



Food Research
Collaboration

The food marketing environment: A force for or against human and planetary health?

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FRC Policy Insights

The FRC Policy Insights are short reports highlighting gaps and opportunities for improvement in emerging food policy in the UK. The aim is to put detailed, specialist knowledge into the public domain at a critical time for the food system.

Brexit, Covid, the climate and environmental crises, the disruption to supply chains caused by the war in Ukraine, and the UK's acute cost-of-living crisis all have consequences for food policy.

In response, there have been new laws and policy proposals, covering all aspects of the food system, from land use and agriculture to health, trade, labour, technology and innovation.

While policy is being developed, there are opportunities for improvements and course-corrections. We hope these Policy Insights will help to inform that process. If you would like to contribute, please contact the [Food Research Collaboration](#).

Introduction

The independent review for the National Food Strategy for England, *The Plan*, published in July 2021, took a comprehensive look at the UK food system and set out a wide range of recommendations for how we could improve the way we produce and consume food for better human and planetary health.¹ Few of these recommendations were translated into the ensuing Government Food Strategy (GFS)²: those that made it include mandatory reporting for food companies,

financial support for sustainable farming and reformulation of high fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) food.

One conspicuous difference between the documents was that *The Plan* did a great job of acknowledging that we cannot hold individuals solely responsible for their behaviour. It highlighted the influence of food policy and the food environment on our food choices, including availability, accessibility and affordability of healthy vs. unhealthy foods. This systemic approach was much less prominent in the GFS. However, there is one critical factor lacking in *both* documents: **marketing**.

There have been several policies proposed by the government to restrict marketing of unhealthy food, and debate over how far these restrictions should go. We argue that current measures and recommendations are wholly inadequate and need to go much further. In this Policy Insight, we set out evidence that marketing continues to drive increased purchase and consumption of HFSS foods which are damaging our health and that of our planet.

We argue that harnessing the power of food and drink marketing is one of the biggest behaviour change tools available to us to transform the way we produce and consume food. We highlight deficiencies in existing government policy and suggest stronger measures to regulate marketing of unhealthy foods to consumers. Primarily, we want to press the government to take the difficult and unpopular decision to ban all marketing of unhealthy foods to consumers and instead use the power of marketing to help consumers create demand for healthier products.

Our hope is that the government will understand that if it is serious about improving public health, this meaningful and effective action is absolutely

necessary. If adopted as part of the UK food policy, this could unlock innovation and imagination, and drive real change.

UK health and dietary statistics

Improving public health is at the forefront of sustainable development. The third of the UN Sustainable Development Goals is to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”. There is also a specific target (SDG3.4) to “reduce premature mortality due to non-communicable disease by a third between 2015 and 2030 via prevention, treatment and health promotion”³

Despite government actions to improve public health, rates of cardiovascular disease and diabetes amongst the UK population have not significantly decreased since 2015.⁴ Any improvements we have seen are primarily due to better screening and treatment for risk factors including high blood pressure and high cholesterol, rather than to prevention via healthy diet. A diet based on vegetables, fruits and wholegrains with a variety of plant-based and animal-

Abbreviations list

BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
NFS	National Food Strategy
GFS	Government Food Strategy
HFSS	High fat, sugar and salt

based protein sources is proven to reduce disease risk and have a lower environmental impact.⁵

Unfortunately, less than 10% of the UK population meet the World Health Organisation dietary recommendations for saturated fat, added sugar, fibre and fruit and vegetable intake⁶ and 70% of the UK population adhere to four or fewer of the nine dietary recommendations set out in the UK's dietary guidelines, the Public Health England Eatwell Guide.⁷ HFSS foods sit outside of the recommendations as they are not necessary in a healthy diet and should be consumed in small quantities, if at all.

