeal Bill and other legislation. Maintaining consumer confidence in the safety and authenticity of UK food and drink is paramount. We must protect the UK’s reputation for high quality products, while where possible, boosting the competitiveness of our sector. It will be vital to minimise regulatory fragmentation across the nations of the UK, and ensure Government has the right mechanisms to ensure mutual recognition for seamless trade.
Food and drink manufacturers take our responsibility to help consumers make informed diet choices and achieve healthier lifestyles very seriously. We agree with leading experts that there is no silver bullet to tackle the complex issue of obesity and diet-related diseases. Success is dependent on many co-ordinated interventions across the entire food chain and in homes, communities and workplaces.

We are proud of our record: from voluntary salt reduction, virtual elimination of artificial trans fats, and now a world-leading sugars reduction programme.

But we know there is more to do to transform the nation’s diet, which is why industry is also taking bold steps on its own initiative. In 2015 FDF announced our support for new restrictions in digital media, so adverts for products high in fat, salt and sugar can no longer be shown in children’s media, as is already the case for television. We are proud that in July 2017 this new regime will come into force and we will continue to look where we can come together to help families choose healthier lifestyles.

We believe strong progress on diet and health is possible through close partnership with Government to deliver a long-term, voluntary programme of work. To achieve this, we seek a stable environment in which any new measures are proportionate, evidence-based and introduced with a realistic timetable.

FDF agrees with dietitians that it is wrong to focus on one single nutrient or ingredient and that we must look for a ‘whole diet and lifestyle’ solution. The emphasis should be on calories, as undue focus on any one nutrient risks misleading the consumer.

The next Government should quickly build on the sugars reduction work to create an holistic reformulation programme, with calorie reduction at its heart. Government should also champion the role of appropriate portion sizing, shifting marketing investment behind healthier options and methods to drive behaviour change among consumers.

Reformulation takes time, involves technical challenges and incurs great costs. The next Government should fund pre-competitive research through the Research Councils with world leading UK universities and improve technology transfer through funding of commercialisation initiatives, such as those supported by InnovateUK. This will help keep new product prices competitive, ensuring these are truly affordable to all and helping to alleviate health inequalities.

With the support of industry, the UK Government has set up the most ambitious sugars reduction programme anywhere in the world to help lower sugar in the national diet.

The food & drink industry is the biggest manufacturing sector in the country...larger than automotive & aerospace combined.

Food and drink companies have reduced sugars & calories from their products by 18% since 2012.

We call on the next Government to:

> Recognise that the most powerful approach to tackling obesity requires a range of interventions across multiple settings and that manufacturers are willing to play their part.

> Provide clarity on the long-term expectation of industry by developing an holistic calorie reduction programme, recognising that both reformulation and portion size are key areas of industry action.

> Provide financial certainty to industry by confirming there will be no further nutrient taxes on foods, providing companies with the security to commit financing to long-term, costly calorie reduction programmes.

> Support industry innovation, through funding support for fundamental and applied research, including improving technology transfer provisions, for example by understanding how healthier foods can be made the foods of choice.
Policies for the new Government to deliver a thriving food and drink industry

3) Turbo charge sector-specific exports support to help smaller firms take advantage of new opportunities

UK food and drink exports are a national success story. Demand for our products has grown consistently and our exports now total more than £20 billion each year. UK products are increasingly competitive overseas. This is helping to highlight the excellence of UK manufacturing, while acting as a shop window that showcases the UK as a modern and innovative food tourism destination of choice across the world.

With only 20 per cent of food and drink manufacturers actively exporting, we know there is huge untapped potential among SMEs to meet rising demand. We are looking for the next Government to work with us so our firms are ready to take advantage of growing demand, including new opportunities in non-EU countries. This can help prepare the UK’s wider food chain for a more competitive future outside the CAP.

The biggest barrier to exploiting this potential is the fragmentation of specialist export support in the UK. SMEs in other countries typically benefit from more generous sector-specific support, with a single point of contact making support easier to access. We are calling on the new Government to work in partnership with our industry to scale-up its provision of specialist export support in food and drink to take advantage of increased demand for UK products overseas and the opportunities that leaving the EU is expected to create.

