

Landworkers' Alliance – Response to the Square Meal Report



Executive Summary

The Landworkers' Alliance believe the “Square Meal Report” is a welcome stimulus to a much needed national discussion about food, farming, health and the environment. We represent small-scale agroecological farmers and growers, who could deliver many of the objectives identified in the Square Meal Report. Such farmers face significant barriers including access to land and affordable accommodation, aggressive competition on price from supermarkets and a policy environment that appears to encourage unsustainable industrial agriculture and discourage small-scale sustainable agriculture.

The four themes - Health, Food, Farming and the Environment - feed directly into the concept of Food Sovereignty, and we believe the biggest omission in the Square Meal Report is the lack of a reference to this global movement to democratise the food system. As members of Via Campesina, an organisation representing 200 million small scale farmers worldwide, we believe this report is an opportunity to “step up” the pressure on the UK Government to join other countries in embracing the six principles of Food Sovereignty. The Landworkers' Alliance is calling for a national food policy which overcomes the current contradictions between agricultural, environment, health and social policies. We see potential for collaboration between our organisations in creating a stronger voice to call for such a policy which unifies the four themes you identify.

The Square Meal Report represents a good overview of the main problems of the food system, but lacks detail. In this response we outline the contribution that our members could make, as well as barriers which prevent a scaling up of the potentially positive impact. Finally we outline the policy changes that would overcome these barriers, including re-orientating the subsidy system to reward sustainable production of food rather than land-ownership, improving access to land and affordable accommodation for farm workers and rebuilding the infrastructure necessary for an efficient, localised food system, both on and off farms. We would welcome an ongoing dialogue with the authors of the Square Meal Report and other like-minded agricultural, environmental and social organisations about how we can work together to overcome the barriers that prevent a fair and sustainable food system becoming a reality.

Introduction

We, the Landworkers' Alliance, welcome the Square Meal Report, which represents the opening of a much needed national debate connecting the issues relating to food, farming, health and the environment. We hope this marks the start of a dialogue that will lead to the creation of a National Food Policy for the United Kingdom, and aim to outline in this paper our response to the Square Meal Report.

About Landworkers' Alliance

The Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) is a producer led organisation representing small and medium scale farmers, growers, woodland workers and land-based crafts workers, all of whom earn at least a part of their livelihood from the sustainable production of food, fuel, fibre and flowers (see www.landworkersalliance.org.uk). Together we are working to overcome the barriers that prevent ecological land workers from delivering benefits to the environment, society and the economy, at a scale which would make a real difference. We are members of Via Campesina, an organisation representing over 200 million small-scale, agroecological farmers worldwide. As part of Via Campesina, we are working towards a national and global food system that embraces the principles of Food Sovereignty. By food sovereignty, we mean, 'people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems' (Via Campesina, 1996).

In our policy booklet, "Feeding the Future" (<http://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Feeding-the-Future-Landworkers-Alliance-A4-low-res.pdf>), we have outlined our vision for the food system we would like to emerge and the key policy changes necessary to start implementing that vision. Our four primary policy requests are:

- 1) **A National Food Policy**, based on food sovereignty principles.
- 2) **Level the playing field** - Cap payments to individual farms at £150,000. Direct subsidies towards those farmers who are delivering social and environmental goods as well as producing food, to bring prices for "eco-products" in line with conventional food prices.
- 3) **Support for new entrants and core production** with money saved by capping payments to larger farms. Greater support for new businesses would address the issue of ageing farmers.
- 4) **Land Access** - Implement measure to implement land concentration, improve access to affordable land and tied accommodation and halt the sell-off of County Council Farms.

Our first policy request, the national food policy, will require the building of consensus between the many organisations working on food, farming and environmental issues, and we see the Square Meal Report as a potential first step in building that consensus. We are therefore contributing our responses to the report, in the "four strand format" that you have started, and hope that this dialogue can be ongoing and grow as more organisations add their voices to the discussion.

We speak as a body representing about 400 small-scale ecological farmers, growers and woodland workers, and have formal allegiances with other organisations, such as the Organic Growers' Alliance, the Community Supported Agriculture Network and Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (Hosts). We believe, therefore, that we are well-placed to give the perspective of some of the "more and more people who are producing locally distinctive and delicious food". For such food producers, life is tough, with many continuing to operate through sheer willpower, due to the numerous difficulties faced, from lack of affordable land and accommodation and earning well below a "living-wage", to inappropriate regulation, overzealous application of planning policy and an inadequate rural support infrastructure (local abattoirs, processing facilities). We hope in this paper, to outline some of the issues that will need to be addressed, to bring the vision of the Square Meal Report, into reality.

Overall Assessment of “The Square Meal Report”

This is a comprehensive report, covering many of the key problems affecting today's food and farming system. We agree with many of the analyses and solutions, and believe it makes a good starting point for a national discussion about the future direction of agriculture and food provision. While many precise details are provided to illustrate points, the solutions sections are inevitably short on detail. However, such detail will be filled in by those that respond to the report, as the debate develops.