These foods are often high in calories and contribute to increased risk of obesity.⁸ More than one in four UK adults are obese, which is a leading risk factor for several life-limiting health conditions.^{9,10} The annual cost to the NHS of obesity-related conditions is estimated to reach £9.7 billion by 2050.¹¹ The COVID-19 pandemic brought this issue further into the spotlight as, according to Public Health England, increased BMI is linked to a greater risk of serious complications, hospitalisation and death from the virus.¹²

'A government committed to levelling up health and creating opportunity for individuals and the country has the power to set an ambitious framework for action.'

A whole-government approach to improving health - The Health Foundation¹³

UK food purchase data

Despite these shocking figures, over 70% of sales in 2020 from the 16 largest UK food companies were driven by products which score less than 3.5 stars in the Health Star Rating system (derived from the UK Nutrient Profiling Model used to define HFSS foods).¹⁴ Many food companies still make enormous profits from sales of unhealthy food and drink which are adversely impacting our health:

- The fast-food market in the UK increased to £18.9 billion in 2021.^{15,16} More than half of adults aged 18-24 years and 40% aged 25-44 years eat at fast food restaurants a few times per month or more.¹⁷
- The British Soft Drinks Association reported sales of 58L per capita of “full sugar” soft drinks in 2018 (including carbonated drinks, fruit juices and concentrates) which contributes over 20,000 calories and over 6kg of sugar to the average person's diet in one year.¹⁸
- Between March 2020 and March 2021, 162,900 tonnes of crisps were sold in the UK, equal to approximately 849 billion calories, 4,000 tonnes of saturated fat and 716 tonnes of salt.¹⁹
- In 2018, sales of alcohol in England and Wales were equivalent to 17.5 units per adult per week, and in Scotland even higher at 19 units, well above the maximum weekly recommended alcohol intake of 14 units.²⁰
- The UK biscuit industry was set to reach sales of £3 billion in 2021 with UK consumers buying almost 100g per week of sweet biscuits, cereal bars and chocolate biscuits.^{21,22}
- 20% of sales in convenience stores are HFSS foods.²³

Publicly available data for sales of processed HFSS foods in the retail environment is currently very limited. Mandatory reporting of sales by food group for food providers including retailers, restaurants, caterers, wholesalers, manufacturers and online platforms was a key recommendation in *The Plan*, but the GFS does not specify whether this will form part of the new requirements.²⁴ Creating a “more transparent” food system, by introducing a Food Data Transparency Partnership, was one of the commitments announced in the GFS, though details remain to be provided.²⁵

The food marketing environment

One of the leading causes of obesity and diet-related ill-health is over-consumption of calories and processed foods high in fat and sugar.²⁶ According to the Global Burden of Disease data, dietary risks are the cause of 34% deaths from cardiovascular disease and 18.5% from diabetes.²⁷ However, we cannot blame individuals alone for their behaviour, as our food choices are heavily influenced by the **food environment** surrounding us. According to the European Public Health Alliance, **food environments** are:

“The physical, economic, political and socio-cultural contexts in which people engage with the food system to make their decisions about acquiring, preparing and consuming food.”²⁸

Additionally, the food environment includes the *availability, affordability, convenience, and desirability* of various foods.²⁹

The **food marketing environment** is a powerful part of the food environment. Marketing is defined as the activity of presenting, advertising and selling a company's products or services in the best possible way.³⁰ Therefore, we define the **food marketing environment** as:

“The way that foods are presented to us in our environment in order to make them attractive to us”.

The key role of marketing and branding is to *influence food purchasing and consumption choices*. This includes *advertisements*, which increase the awareness, emotional attachment and desire for unhealthy foods; *price promotions*, which make them the more affordable choice; and *prime product placement*, which increases availability and convenience and reminds customers of their pre-programmed desire at the moment of making food purchases.³¹

The food environment, and marketing in particular, has created a huge appetite for HFSS which sit outside of the Public Health England Eatwell Guide.³² Some of the biggest household names in the UK are food companies with HFSS foods at the centre of their product profile and global marketing campaigns. In comparison with public authorities' and non-government organisations' health promotion campaigns, the budget for food industry marketing campaigns is huge (Table 1). Not all food brands promote unhealthy food but the figures demonstrate the scale of the food industry's financial power.

