



UK Delegation to the OECD

From the Permanent Representative

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Dear Colleagues

UK Government Report on Food and Farming Futures

I wanted to draw your attention to the publication last week of a major report of the UK Government's Foresight Programme. It follows a two-year investigation into what needs to be done to feed a projected world population of 9 billion by 2050. I think it offers some useful insights for our own work in OECD on these challenges.

Led by the UK Government Chief Scientific Advisor, Sir John Beddington, this project has brought together expertise from around the world, and from across different policy areas and academic disciplines. The report underlines that no action on its own is going to provide a solution, and different policies may have either a negative or only a negligible positive net impact if their side-effects are not taken into account. As a result, the report provides a valuable framework for thinking about the issue of food security within a broader context.

The report stresses that the food and farming sector today is failing – nearly a billion people are going hungry, and current agriculture and fisheries practices are unsustainable. Given the pressing need to tackle hunger and combat climate change, as well as the inevitable delay for many policies to take effect, it urges international institutions, governments, NGOs and citizens to act now.

The report identifies five key challenges, which it explores in successive chapters.

- **Balancing future demand and supply sustainably** – to ensure that food supplies are affordable
- **Ensuring that there is adequate stability in food supplies** – and protecting the most vulnerable from the volatility that does occur
- **Achieving global access to food and ending hunger.** This recognises that producing enough food in the world so that everyone can *potentially* be fed is not the same thing as ensuring food security for all
- **Managing the contribution of the food system to the mitigation of climate change**
- **Maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services while feeding the world**

It comes to five main conclusions:

- We need change throughout the different elements of the food system (application of new and existing innovations, reducing demand for resource-intensive foods, minimising waste, better governance)
- Sustainability and addressing climate change must be at the forefront of action on food and farming
- We need to take renewed action to tackle hunger in lower income countries – stronger agricultural development will not only produce more food, but can also create wealth and address social and gender inequalities.
- We need to act on a broad policy front, informed by a strong evidence base
- Policies designed to bring about self-sufficiency can be the enemy of food security. Better global governance can help ensure that all benefit from globalisation.

Addressing policy-makers, the report identifies twelve policy priorities, many of which are close to the work of the OECD:

- Spread best practice, including both technological and non-technological innovations
- Invest in new knowledge
- Make sustainable food production central in development
- Work on the assumption that there is little new land for agriculture
- Ensure long-term sustainability of food stocks
- Promote sustainable intensification
- Include the environment in food system economics
- Reduce waste – both in high- and low-income countries
- Improve the evidence base upon which decision are made and develop metrics to assess progress
- Anticipate major issues with water availability for food production
- Work to change consumption patterns
- Empower citizens

The OECD has contributed to this work, through its publications, the expertise of its analysts, and by inviting members of the Foresight team to participate in meetings. The Secretary-General has kindly offered the following statement:

"The final report of the Foresight Project on The Future of Food and Farming is a major contribution to identifying the decisions that policy makers need to take today to ensure that an increasing global population can be fed sustainably and equitably. It is extremely timely, given the big challenges that policy makers face, including the recent volatility in agricultural commodity markets – which were the focus of the meeting of Ministers of Agriculture in the OECD in 2010.

The report is in line with OECD findings, emphasizing the serious consequences of inaction – business as usual – in terms of meeting future food demand, resource depletion and

environmental degradation. But well functioning and open global markets - taking account of environmental and social concerns – and harnessing innovation and technology, offer grounds for optimism that the challenges can be met.

The report has brought together many experts from a wide variety of disciplines and countries across the world, including insights and analysis from colleagues in the OECD. The key findings will assist in the development of the OECD's Green Growth Strategy for Food and Agriculture, the OECD Agriculture Knowledge Systems Conference in June 2011, as well as the OECD's work with African countries on agriculture in Spring 2011."

For further information, please see the Foresight [website](#). There have also been press releases from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Professor Sir John Beddington was also interviewed on the BBC.

Best wishes,

Dominic Martin

Dominic Martin,

Ambassador and Permanent Representative