We would like to see a mention of the concept of “food sovereignty” in the report. The whole report is essentially about achieving “food sovereignty”, and it would be helpful to connect it to a movement which is growing globally as well as in Europe and the United Kingdom. Food Sovereignty is often associated with small farms using agroecological production methods, but is also used by civil society and NGOs to lobby for an alternative food system. It is based on six principles, namely it:

1. Focuses on food for people
2. Values food providers
3. Localises food systems
4. Puts control locally
5. Builds knowledge and skills
6. Works with nature.

This set of principles may inform decision-making in food production and sourcing, from personal and local scales, to national and international policy. They have inspired organisations, communities, NGOs, and even governments around the globe.

The Square Meal Report is currently very UK focussed, and we understand that it is probably beyond the scope of the initiative to take on the entire global food system. However, we believe it would be helpful to at least acknowledge the interconnectedness of global agricultural issues. For example, much of the cheap food that we enjoy in the UK is produced overseas on land that could be used to feed people in those countries. We welcome the mention of animal feed being produced overseas, and would encourage the development of the theme of substituting soya feed with domestically produced concentrates, or better still a greater emphasis on grass and legume fed beef and dairy, and a move to reinstate pigs and poultry being fed more waste produce. LWA are committed to standing in solidarity with small-scale land workers all over the world. We would like to influence UK agricultural and food policy to be beneficial not only to UK farmers and consumers, but to have a positive impact on people in places that trade with the UK.

Structure of this response paper

The Square Meal Report is arranged into four strands: Health, Food, Farming and Nature. Since we agree with most of the broad statements of the report, and our main suggestion is that it needs to be more specific, we will respond by outlining how small and medium scale farmers and growers can contribute to each of the four themes. This is followed in each section by an outline of the main barriers that prevent us from scaling up our efforts.

There are, however, several themes of benefits offered by small farmers and barriers that prevent an increase in the number of small, agroecological farms, that cut across the four topics. To avoid repetition, our suggestions for actions and policy requests are therefore themed at the end.

Health

The Square Meal Report says....

We can improve the nation's health and well-being by:

- Tackling health inequalities
- Promoting sustainable, healthier diets
- Ensuring food and water safety
- Making natural connections

How small-scale farmers and growers can contribute

- Local food means fresher food - Small-scale producers tend to sell their produce locally, either direct to the end consumer, or to independent retailers, pubs and restaurants. Hence, produce is fresher than that with a longer supply chain, often having been picked on the day or the day before delivery. Hence, vegetables have a higher nutritional value than those that have been stored and transported long distances.
- No pesticide residues on food or nitrates in water – Most of our members tend to use organic or biodynamic production methods, even if they are not legally certified as such. This means that their produce is grown in soil fertilised with compost, animal manures or leguminous green manures, reducing the risk of nitrate pollution of water courses. No artificial fertilisers or pesticides are permitted, and pests and diseases are kept at bay through prevention (by ensuring a healthy, fertile soil), encouragement of natural predators, biological controls and careful hygiene. Veterinary medicines, such as antibiotics are used sparingly, to ensure animal welfare, and not prophylactically. Hence, the produce from these farms is free from pesticide and antibiotic residues.
- Less meat, more fruit, vegetables and cereals - Sustainable production systems coincide with the changes in proportions of food types recommended for a healthier diet, with less meat and more fruit and vegetables. “Can Britain Feed Itself” (Fairlie, S. “The Land Magazine”, Issue 4, Winter 2007-08) shows how a population of 70.8 million (that projected for the UK in 2030) could be fed using a permaculture approach, if people were to eat less meat and dairy produce, and more fruit, vegetables and grains. In “Zero Carbon Britain” it was also shown that a move from a highly meat based diet to one in which meat is eaten once or twice per week, and dairy produce is reduced, would result in only 17% (as opposed to 42% at present) of our food needing to be imported (CAT 2013, p 90-94). Less agricultural land would be required to provide this healthier diet, with the same amount of cropland (4.6 million hectares) being used as today. Moreover, as we would not be importing animal products or animal feed, land would be freed up in other countries for their own food production, or for wildlife. Such mixed agroecological farming is just the type of land-use that small-scale farmers and growers are well suited for, with a four-fold increase in fruit and vegetable production (p93).
- Healthy, fulfilling employment – More small-scale farmers would result in more jobs in the countryside, if workers were able to earn a living wage from land management and the sustainable production of food. Work on the land, whether growing organic vegetables, raising grass-fed livestock or caring for woodlands and hedgerows, can give a profound sense of satisfaction and well-being. Land-work could potentially lead to improved fitness, mental health and a better diet. People become motivated to eat a more seasonal and animal

welfare orientated diet when they understand the production processes involved in different farming systems.

- Educational Connections – Small farms and market gardens are safe places for the public to visit, and often encourage customers or local schools to come and see how the food is produced. Some of our members run Community Supported Agriculture schemes, and the LWA has close connections with the CSA Network. Community Supported Agriculture builds an even closer connection between farmers and consumers, by asking consumers to invest in a “share” of the harvest, at the beginning of the growing season and sometimes requiring members to contribute to the work of growing crops or feeding animals. Hence a stronger connection is built between people and their food. Many CSAs, by allowing members to “pay” for their share through contributing to the work of the CSA, make fresh, organic food accessible to people on low incomes.