Clearly it is the big food companies who have the financial power to bring about huge nationwide change. Why not leverage the power of industry to drive positive change towards healthier and more sustainable diets?

Table 1. Comparison of spending on product marketing by food companies vs. health promotion campaigns

Food companies	Public health campaigns
Top 18 food brands in the UK spent £143 million on advertising in 2017	£5.2 million on Public Health England's Change for Life campaign aimed at promoting healthy lifestyle choices
UK and Ireland revenue for takeaway delivery company Just Eat reached £1 billion in 2021 after spending £570 million on global advertising campaigns to raise brand awareness ³³	The 'Eat them to defeat them' campaign led by campaign groups Food Foundation and Veg Power to encourage children to eat more vegetables was supported by £3 million in donations and led to an increase in fresh produce sales of £92 million ³⁴

Traditional marketing and advertising

Food *advertising* is everywhere: TV and radio advertisements, public spaces which are an integral part of our daily lives such as public transport, sports stadiums, billboards, hospitals and supermarkets. *Marketing* includes not just advertisements for specific products, but also the clever weaving of brands known for selling unhealthy foods into the fabric of our culture.

Research into the prevalence of unhealthy food marketing has showed that:

- Nearly half of food-related *TV advertisements* in the UK are for HFSS foods and this increases to 60% between 6pm and 9pm.³⁵
- Half of *bus shelter advertisements* in deprived areas are food-related and over a third for unhealthy food products.³⁶
- The majority of *price promotions* in supermarkets in high-income countries are for unhealthy foods and beverages, which sit

outside of national dietary guidelines. Rather than saving money, these promotions lead to 10-22% increase in spending.³⁷

- Food brands such as McDonalds and Coca Cola, who primarily sell foods which are not aligned with the Eatwell Guide, are the *sponsors for many major sports events*, undermining attempts to promote healthier lifestyles.³⁸

In a study of 1,500 UK adults, 85% saw advertisements for HFSS foods on a weekly basis and those in lower-income families as well as young adults (aged 18-34 years) were most at risk.³⁹ This is concerning as lower income is associated with increased risk of obesity⁴⁰ and young adults in particular have been shown to be susceptible to the impacts of marketing, which then shapes their habits into adult life.⁴¹

Online marketing

The marketing environment has also changed rapidly in recent years with the boom of the digital space. We are now exposed to extensive online

advertising including on websites, social media, email, and video streaming sites. Social media influencer marketing is another way in which individuals, especially children and adolescents, are constantly exposed to food marketing.⁴²

The food industry spent an estimated £743 million on paid online advertising in 2019, which represents 14% of the total online advertising market. Around 60% of this promoted unhealthy products.⁴³ UK adolescents see 189 online food advertisements every week, most of which are for fast food and sugar-sweetened beverages.⁴⁴

Over 90% of influencer videos from several UK based channels aimed at children contained food advertisements and half of these were for unhealthy foods.⁴⁵ This is particularly alarming as unqualified individuals and companies are able to promote unhealthy food via digital content which may fall outside of existing marketing regulations and viewers may not realise that they are being marketed to.⁴⁶

Marketing strategies

Marketing is not just advertising but, according to the Chartered Institute of Marketing, it is:

“The management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably.”

Food companies use a variety of marketing techniques to trigger positive associations between their brand and their customers, including:

- Memorable and emotional marketing campaigns
- Music and visual entertainment

- Celebrity and sports star endorsement
- Cartoon characters aimed at children
- Advertisement in locations associated with fun and happiness.

