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# Academic engagement with food policy development 2021-22

The final report of the National Food Strategy Independent Review appeared in July 2021, presenting a thorough analysis of the challenges facing England’s food system and recommending [77 separate actions](https://foodresearch.org.uk/publications/the-70-recommended-actions-in-the-national-food-strategy-independent-review-the-plan/) to achieve healthier and more sustainable outcomes. It is to be followed by a White Paper in early 2022, and then possibly by legislation to implement changes. **During this critical period of food policy development**, it is important for media and public debates to be supported by evidence or, where necessary, challenged on the basis of existing evidence. This FRC initiative aims to facilitate that process.

### What is the objective?

To help ensure that the reception and subsequent debate of emerging policy is broad (reflecting the scope of the issues involved) and informed by expert evidence.

How will we achieve it?
By approaching:

1. A range of academic experts on the UK food system and food policy, to encourage and help them to be available with a comment or with their expertise – either directly to the media or via us – when policies are published or policy-relates issues arise.
2. Journalists with an interest in food policy, to make them aware of the expertise available.

### Why is this important?

Broad, informed debate helps keep policy-makers’ options open: when media and public discourse becomes polarised or narrow, policy-makers’ options may be curtailed or even closed down.

### Does FRC have an agenda?

The FRC is in favour of a more sustainable food system (explained at <https://foodresearch.org.uk/>), but we realise that the picture is complicated and there are many views, interests and trade-offs to be debated and balanced. This is why we think it is vital for a range of academic expertise to be available to people who want to engage with and understand the issues. **Our agenda is to ensure a broad and informed debate about the National Food Strategy, the ensuing White Paper and possible subsequent regulation.**

# Some anticipated reasons for academic hesitation:

### ‘I only know about my own specialism’

That’s the point: we want to pull together and facilitate expert contributions on different aspects of food policy; cumulatively, they will contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced debate, and no academic will be asked to comment on anything they don’t feel they have the knowledge to speak about.

‘This already happens via my university press office’

Great! But perhaps not in a coordinated way: we are offering to broker details about a range of academics’ areas of expertise, readiness to speak to the media, or preferences to comment off the record, with journalists’ special interests and requirements. We are happy to work with other institutions’ press offices. We will do nothing without your consent, and will definitely not share comments or contact details without explicit permission.

### *‘No one is interested in what I have to say’*

Untested. What is clear is that the complex nature of our food system, and its critical importance in tackling the climate and biodiversity crises as well as health inequalities, could be more effectively communicated to the public. We want to make it possible for the media to report the food system in more breadth and detail, and that will mean making a mosaic of expertise available, quite possibly including yours.

To join this initiative, or for more information, contact us here.

The [Food Research Collaboration](https://foodresearch.org.uk) is an initiative of the [Centre for Food Policy](https://researchcentres.city.ac.uk/food-policy) at City, University of London.