Barriers that prevent us scaling up

- Low price of food and high price of land – The imbalance between the livelihood it’s possible to earn from farming and the cost of farms and agricultural land creates an enormous barrier to new entrants. The current area payment subsidy system rewards land-ownership, rather than good farming, and provides an incentive for farmland to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.
- Inappropriate regulations – Health and safety regulations on the rearing, home slaughter and butchery of poultry and other animals limit small-scale, welfare friendly production and sale of pigs and poultry. Clearly it is necessary for some regulation to ensure adequate hygiene standards. However, it often seems that such regulations are developed with industrial agriculture in mind, making it hard for small scale farmers to comply even though they may be producing food that is of a higher specification in terms of animal welfare, freedom from pesticides and antibiotics, and superior freshness, than that produced by industrial systems. Meanwhile, the routine prophylactic use of antibiotics in factory farmed meat leads to antibiotic resistance and the availability of cheap alternatives which undercut meat raised in less intensive conditions.



Food

The Square Meal Report says....

We can move towards better quality, fairer and “greener” food for all, by:

- Redefining food security
- Creating good jobs
- Investing in the future
- Ensuring transparency, traceability and fairness in the food chain

How small-scale farmers and growers can contribute:

- Community Growing Schemes – These now offer opportunities for people on low incomes to not only access affordable fresh fruit and vegetables, but to gain the skills to grow them and cook them. Food poverty could be eradicated if land was made available, and start-up support was offered to train more people to start urban food production and community supported agriculture projects close to centres of population.
- Strengthening resilience - Small-scale and organic agriculture is less dependent on cheap fossil fuels than large scale agriculture, which relies on nitrate fertilisers and large machinery. By cultivating smaller areas, we are in a better position to integrate oil powered machinery with hand tools. Such intensive cultivation sometimes results in higher yields per unit area. We need to work towards greater self-sufficiency, as a nation, so that we can reduce our reliance on imports of foods that can be produced in our climate, and reduce:
 - Transport costs and carbon emissions associated with long distance food transport, to minimise climate change and prepare us for a time when fossil fuels are less abundant.
 - Our reliance on “ghost acres”, the land in other countries which should be available to their own populations for food production, but is currently used for growing export crops for UK markets.

Given access to land and affordable housing, small-scale agroecological growers and farmers are in a strong position to increase domestic production of vegetables, fruit, grass-fed meat, pigs and poultry and dairy using less fossil fuels.

- Affordable Eco-Food – We would like ecologically produced and local food to be an affordable option for all, rather than a niche luxury. In theory direct marketing should lead to cheaper food, due to fewer middle men being involved, and subsidies should encourage ways of farming that deliver public goods, such as clean water and reduced emission of greenhouse gases. However, rather than rewarding farming systems that build soil organic matter and avoid pesticide use, negative externalities such as soil erosion, flooding and greenhouse gas emissions are perpetuated by the current agricultural subsidy system that rewards farm size. While greening measures are in place to address some of the negative externalities, only 30% of Basic Farm Payments stand to be forfeit if greening measures are not met. We would advocate campaigning for a subsidy system which puts the delivery of public goods such as healthy food, environmental protection and rural employment at the centre of the subsidy system, rather than as a “bolt on extra”. Subsidies should be made 100% conditional upon safeguarding soil quality, biodiversity, water quality, rural skills and

reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Only this way will all farms be given the incentive to internalise the costs of production, such as environmental degradation and the disintegration of rural society.

- Creating Good Jobs - We estimate that if all UK farming was based on agroecology principles the number of people employed in farming and associated industries would increase dramatically. Hamer (2012, p27) estimates that a total of 158,000 new full time jobs could be created, almost doubling the number currently employed in agriculture. However, we believe this to be a conservative estimate, since it is based on DEFRA's Standard Labour Requirement (SLR), which considers one full-time person to be sufficient to manage 13hectares of organic vegetables and fruit. In our experience, organic horticulture requires a significantly higher labour input (one full time person to 1-5ha vegetables and fruit), meaning that a national shift to low-input, ecological farming would result in a significantly higher labour requirement. Agroecological farming and horticulture are highly skilled, knowledge intensive occupations, resulting in deep satisfaction for those involved.
- Investing in the Future – With an ageing population of farmers it is vital that young people are encouraged into agriculture and horticulture to ensure a future food production system in the UK. The average age of farmers in the UK is 59, and only 14% of farm holders are under the age of 44 (DEFRA 2013, p8). The Landworkers' Alliance has many younger members, who are committed to earning their livelihoods from the land, and willing to endure the financial hardship and insecurity often involved in farming. As stated above, we believe that if there was a nationwide shift to small-scale mixed farming, the number of jobs available in agriculture would at least double. While many young people are willing to undergo financial hardship to work in agriculture, this is not sustainable in the long term. To attract more people into agriculture and horticulture, they need to be assured that they can earn a living wage, have access to land and affordable accommodation within reasonable distance from their work.