In contrast, public health campaigns aimed at promoting healthy eating tend to focus on facts and data (e.g., nutritional information, serving sizes) which require more mental processing and don't appeal to our emotional brain.⁴⁷

A recent example is the award-winning McDonalds advertising campaign using the iconic '80s classic

'The multi-billion pound food and drink marketing industry is a highly sophisticated behaviour change machine that strategically nudges target consumers to purchase more.'

song Hungry Eyes to promote their home delivery service. The advert was cleverly designed to connect to the public and according to Little Black Book advertising community, it “brings to life the anticipation, excitement, jealousy, and pleasure that go hand in hand with a McDelivery”.⁴⁸

Another example is Walkers, who in 2019 partnered with '90s girl band the Spice Girls via social media to promote the launch of their latest reformulated product. The campaign was designed to increase awareness and popularity amongst millennial families and to create a connection between the crisp brand and feelings of excitement and connection.⁴⁹

It is clear that the multi-billion pound food and drink marketing industry is a highly sophisticated behaviour change machine that strategically nudges target consumers to purchase more. Marketing agencies hired by food companies are experts in the field of psychology and emotional manipulation. They know exactly how to reach the hearts and minds of consumers and currently this is not always applied with the best interests of the consuming public in mind. Table 2 shows examples of the emotive language used by UK-based food marketing agencies to explain the process of creating effective advertising campaigns.

These agencies represent a variety of food brands promoting both healthy and unhealthy foods. Advertising is not inherently bad but is a powerful tool that can be wielded for or against the health of people and planet.

Companies invest a huge amount of time, effort and money to understand exactly how to connect with potential customers and how to use language, emotion and sensory experience to draw them in. Clearly the major players in the food industry have the financial power to influence our food purchasing behaviours. This is why we believe that marketing should be centre stage when it comes to food policy to improve public health and tackle the planetary crisis we are heading towards.

We need to decide whether we want food marketing to support progress towards a healthier nation and sustainable development, or whether it will continue to prioritise profits over people and planet. If we choose the former, then we need policies that harness the power of food marketing to improve public health.

Table 2. Examples of language used by food marketing agencies

<p>“Are your words working hard enough for you? Everything from your website to your packaging is a member of your sales team. Don’t waste the opportunity to secure another sale. Purchasing decisions are based on emotion. We will write you emotionally engaging copy to inspire, convince and persuade more customers than ever before.”</p> <p>The Food Marketing Experts⁵⁰</p>	<p>“Creating an effective marketing campaign takes more than good ideas. It takes a marketing agency with over 25 years’ experience delivering measurable results.</p> <p>We’re a creative and strategic team that knows how to turn ideas into effective campaigns, solus or multi-channel, always with your brand at the heart, and which speak directly to your audience and align with your specific business goals.”</p> <p>Parker Design⁵¹</p>	<p>“We’re McCann London and we are purveyors of a Truth Well Told. This is where, for over a century, three simple words have led the way: Truth Well Told. We find the most powerful truths that reveal an unmet need or feeling that hasn’t been tapped. We bring them to life and tell them to the world in a way that impacts culture & helps our clients earn a meaningful role in people’s lives.”</p> <p>McCann London⁵²</p>
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Marketing and consumer behaviour

Psychology and behavioural economics research explain why it is so hard to make healthy eating decisions in modern food environments. Despite having the capacity to think rationally, process information and make goal-orientated decisions, humans often make quick decisions based on emotion and intuition in the present moment rather than on long term goals.⁵³

Our food choices are often made in this way, which makes us susceptible to the influence of the food environment and marketing techniques – especially when we are busy, distracted and confused by complicated or conflicting nutrition information.⁵⁴ When the food environment is against us, we have to fight between satisfying our current desires for convenient, tasty food and our long-term desire for good health.

‘The actions of businesses trickle down into our day-to-day lifestyles because businesses so profoundly shape our choice environment: their commercial models, their marketing efforts, their R&D, their supply chains and investment decisions all dictate what options are available, cheap, normal, desirable, and convenient for the consumer.’