Access to market research is also important for ensuring exporters are successful. This information is all too often out of reach for UK SMEs. We want Government to fund a pilot ‘Food and Drink Export Academy’ focusing on SME businesses to help us address a gap in the provision of food and drink-specific export training and guidance.

We call on the next Government to:

› Work in partnership with our industry to scale-up its provision of specialist export support in food and drink to take advantage of increased demand for UK products overseas and the opportunities that leaving the EU is expected to create. This can help prepare the UK’s wider food chain for a more competitive future outside the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

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Now is the time to harness industry and Government expertise to build a long-term vision for food, farming and fisheries which boosts UK productivity and unlocks the great potential in our sector. This must be part of a new industrial strategy which makes the UK economy the most competitive in the world, and helps us to adapt as we prepare to leave the EU.

Food and drink’s wide geographic footprint, and vital role as a “bridge” between primary producers and the UK retail and hospitality sector, means we are ideally placed to support the next Government in spreading wealth and opportunity across all communities in the UK.

We are ambitious for a sector deal that ensures our consumers continue to have great choice and quality products, that our businesses have the certainty and confidence to invest for the long-term and that the next generation benefits from a transformation in skills, innovation and exports growth.

We call on the next Government to:

- Work with us and our food chain partners to deliver a safe, secure, affordable, resilient and sustainable food chain for now and for future generations. This includes support to grow a more competitive and productive supply base, delivering resource efficiency, quality and traceability from farm to fork.
- Commit to a stable regulatory regime, through risk and evidence-based policy making, which makes the UK highly competitive and does not discourage business investment with regard to EU competitors and the rest of the world.
- Help food and drink manufacturing obtain better access to public funds - for example through better utilisation of R&D tax credits and access to funding through InnovateUK and the Research Councils, including the recently announced Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF).
- Deliver a programme to raise awareness of the benefits of automation, initiatives to encourage uptake of automation by reducing risk and strengthening the STEM skills base. This will help support productivity improvements in many SMEs who represent 96 per cent of the food and drink manufacturing sector.
- Consider how to harness the benefits of the circular economy and how future energy and climate policy can deliver decarbonisation and improve competitiveness in the longer term.
Creating highly skilled, home-grown talent is crucial for a new, globally competitive nation. As part of a comprehensive industrial strategy, the next Government must commit to long-term investment in skills and apprenticeships so the UK remains the destination of choice for multi-national food and drink manufacturers.

Our sector offers enormous potential as a high value manufacturing sector, but faces a looming skills gap due to demographic change. This is compounded by the uncertainty that a new immigration policy may put at risk our valued EU workforce, and leave our sector with an immediate skills gap we are unable to close.

Over a third of our workforce is set to retire by 2024 and we will need 140,000 new recruits to fill this looming shortage. UK food and drink manufacturers, like the rest of the agri-food supply chain, have benefitted from bringing in labour from the EU. Almost a third (29 per cent) of our workforce are EU nationals, with a high percentage carrying out vital production, technical and specialist roles.

Through a new industrial strategy, we need a significant step change to develop home-grown talent and to tackle the structural barriers which prevent our sector from securing particular skills, caused by image, location or competition from other STEM sectors.

We call on the next Government to help us to:

- Deliver co-ordinated careers action and a more strategic approach to engagement with schools, so we can encourage home-grown talent to replace our ageing workforce, thereby helping to reduce our reliance on EU national workers in the longer-term.
- Ensure the skills gaps of the country’s largest manufacturing sector are addressed within technical education reforms, including the Institutes of Technology. The proposed T Levels fall short for food and drink.
- Fulfil FDF’s pledge to increase the apprentice workforce in food and drink manufacturing from one to three per cent by 2020 and tackle market failures such as the fragmented apprenticeship provision for our sector and lack of new standards at level 4 and above.
- Create a new immigration policy which reflects the importance of skilled workers to our industry and considers food and drink a priority sector.

Policies for the new Government to deliver a thriving food and drink industry

5) Work with us to develop home-grown talent, boost skills and apprenticeships for a global UK