Barriers that prevent us scaling up

- Cost of Land – Over the last fifteen years agricultural land prices have quadrupled, as the single farm payment has rewarded land ownership, low interest rates and inheritance tax loopholes turned land into a desirable investment opportunity, and competition with other land uses such as keeping leisure horses or golf-courses, has priced farmers and growers out of the market. The capital outlay of buying a farm which has a house and buildings has long been beyond the scope of many start-up farmers. However even buying a bare land holding is often prohibitively expensive and outstrips the income that can be generated from farming that land.
- Competition from supermarkets – Shoppers can buy produce from all over the world, out of season and sold at knock down prices. Supermarkets have the power to offer long opening hours and to discount “loss leader” products, undercutting producers who must make a margin above the cost of production on a limited range of products. The convenience and low prices are irresistible to many shoppers, whose busy lives are leading to a decline in time both to shop and to prepare food.
- Low Pay – Many who currently work in agroecology are motivated by principles, rather than money. However, the fact that it is very difficult to earn a living wage from food production acts as a barrier to the recruitment of more young people into agriculture and horticulture. The low prices gained from selling food, combined with a policy environment

that favours industrial over agroecological farming, challenge the adequate remuneration of food producers addressing the objectives in the Square Meal Report.

- Lack of infrastructure – You are correct to identify the erosion of infrastructure as an impediment to small-scale, sustainable food production (p22 SMR). Not only have abattoirs been closed down, but for those who want to add value to their produce, environmental health legislation calls for expensive facilities, such as juicing rooms and dairies with walls and floor that can be easily washed, chiller equipment and stainless steel work surfaces. For small farmers, who only have small quantities to process, having access to communal processing facilities that met environmental health requirements would enable them to add value and increase the range of products they could offer.



Farming

The Square Meal Report says...

We can build a new future for British farming, food and the countryside by:

- Opening up the debate
- Reconnecting people with where food comes from
- Fully embedding long-termism and environmental sustainability
- Stop focusing on ‘production efficiency’ as the metric of success

How the Landworkers' Alliance can contribute:

- Opening up the debate - We welcome this, and are already engaged in a programme to publicise the contradictions in the way subsidies are currently distributed (see “Feeding the Future” our campaign brochure).
- Reconnecting the public with where food comes from - Many of our members already do this. We could provide examples and case-studies of ways to achieve this.

- Food production, not commodity production - We agree that farming is about so much more than just producing food, but it is important not to underplay the importance of producing adequate quantities of the right kinds of food on our farmland. We need a farming system that simultaneously produces sufficient food for the UK population, protects soil fertility and structure, sequesters carbon, and provides wildlife habitats and cultural nourishment through beautiful landscape. This is entirely possible, if the political will exists to ensure fair distribution of land and subsidies. At present, the Government's focus is on the production of commodities, such as wheat, oil seed rape, sugar beet and milk, rather than farming being about producing food that provides a balanced diet for local communities, towns and cities. About two thirds of Britain's orchards have been lost since 1960 (Common Ground, 2015), and we now import 90% of our fruit, while we are only 56% self-sufficient in vegetables (DEFRA 2013). In agricultural policy more emphasis should be placed on encouraging farmers and growers to produce the food that UK consumers want to eat, rather than commodities for an international market. Agricultural production policy should be made consistent with health policy, so that as a nation we are in a position to eat more domestically grown fruit and vegetables, alongside a balanced diet of grains, dairy produce and meat.
- The “Production Efficiency Debate” - One missing element in your analysis here is that production efficiency is today taken to mean labour efficiency, rather than “land efficiency” (ie, productivity per unit area). We believe that increasing access to land is key to the success of sustainable farming. Hence, more people would have the chance to work on smaller farms, and develop more labour and skill intensive systems that combine food production with environmental protection and animal welfare. Since the 1960's, research has found that in Third World countries there is an inverse relationship between farm size and productivity. Today, many truly sustainable agroecological systems in South and Central America are capable of producing extremely high yields whilst also delivering environmental and social benefits. The food production objective of farming should not be sacrificed to its other functions.

Barriers that prevent us scaling up

- Cost of farms, land and rural accommodation – Alongside the cost of farms and farmland, discussed previously, rural accommodation is often too expensive for those on an agricultural income. Traditionally this problem has been addressed by the provision of tied accommodation. However the stock of tied accommodation has been eroded as it is too easy for such ties to be lifted, to increase the value of the house. The result is that few affordable accommodation options are available for rural workers, and many have to “reverse commute” from towns where accommodation is cheaper.
- Application of planning policy for agricultural workers' dwellings - Due to fear of speculation on agricultural land by developers, local authority planning officers are zealous in turning down planning applications from genuine agricultural workers, who are often new entrants trying to find an affordable route into farming. Lack of understanding of the multiple requirements of farmers and growers to live at their place of work, to undertake a range of jobs throughout a very long day, means that their planning applications are often refused. Furthermore, planning officers rarely believe that a livelihood can be generated from a small farm, due to the fact that many large farms are struggling financially. In fact, farms and market gardens, which are direct marketing their produce can produce a perfectly adequate livelihood from a small acreage.