Net Zero: Principles for successful behaviour change initiatives (report commissioned by the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) but subsequently withdrawn though still available on the internet)⁵⁵

We know from behavioural science research that we are more likely to purchase and consume food that is visible, attractive, accessible and cheap.⁵⁶ The current food marketing environment with its enticing advertisements and prime placement of HFSS foods ensures that they are constantly visible and accessible as we go about our daily lives.

There is a strong body of evidence demonstrating that unhealthy food marketing increases children’s and adolescents’ preferences for and consumption of these foods.^{57,58,59} Recent research has focused on the effect of digital marketing of alcohol, energy drinks and high-calorie, low-nutrient foods on young people’s purchasing behaviour. The outcome is clear: marketing of these products online leads to young people desiring and consuming more.⁶⁰

Adults are affected too. An American study found that adults watching food-related adverts whilst occupied with a mental task ate 94 more calories and chose 43% more unhealthy foods at the following snack break.⁶¹ This suggests adverts affect our automatic, non-rational behaviours.

A daily snack of 94 calories is equal to 34,000 additional calories per year. As a simplified estimate, consuming this many ‘empty’ and unnecessary calories could result in weight gain of up to 10 pounds over the course of a year!⁶²

The Junk Food Cycle

As stated in *The Plan*, marketing creates a ‘Junk Food Cycle’ whereby the food industry creates an appetite for unhealthy foods and this demand drives further investment from companies.⁶³

'We are going to keep bringing in new flavours that excite a younger generation and attract consumers to the brand while elevating the top flavours and reminding people why Walkers flavours are so irresistible.'

Fernando Kahane - Senior Marketing Director at Walkers Crisps, 2019⁶⁴

Marketing sustains the Junk Food Cycle via its impacts on *social norms, cultural values and social learning*.⁶⁵ For children, the effects of marketing are more direct – they see unhealthy food and want it immediately. Adults have a greater critical thinking capacity but are influenced to buy unhealthy foods when that is considered a social norm.⁶⁶

This is why advertisements which become entrenched as part of the national culture can be so damaging. It is adults who are responsible for food purchases and parents' food choices and modelling influence children's food preferences in early years and potentially into later life.^{67,68}

'It turns out that the environmental effects on behaviour are a lot stronger than most people expect.'

Daniel Kahneman, Nobel Laureate, Economic Sciences⁶⁹

By continuing to allow brands to advertise and promote unhealthy food and drinks, we are allowing these products to remain beloved and socially acceptable aspects of our culture.

Limitations of the current food policy and proposals

The Plan acknowledged that the food industry plays to our appetites and has a financial incentive to continue to invest in developing unhealthy, delicious food products which appeal to its customers. As well as spending millions on research and development, the food industry also has a huge marketing budget designed to promote its products and encourage us to buy and consume more.

The GFS has a greater focus on improving food security and supporting local and sustainable agriculture. There is no real acknowledgment of the impact of unhealthy food marketing on public health or any recommendation for how this should change. We question why neither *The Plan* nor the subsequent government response adequately addressed the issue of unhealthy food marketing.

'Education and willpower are not enough. We cannot escape this vicious circle without rebalancing the financial incentives within the food system.'

The Plan (the Independent Review for the National Food Strategy), 2021

Prior to the publication of *The Plan*, the government had proposed new policies to limit advertising of unhealthy foods as part of its ongoing childhood obesity strategy for England. The regulations proposed included the restriction of paid-for online advertising

and a 9pm watershed for TV and on-demand advertisement of HFSS foods.⁷⁰ These were on top of the previously agreed measures to prohibit promotion of unhealthy food adverts to children and restrict 'prime-placement'.^{71,72}

Unfortunately, the government has since taken a U-turn and delayed its decision to make any progress in this area. There is no mention of HFSS marketing restrictions in the GFS, and regulations set to restrict promotion and prime placement of HFSS foods in retail have also been delayed.⁷³ This is disappointing and shows a lack of commitment to tackling obesity and improving public health.