- Distribution of CAP subsidies - Your analysis of the unfair distribution of subsidies, which fail to deliver the public goods they are meant to encourage, is very accurate. We represent small and medium scale ecological farmers and growers, who build soil fertility, prioritise animal welfare, restore and maintain habitats and provide satisfying rural employment, as well as producing high quality food. Yet many are ineligible for Basic Farm Payment because their farms are under 5ha. Even those which are over 5ha struggle to earn a reasonable income from farming, as payments are distributed according to land area rather than public goods delivered. As you state, traditional mixed farms now have to compete with large scale, specialised farms, and it is impossible for mixed farms which are “internalising” the costs externalised by more specialised farms to compete on price. Hence mixed farms, organic market gardens and other forms of sustainable agriculture are forced to sell their produce as more expensive “niche” types of food, to an inevitably limited market. **As land workers dedicated to a more equal society, we want our sustainably produced food, fuel and fibres to be affordable to everyone, not just a wealthy or well-educated elite.** However, without a radical change in the way subsidies are distributed, the system will continue to favour large scale land-owners and industrial agriculture.



Nature

The Square Meal Report says...

We can protect the environment by:

- Building a strong and connected ecological network
- Protecting and enhancing soil
- Investing in research about the environment and how it is doing
- Effective rural and urban planning

How small-scale farmers and growers can contribute

- Land sharing, not land sparing – We advocate an approach of integrating nature with food production, rather than intensifying production on some land, so that more land can be left as nature reserves. We believe there is sufficient land to have both nature reserves and sustainable farming which is integrated with nature conservation. The UK landscape and its ecosystems have been moulded by traditional farming practices, such as winter fallows, hedgerow management, conservation grazing and hay-making regimes. Such practices are often followed by small and medium scale family farms, whose emphasis is on grass fed, rather than grain fed livestock, organic management (avoiding the use of herbicides and pesticides), and maintenance of landscape features such as hedgerows, field margins and pockets of woodland.
- Wilderness areas - The permaculture “zoning model” recommends that when designing a production system at whatever scale, “Zone 5” (the outermost concentric ring in the design) is designated as a wildlife area. Even if this doesn't fall into the theoretical concentric ring model, this concept ensures that areas are set aside for conservation on every farm, as well as integrating wildlife with production.
- Soil Care – In agroecology, soil care is at the heart of the production system. Soil fertility is maintained and enhanced through the use of composts, animal wastes and green manures, while the use of smaller machinery (or no machinery) reduces compaction. Most of our members use organic or biodynamic methods, and many practice “no-dig” or “minimum tillage”, with permanent beds and cover crops to prevent nitrate leaching and soil erosion.
- Addressing Climate Change – Climate change is a significant threat to our wildlife. Organic farmers can contribute to significant carbon sequestration, through their emphasis on building soil fertility with organic matter. By using green manures, composted animal manure, biochar composts, and minimal/no till methods, soil carbon is stored in the soil. Furthermore, non-organic farming contributes the greenhouse gas nitrogen dioxide, through its reliance on nitrate fertilisers, the manufacture of which also requires large amounts of energy and the use of which results in emissions of nitrous oxide, another potent greenhouse gas. A dramatic increase in the area under organic management and more detailed, small-scale husbandry would increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (see Tolhurst Organic Produce Case Study below).

Tolhurst Organic Produce – A “Carbon Positive” Market Garden

At Tolhurst Organics, which produces vegetables for 150 families on 7 hectares in Berkshire, 21 tonnes of CO² equivalent (a measure of all greenhouse gases expressed as the equivalent in CO²) per year are sequestered, while only 16.6 tonnes are emitted. This means the whole farm is ‘carbon positive’ by over 4t CO²e per year. The sequestration is achieved mainly (49%) through extensive use of green manures and a tillage policy of shallow and timely cultivations, but also due to the presence of mature hedgerows between fields (17%), a small woodland in a damp corner of one field, and a total of 1ha of field margins and beetle banks around the productive areas. (Source – Farm Carbon Cutting Toolkit, Carbon Calculator Case Study).

- Mixed small-holdings contribute to “Zero Carbon Britain” - In the scenario set out by the Centre for Alternative Technology's “Zero Carbon Britain” report, which involves a shift from an animal based agricultural system to one with increased production of cereals, fruits, vegetables and nuts, agricultural emissions from food production (on the farm) are reduced to 17 MtCO₂e per year – a 73% reduction (Centre for Alternative Technology 2013, p92), while the amount of land needed for food production is reduced from about 78% of total UK land to about a third, freeing up space -all grassland – for other uses (p83). Such changes will involve a radical shift in agricultural management, by both large and small farmers, as well as a cultural shift in eating habits.
- Seed and Farm Animal Biodiversity – Small-scale farmers and growers are more likely than industrial farmers, to use open pollinated and heritage crop varieties and rare breed farm animals, which are often better suited to their production systems. Such choices help ensure the conservation of diverse genetic material in agricultural systems. Furthermore, the Landworkers' Alliance, in association with The Real Seed Catalogue (<http://www.realseeds.co.uk/>) and the Seed Co-operative (www.seedcooperative.org.uk) is committed to promoting the saving of seeds by regional networks of growers, to develop seeds that are more appropriate to the UK climate, and its specific regions.

Barriers that prevent us scaling up

- Seed Legislation – Sustainable farmers, growers and domestic gardeners are frequently having to campaign to protect their rights to save seeds. This not only distracts them from the all consuming work of growing their crops, but threatens business viability as the range of seed suitable for small-scale cultivation is narrowed.
- Lack of Secure Land Tenure – Small-scale, agroecological farmers and growers tend towards good soil husbandry, planting landscape features such as hedges, orchards and woodlands and safeguarding water sources as a matter of principle. However, where such measures require significant capital investment, there is a much greater incentive to invest if land/the farm is owned outright or rented on a long term tenancy. Affordable opportunities for such land security are increasingly rare, and often small start-up businesses are on ten year farm business tenancies at best, and frequently have only an informal agreement with the land-owner. Measures to increase long-term access to affordable farms, market gardens and smallholdings would greatly increase the incentive for farmers and growers to invest in soil health, water management and beneficial conservation projects.

Changes needed to strengthen the “Rural Workforce” and bring about a “Square Meal Revolution”

The benefits outlined above will not come into being at a significant scale until a number of changes have been made to balance the framework within which land-workers operate. At present the agricultural subsidy system, regulations, investment in research and development and distribution of land and housing all favour large scale, industrial agriculture. While some of these farms may be making efforts to reduce their environmental impact, many feel trapped in an economic system that forces them to view their produce as a commodity rather than a source of nourishment. Political will is needed to bring about radical changes which will enable the kind of diverse rural economy, composed of small and medium scale businesses that would be best placed to deliver the kind of environmental, health, economic and social changes outlined in the Square Meal Report.

Several themes arose repeatedly as barriers to the scaling up of the kind of agroecological farming that we believe would simultaneously address many of the issues raised in the Square Meal Report. These include the difficulties of earning a living wage from farming, loss of infrastructure and access to resources such as seed diversity, and the lack of access to land and affordable housing. To conclude our response, we list a number of ideas, suggestions for policy change and actions that we believe would enable more sustainable food businesses to start up and succeed. These are listed under the four main headings of our policy requests in “Feeding the Future”.

A National Food Policy based on Food Sovereignty Principles

- Create consistency between health, environment and agricultural policies – We urgently need a national food policy to ensure an integrated approach to farming, health, environment, food safety and marketing. Current health, environment and agricultural policies contradict each other. For example, the “Five a Day” campaign encourages the consumption of fruit and vegetables, yet due to lack of agricultural policy support, these are the most imported food categories and therefore offer greatest potential for import substitution. Market gardening lends itself to small scale production and many positive outcomes could be achieved by a targeted programme of support for sustainable, small and medium scale market gardening. At the same time £20 million per year is used to subsidise British sugar, while excessive sugar consumption is contributing to obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Many social, environmental and economic problems could be solved simultaneously, giving us better food, better preventative health care and a better environment, were the Government encouraged to create consistency between policies.
- Launch a Landscape Debate - One aspect of the food and farming debate which needs airing is how we can balance where and how we produce the food we like to eat, and the way we as a nation would like our landscape to look. At present we import about 90% of our fruit and 45% of our vegetables (DEFRA 2013, p8), meaning that the visual and environmental impact of their production is “out of sight and mind”. Other countries, such as Spain and Kenya, are effectively subsidising UK consumption habits with their land and water resources. We have the climate and sufficient land to produce a higher proportion of many of the fruits and vegetables we like to eat, while health policy is encouraging us to eat more fruit and vegetables and less meat and dairy produce. An increase in UK horticultural production would lead to certain landscape changes, including more polytunnels or glasshouses, and more complex cropping patterns within fields. Such changes are often not welcomed by people living in neighbouring properties, who value a “traditional pastoral

landscape”, despite the fact that such people usually eat fruit and vegetables. The fact that they cannot see how their food is being grown, means they rarely think about the decimation of landscapes in southern Spain by hundreds of acres of polytunnels, or the scarce water resources that horticulture requires in such places. As growers and aspiring growers, members of the Landworkers' Alliance would welcome a public debate that encourages people to think more broadly about the connections between the food they eat, where it is produced, and its landscape impact. A national engagement in land-use policy could result in some creative and beautiful solutions to food production, housing and resource management problems.

- Protect right to save and trade seed, encourage regional seed saving networks – With climate change causing ever more challenging growing conditions, we need to conserve the diversity of seed available to us, and develop new varieties which suit different regions, climatic conditions and the tastes of consumers. The Square Meal Report does not currently address the issue of seed conservation, and this feels like a large omission.
- Subsidies 100% dependent on Greening Measures - We urge you to push for a system in which subsidies are 100% dependent on providing public goods, such as soil protection, carbon sequestration and habitat conservation. We do not see any justification for large scale, so called “efficient”, agribusinesses receiving subsidies. If they are so efficient due to economies of scale, why do they need subsidies? It seems that the subsidy system is currently propping up an outdated system of food production, which is highly dependent on fossil fuels and limited mineral reserves such as phosphate, is depleting our soils, significantly contributing to climate change and flood risk, and is turning valuable resources, such as animal manure into polluting bi-products. We believe that subsidies may in fact be obscuring the economic truth about industrial agriculture, which is that the costs of production already exceed the income from sales of food and other produce. This should be investigated. For too long sustainable alternatives have been cast as being “uneconomically viable”, but we would question whether this is in fact the case. Subsidies should be used as a tool to correct market failures, such as externalities not being accounted for in the sales of agricultural produce, rather than to obscure the fact that rising resource costs are already reducing the economic viability industrial agriculture in many cases. Research should be commissioned to investigate this issue.