We argue that we need these regulations and more, including additional measures to prevent companies navigating around the rules, either via shifting their focus to unhealthy products which fall outside of regulation or by exploiting brands' reputation for sales of HFSS foods using non-specific promotions. There is also the question of how strictly these policies would be enforced and whether the financial penalties for breaches of the regulations are adequate to deter non-compliance.

In our opinion it is a huge oversight not to include further restrictions on unhealthy food marketing in UK food policy if, as a nation, we are committed to tackling obesity and other related, preventable public health issues.

Our proposals for alternative policies

If the current policies and recommendations are not adequate, what could be more effective options?

Table 3. Behaviour change model to promote healthier diets (adapted from BEIS model to promote climate-positive behaviours) agencies

Upstream	Mid-stream	Downstream
Incentivise businesses to produce healthier options	Create a food environment that makes healthy eating the default, easy, affordable choice	Public health campaigns promoting healthy eating messages
Align market competition with public health goals	Make healthy eating the social norm	Rally public support for policy change
Lead by example		

The Behavioural Insights Team report *Net Zero: principles for successful behaviour change initiatives* (commissioned by BEIS but subsequently withdrawn) highlights the importance of driving behaviour change via a multi-level approach.⁷⁴ We have adapted their climate-focused model to the goal of improving UK diets (Table 3).

In this Policy Insight, we have focused on the *midstream approaches* needed to complement upstream policy recommendations (such as those set out in *The Plan*) and downstream public health campaigns. This is not about controlling populations or removing free will but rather creating a food environment which makes healthy choices the easy, default and socially acceptable option.

In our opinion, the answer lies in *restricting all advertisement and marketing of unhealthy foods, including alcohol, in all indoor, outdoor and digital public spaces*. It is clear that food and drink marketing is effective and that it is having significant impact on our lives. We need to start recognising that it is either:

- A force to improve the health of people and planet *or*
- A force against the health of people and planet.

Instead of allowing advertising to be a profit-making tool for companies selling empty calories, we can utilise the power of marketing for good by only permitting companies to market and advertise foods which fall within the UK national dietary guidelines, the Eatwell Guide.

Our proposal includes the following four elements to be implemented by the governments of all UK nations:

1. Total ban of media advertising of all unhealthy foods

Although the previously proposed policies to restrict digital marketing of unhealthy foods are justified, we believe they need to go much further. Advertising of HFSS foods should be completely banned from the media and this mandatory regulation should be properly monitored with targets and enforcement for those who do not comply.

This would further reduce HFSS adverts seen by children (estimated 11 less per week) and could reduce

childhood obesity by 4.6%.⁷⁵ This does not account for the reduced exposure of parents to advertising. As parents are the ones who control food purchases, this is likely to have an even greater impact. Economists have estimated that a total ban of advertising in the crisps industry would reduce sales by 15%.⁷⁶

This idea has also been put forward by researchers at the University of Warwick Obesity Network.⁷⁷ According to the Obesity Health Alliance, 74% of the UK public support further regulation of TV and online advertising of unhealthy foods.⁷⁸ It is clear that people want to be supported to make healthy choices rather than constantly fighting against the food environment.

This proposed regulation is not intended to reduce sales for food companies but rather to drive them to invest in making their product profiles healthier and promoting more nutritious foods.

2. Restriction of advertising of unhealthy foods in public spaces

In addition to a ban on TV and online advertisements for HFSS foods, we believe that unhealthy food marketing should also be prohibited in all indoor and outdoor public spaces, including retail and out-of-home dining. Research shows that there is a strong rationale and public support for implementing this type of policy.⁷⁹

An excellent example is the 2019 Greater London Authority ban of HFSS foods advertising on the Transport for London (TfL) network. This was strongly opposed by the food and advertising industries, in particular from larger businesses.⁸⁰ However, a study evaluating the impact of the intervention concluded that the policy was effective in reducing HFSS

consumption. The researchers estimated that there was a relative reduction in energy intake from both HFSS foods (6.7%) and chocolate and confectionary within households in the intervention area.⁸¹

The government in the Netherlands has followed suit, banning advertisements for unhealthy foods aimed at children from the Amsterdam metro line and other municipal sites as part of its Healthy Weight Approach project. The Brazilian Ministry of Health has also adopted this approach to tackling obesity and rising rates of chronic disease by banning all HFSS food advertising on health department buildings.⁸²

The UK and devolved governments should take the lead on this powerful and visionary food policy and pave the way for other countries to do the same.

3. Encourage and support promotion of healthy and sustainable foods

An additional avenue to explore is to level the playing field by enabling producers of healthy foods, who are often small to medium sized businesses without big promotions budgets, to promote their products. For example, by supporting the fresh produce industry by subsidising marketing of local and sustainably grown produce.

An extensive scientific review demonstrated that marketing of healthy food (mainly fruit and vegetables) leads to increased consumption.⁸³ In the USA, it is estimated that promoting fresh produce via media campaigns and government subsidies has the potential to prevent 230,000 deaths from CVD per year.⁸⁴

The British Buywell study investigated the impact of healthy foods price promotion on retail food purchases

in a low-income community. In this randomised controlled study involving over 50,000 participants, sales of healthy foods increased by 1.4-2.8% during the price promotion period.⁸⁵ Nudging techniques such as placing healthy foods in prime locations next to the checkout also increase sales, even when individuals are not aware of the changes to their food environment.⁸⁶

These studies support the idea that increasing marketing and promotion of healthy foods can help enable a shift towards more healthy and sustainable diets.

4. Setting targets and monitoring progress

To bring all of this together, we need a way to monitor progress on the transition towards healthier and sustainable diets. One of *The Plan's* recommendations was to set targets and collect and share data from across the food supply chain. This was translated into the GFS as the Food Data Transparency Partnership. The aim of this data programme is to provide information to the public as well as to incentivise industry to produce healthier and more ethical and sustainable food through healthy competition.

'These targets and regulation should be extended to public relations and communications agencies who work alongside the food industry.'

We believe that retailers and out-of-home suppliers should be responsible for recording data on percentage sales and promotion of healthy vs. unhealthy food and drink, according to the Nutritional Profiling Model and/or the Eatwell Guide. The UK governments should enforce mandatory reporting of this data which could be phased in over a two-to-five-year period, depending on the size of the business.

These targets and regulation should be extended to public relations and communications agencies who work alongside the food industry. They too have a role to play and setting and reaching targets, in this case for the proportion of support they give to healthy vs. unhealthy food promotion via their services. This will be a necessary part of the shift in the food marketing environment. Again, this could be phased in over a period of several years.

We believe that these difficult but necessary actions to ban advertising of unhealthy food, promote advertising of healthy food and monitor progress by the industries involved are needed if we want to see real change and as a nation lead on tackling the public health challenges of today.

Conclusions

In this Policy Insight, we have put forward the evidence that marketing of unhealthy food drives consumption. We know from the huge amount of scientific evidence that we need to shift to more healthy and sustainable diets to protect the health of both people and planet. The current food marketing environment absolutely does not support our progress towards this goal. It is clear that advertising of HFSS in all forms leads to us desiring, purchasing and then

eating these foods. Food companies spend a significant sum of money on marketing to keep us coming back for more.

If we truly want to improve public health and develop sustainably as a nation, we have to tackle the food marketing environment. We need UK-wide food policies which actually support individuals to make healthier food choices, rather than prioritising food industry profits over public health. The suggestions set out in this paper could form the starting point for much-needed stringent rules on unhealthy food marketing.

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Amy Culliford started her career as a process engineer in the food industry, then spent three years working as a regulatory officer at the Environment Agency, where she audited industrial sites to ensure compliance with environmental legislation, including many UK-based food manufacturers. She went on to study public health nutrition, specializing in environmentally

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