Level the Playing Field

- Cap Basic Farm Payments to individual land-owners at 150,000euros (£120,00) per farm – The current EU subsidy regime rewards land-ownership, and encourages concentration of farmland. Those with very large farms are able to purchase more land with their subsidies, thereby gaining access to more subsidies, with the effect that some parishes are entirely owned by one or two farmers. While the UK Government cannot at this stage change the whole Common Agricultural Policy, it does have the power to make the distribution of subsidies fairer. For example, in France payments per ha are reduced after the first 50 ha. If direct payments were capped at £120,000 per farm, we calculate that over £4million would be saved. These funds could be diverted into supporting new entrants and promoting the uptake of more sustainable farming techniques (See “Feeding the Future, page 7).
- Support active small farms - Reinstate payments for holdings of 5ha and less, where farmers/growers are earning their living from agriculture/horticulture, and opt into the EU's

Small Farmer Scheme.

- Make public procurement contracts accessible to small and medium-scale farms in the locality - Public procurement contracts are often inaccessible to small and medium scale farms due to the large quantities of food being required. Yet local farms and market gardens, if organised co-operatively, would be well placed to provide fresh, high quality and good value meat, milk, vegetables and grains to schools, hospitals, councils and prisons. Such contracts would open up new markets and business opportunities for such farms, boosting local employment, cutting food miles and improving the health of those who consume food in these institutions.
- Retail Planning - Stem the power of the supermarkets through the planning system, by recognising detrimental effect that large scale retailers have both on independent retailers and local, small scale producers. Create planning policies that give priority to local food infrastructure and retailing, and encourage consumers to support local farmers.

Opportunities for New Entrants and support for Core Production

- Better careers advice - The future of farming in the UK depends on young people being motivated to learn the skills of land management and food production, and then to have the opportunities to put their skills into action by running farming and horticulture businesses. These should be highlighted as exciting and challenging employment opportunities for all school children, not just those who are academically less able. They should be given accurate careers advice about the many opportunities available for sustainable food production, processing, land-management and conservation, and encouraged to gain work experience on farms and market gardens.
- Training courses and Apprenticeships – Training in organic agriculture, horticulture and sustainable wood-land management, comprising both practical and theory elements, should be funded, and combined with a programme of apprenticeships, such as the Future Growers' programme offered by the Soil Association.
- Halt sell off of County Farms - The sell-off of County Council farms should be halted forthwith, and Councils should be required to establish a new system of County farms and smallholdings of a variety of sizes, with tied accommodation, available to rent.
- Ecological Land Initiatives - To meet our future food needs there needs to be a vast scaling up of projects which lease land to people on condition it is managed according to a strict environmental protocol. The French model, 'Terre de Liens', is a civil society organisation created in 2003 to address the problems faced by small and peasant farmers in securing agricultural land. Through two financial tools: a solidarity investment company; and an Endowment Trust which collects investment or donations in cash or kind, 'Terre de Liens' has secured 71 farm estates, amounting to 1900 hectares, where 220 adults live and/or work. 'Terre de liens' land is let to farmers who undertake to farm organically or biodynamically or who are peasant farmers committed to respecting the environment. This has been made possible by the support of 1200 members, about 5000 (mostly individual) shareholders bringing over €15 million, local inhabitants and local authorities (See "Future Farmers in the Spotlight" website reference below). Some initiatives are already in action in the UK, such as the Ecological Land Co-operative (www.ecologicaland.coop); the Biodynamic Land Trust and the Kindling Trust in Manchester. However, due to institutional barriers and lack

of investment, these are both operating on a very small scale. To achieve the impact of Terre de Liens' in France, organisations like the Ecological Land Co-operative and the Kindling Trust need a policy environment which is more supportive of small-scale, ecological farming.

Ecological Land Co-operative: The long road to affordable smallholdings

The Ecological Land Co-operative (ELC) started in 2007, with a vision “to make land available for sustainable use. Where smallholdings are priced out of reach of a modest income, we will offer affordable leases and keep the land forever accessible”. “Investor members” provide the capital to buy land which is divided into affordable, low impact smallholdings, which are leased long-term to new entrants. ECL provide basic infrastructure, including a barn, a solar array and a water treatment system and secure temporary residential planning permission, while the lessees commit to farming sustainably, living off-grid and earning a full-time living from the land.

The first land was purchased in 2009, and ELC applied for planning permission for three low impact smallholdings. The local planning authority were sceptical about whether holdings of 7-9 acres could be economically viable and refused permission. It was finally granted at Appeal in 2013, after years of dialogue with the council, site visits, planning applications and a research project show-casing eight economically viable smallholdings of ten acres or less. Such delays put severe financial pressure on the Co-operative, and it was only due to the tenacity and personal commitment of the Directors that ELC won its appeal, and Greenham Reach now provides fledgeling livelihoods for three households. With such obstacles to overcome it is not surprising that there are few outfits like ELC providing land to start-up farms.

- Land Share Incentives - Private land-owners should be encouraged to make some of their land available as “Starter Farms and Market Gardens” to give new entrants an opportunity to rent a holding with appropriate infrastructure while they get established. Tax incentives could be offered to discourage land “hoarding” and reward those who make land available for sustainable farming. Where land is offered for less than ten years at a time the onus should be on landowners to provide investment in necessary infrastructure, with rent being charged to make their investment worthwhile. Inheritance tax loopholes that encourage people to pass on their wealth as woodlands or farmland should be curtailed.
- Keep the children of farmers' and horticulturists in farming – The knowledge and experience of those who have grown up on farms, market gardens or in woodlands should be valued more highly, so that the children of land-workers' are encouraged to keep their skills within the sector. We welcome the new provision for young farmers in the recent CAP reform, but believe that there needs to be a cultural as well as an economic shift, which values those who produce food to a degree at which they can earn a living-wage and feel that the contribution they make to food provision and care of the land is appreciated.
- Core Costs - Pillar 2 money should be made available to help with the core costs of starting a farm from scratch. Many new entrants are operating at low efficiency due to poor infrastructure and inadequate equipment, since they do not have the capital necessary to invest in farm buildings, machinery and fencing. Pillar 2 funds seem to encourage diversification and adding value to produce, but not the core activity of agriculture. To enable the UK to become more self-sufficient in food production, small farmers need help in establishing efficient primary production systems.

Access to Land and Planning Tools

Access to land is a major barrier to new entrants, and the step from County Farm to purchase of land is made difficult due to the high price of land and on-site accommodation. These measures would help improve land security for new entrant farmers and growers, and give them greater confidence to invest in their land:

- Stronger protection of agricultural tied accommodation –Lifting agricultural ties has become too easy. They should be given greater legal strength to keep housing affordable for those who work at rural occupations.
- Effective Rural and Urban Planning – We agree that land-use planning is a key to not only ensuring the protection of nature and good agricultural land, but also facilitating the success of a new generation of farmers. Future planning should take into account the benefits that allowing small-scale agroecological farms and market gardens on the outskirts of towns and cities would bring in terms of increased biodiversity (compared to some forms of industrial agriculture), good land husbandry and integrated, ecological smallholdings. The lack of affordable land and accommodation for new entrants means that a radical rethink is needed in both rural and urban planning to facilitate live/work opportunities for farmers and growers. Using low impact development principles, such as requiring homes and farm buildings to be built using local materials, designed to high eco-specifications, and using off-grid energy sources, as well as encouraging visual screening with orchards and fruit trees, there is no reason why such developments associated with local food enterprises should cause visual intrusion in the landscape.
- Training for local authority planning officers on the benefits and needs of small-scale, sustainable farm workers/growers – Local authority planning officers need better training to enable them to understand the needs of small-scale sustainable farmers and growers. Such training would expose them to the facts about how small-scale, ecologically managed farms selling direct to the public are sometimes able to make a better income per hectare than larger farms. It would also help them to distinguish between the genuine needs of rural workers and people who are trying to speculate. Such training could be integrated into Town and Country Planning degree courses or take the form of a continuing professional development qualification, providing those who attend with credits needed for their career progression. It is notable that Planning Inspectors, from HM Planning Inspectorate, who undergo a very thorough training, have a better understanding and ability to listen to the genuine needs of rural workers.
- Rural and Food Infrastructure - Protect the remaining network of abattoirs, and support the development of new infrastructure for local food producers, such as local abattoirs, processing facilities, and local retailers.

Many of these ideas and suggestions have arisen from our membership, in response to the struggles they face in trying to earn a livelihood from farming in an environmentally and socially responsible way. At the Landworkers' Alliance it is our role to bring together producers of food, fuel and fibres, who are often isolated geographically and economically, to create a strong unified voice for change. By bringing an agroecological land workers' perspective to the Square Meal Debate, we hope to strengthen its impact, and increase the chances of bringing about positive change. Like you, we care passionately about the countryside, good food, social equity (both in the UK and globally) and the professions of farming and growing. We hope this debate will lead towards a National Food Policy that brings about a shared vision of genuine Food Sovereignty.

An Incentive to Act.....

More sustainable small and medium-scale farmers would result in:

- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions, through soil carbon sequestration and use of organic, rather than nitrate fertilisers.
- A naturally fertile soil capable of withstanding erosion and storing water, through use of composts, green manures, avoidance of agrochemicals and reduced compaction.
- Healthy, fresh, local food made available through shortened supply chains, direct marketing and community supported agriculture initiatives.
- Rural employment in satisfying and skilled jobs that combine environmental protection and enhancement with the primary production of food, fuel, fibre and flowers, and rural crafts and food processing.
- Vibrant local economies in both rural and urban areas, in which locally produced goods are traded and money stays within the locality.
- Biodiversity is preserved through integrating nature conservation with food production, and the use of a diverse range of crop and livestock varieties.
- Better animal welfare, with fewer animals raised more slowly in natural conditions being fed appropriately to their species.
- Greater control over the food system by farmers, growers, food processors and consumers, than when corporations make profit the driver of the food system.
- Trust, accountability and understanding, with consumers knowing who produces their food and having the opportunity to visit the farms and market gardens to learn how their food is grown/raised.

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Terres de Liens features on the "Future Farmers in the Spotlight" Website, <http://future-farmers.net/from-the-field/specia/sjoerd-wartena/>, and is also written up as on this Dutch sustainable agriculture website http://www.landco.nl/uploads/Case%20Study_Terre%20de%20Liens.pdf

